

[1973. In *Baker's Dictionary of Christian Ethics*. Carl F.H. Henry, ed. Washington D.C.: Canon Press.]

**INTUITION.** Intuition, if there be such, is the grasping of an individual object without using inference or general rules. It is an *immediate* knowledge, knowledge without means.

The most frequent form of intuition is sensation. By the sense of sight, for example, one sees grasps, or “knows” this chair, this desk, or this pen. John Locke, because of his empiricism, would deny that we intuit this chair. We intuit the color brown by sight, the quality hard by touch, and then we combine these sensations to produce a chair.

For Kant the only pure intuitions are those of space and time. These two are strictly individual. There is only one space and one time, whereas there are many chairs and desks. Though we cannot see or touch space and time, they are intuitions of sense in that they are the forms of empirical intuitions. A single chair is seen in space somewhat as railroad tracks converge in perspective. This is how the mind works. Railroad tracks do not really converge; nor do chairs in themselves occupy space. Space is just our way of seeing them.

In opposition Hegel denies that there is any immediate knowledge. His argument includes the point that the individualizing “this” of space and time is the most universal and empty term of all; so that what empiricists take as the richest knowledge is the poorest, in fact no knowledge at all.

By an analogy between the physical seeing of a sensory individual and the figurative intellectual “seeing” of a truth, the term intuition has been stretched to include the grasp of ultimate or first principles. Since axioms cannot be inferred, they must be seen immediately in their intuitional self-evidence. There is no geometrical proof whatever that two sides of a triangle are longer than the third side. One must simply “see” that only one straight line can be drawn between two points.

In ethics, Ralph Cudworth (1617-1688) used the intuitionism of Platonism to establish morality. Henry More (1614-1687) was closer to the geometrical ideal. He posited moral axioms- two dozen of them. But if six Euclidean axioms can imply several

books of geometrical theorems, it seems cumbersome to have twenty-four in Ethics. The more serious objection, however, is the difficulty of convincing an opponent that such and such a proposition is axiomatic and self-evident, when he does not “see” it.

In the present century behaviorism (q.v) and linguistic analysis have tried to explain what actually lies behind the belief in intuitions. The purely linguistic theories are, in the writer’s opinion, pedantic trivialities, and behaviorism faces other difficulties. In any case their discussions of intuition have nothing specifically to do with ethics.

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