Comments on William Perrin’s “The Failure of Hope as an Epistemic Standard”  
By Colleen Hanson

In his paper, “The Failure of Hope as an Epistemic Standard,” William Perrin objects to Jonathan Weinberg’s (2007) position that doubts intuition as a source of evidence and instead argues that we should doubt hopefulness as an epistemic standard. In the first section, Perrin provides Weinberg’s definitions for both hopeful and hopeless evidence. Perrin also summarizes Weinberg’s four criteria for hopeful sources of evidence: 1) external corroboration, 2) internal coherence, 3) detectability of margins, and 4) theoretical illumination. Perrin then reconstructs Weinberg’s argument that intuitions are hopeless and untrustworthy in philosophy. Next, Perrin argues that perception – which Weinberg regards as reliable and a hopeful source of evidence – does not satisfy the criteria for hopeful evidence either. Perrin argues that perception gives us reason to be skeptical, thus it doesn’t properly fit Weinberg’s standard of evidence. Furthermore, because perception is no better than intuition at satisfying the criteria Weinberg presents for being hopeful, we must be skeptical of the standard of hopefulness itself.

I think this paper is strong in its definitional clarity and thorough evaluation of Weinberg’s work. Perrin reconstructs Weinberg’s argument and appropriately emphasizes implicit premises crucial to the understanding of the relevant issue. To expand on his paper, Perrin could further articulate the implications of intuitions and hopefulness on philosophical methodology. For example, Perrin mentions that Weinberg is less concerned with intuitions themselves being hopeless, but rather he is concerned with the ways in which philosophers use them. Both Weinberg and Perrin are focused on intuition being used evidentially, but I wonder if the appeal to intuitions is best suited in another activity. That is, rather than appealing to intuitions to confirm a hypothesis, perhaps intuitions ought to be used pragmatically to illustrate an existing point or concept. I would like to hear more from Perrin about the ways in which intuitions would be adequate in philosophy. Ought we to move from using intuitions for justificatory or evidential purposes to using them for pragmatic purposes?

Another point of expansion for Perrin’s paper is what a sufficient standard or principle for evidence ought to look like, and furthermore, if Weinberg’s four criteria for a hopeful source of evidence can be revised to satisfy both perceptions and intuitions. Perrin spends time showing that, “we have good reason to doubt theoretical illumination as a necessary condition for putative sources of evidence” and ultimately argues that hopefulness fails to be an adequate epistemic standard, but I wonder if Perrin can elucidate possible revisions for a better standard.