

ABSTRACT

Common Sense Epistemology:
A Defense of Seemings as Evidence

Blake McAllister, Ph.D.

Committee Chairperson: Jonathan L. Kvanvig, Ph.D.

Starting from an internalist, evidentialist, deontological conception of epistemic justification, this dissertation constitutes a defense of common sense epistemology. Common sense epistemology is a theory of ultimate evidence. At its center is a type of mental state called “seemings”—the kind we possess when something *seems* true or false. Common sense epistemology maintains, first, that all seemings are evidence for or against their content and, second, that all our ultimate evidence for or against a proposition consists in seemings. The first thesis entails phenomenal conservatism—an increasingly prominent and controversial epistemic principle. Together these theses imply that what stances we’re intellectually permitted to take will ultimately come down to what seems to be the case.

Following a short introduction, the groundwork for the project is laid in Chapter Two. Common sense epistemology is presented in detail and situated within a larger epistemic framework. Starting assumptions are made explicit and briefly defended. The significance of the project is highlighted, including for those who reject the starting assumptions. I then begin my defense.

The defense of common sense epistemology offered herein is holistic in that I strengthen the metaphysical and historical foundations of the theory in addition to arguing straightforwardly for its truth. In Chapter Three I show how common sense epistemology is a contemporary outworking of epistemic insights contained in the work of Scottish philosopher Thomas Reid. In Chapter Four I give one of the most detailed accounts of seemings available and defend their existence. In Chapter Five I present my main argument for common sense epistemology. I begin with a Reidian argument for phenomenal conservatism. After concluding that all seemings are ultimate evidence, I consider what other kinds of mental states might serve in that role. All the likely alternatives are considered and rejected, leaving seemings as the lone candidate. In Chapter Six I respond to the problem of cognitive penetration—an influential objection that arises during my defense of phenomenal conservatism.

Together these chapters compose one of the most thorough and sustained defenses of phenomenal conservatism and common sense epistemology in the literature.

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by

Blake McAllister B.A., M.A.

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Approved by the Department of Philosophy

Michael D. Beaty, Ph.D., Chairperson

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Approved by the Dissertation Committee

Jonathan L. Kvanvig, Ph.D., Chairperson

Trent Dougherty, Ph.D.

Alexander R. Pruss, Ph.D.

Todd Buras, Ph.D.

Gerald B. Cleaver, Ph.D.

Accepted by the Graduate School

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J. Larry Lyon, Ph.D., Dean

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*To Caleb and Mason,
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CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

The purpose of this project, put simply, is to defend a theory of evidence or, what is equivalent, of good intellectual reasons to believe or disbelieve (hereafter “good reasons”). The focus in particular is on non-derivative good reasons—the sort that can justify the foundations of our noetic structures. Already, much of what I have said needs clarification. Forgive me for deferring such clarification until the next chapter. Providing detailed explanations runs counter to the present aim, which is to introduce the project as a whole.

The theory of ultimate evidence defended herein is called “common sense epistemology” (for reasons explained at the end of this introduction). In defending such a theory, the goal, if it be feasible, cannot be to decisively establish common sense epistemology or even to make it more probable than not. The prior probability of common sense epistemology will be relative to each reader, and it may be low enough that likelihood isn’t a realistic option. What I will try to do is to significantly raise its probability. If we want to get more precise we can say that the goal is to make more probable than not the following conditional: if my internalist starting assumptions are true, then common sense epistemology is true.

Common sense epistemology centers on a type of mental state called “seemings” or “appearances”. These are the kind of mental state present when something *seems* true or false. Common sense epistemology makes two key claims about seemings:

- (A) All seemings are non-derivative good reasons to believe or disbelieve their content.
- (B) All of our non-derivative good reasons to believe or disbelieve are seemings.

(A) entails an epistemic principle commonly known as phenomenal conservatism. The main formulation of phenomenal conservatism defended herein is

PC_R If it seems true to S that *p*, then S thereby has *pro tanto* good reason to believe *p*; and if it seems false to S that *p*, then S thereby has *pro tanto* good reason to disbelieve *p*.

This formulation of phenomenal conservatism differs significantly from all others in the literature. Details will be addressed in Chapter Two, §5.

It is nigh impossible to defend a theory of (ultimate) evidence without situating it within a larger epistemological framework. The concept of evidence stands in a complex web of interrelated epistemic notions including justification, rationality, knowledge, and many others. It is difficult to draw any conclusions about evidence without making some controversial assumptions about these interrelated notions. Consider a truism about evidence: that one is justified in believing *p* if and only if one has good evidence for *p*.¹ This only helps us pinpoint what evidence is insofar as we already have some grasp of what justification is. Our understanding of evidence usually adapts to fit our conception of justification. So unless we hold fixed some notion of justification, matters will be too slippery to pin down anything robust about the nature of evidence. In short, I'm going to need to make some controversial assumptions about justification.

I adopt (in Chapter Two, §2) a deontological notion of justification: S has justification for taking stance *s* in *p* iff S is permitted by her intellectual duties to take *s*

¹ Properly understood, I think it's fair to call this a truism. Whether it's a truism or not, I will be assuming it in this project. See Chapter Two, §2.

towards *p*. I also assume a robust version of internalism—a type of mentalism. While I give rationales for these assumptions (in Chapter Two, §3), the issues are too large to admit of decisive arguments in so small a space. I don't expect anyone who isn't already somewhat favorable towards internalism to be persuaded by them. Those who find these starting assumptions implausible are invited to treat my conclusions as conditionals: *if* these assumptions are true, then common sense epistemology is true.

Even those who reject these starting assumptions have a vested interest in the outcome of the project (see Chapter Two, §4). Most will admit that internalists have their eye on *some* positive epistemic status; they just deny that it is justification.² Whatever we call this positive epistemic status, it is closely connected with doing what's best from the first-person perspective; and everyone should be concerned with doing what's best from his or her perspective. It is, after all, the only one we've got.

While there are drawbacks to basing a project on such controversial starting assumptions, there is also a key advantage. What we really want in a theory of evidence is something that enables us to address fundamental human concerns about what to think.³ By situating my theory of evidence within a larger epistemological framework, it becomes apparent how this theory helps us answer questions that matter. This ensures that our efforts are wisely invested.

The defense of common sense epistemology contained in the following chapters goes beyond a straightforward argument for its truth—though I do provide such an argument in Chapter Five. I seek a more holistic defense. Thus in Chapter Three I explore

² See, e.g., Sosa in Bonjour and Sosa 2003, 147-49, 150-55.

³ In general, I am favorable towards the value-driven approach adopted in Kvanvig 2014, 6-9.

how common sense epistemology grows out of the work of Thomas Reid. This gives us a deeper understanding of the theory and its motivations and lends it credibility through association with a highly influential epistemological system. I then turn to the mental states around which common sense epistemology revolves. One of the most common complaints is that it's not clear what seemings are supposed to be; some go so far as to challenge whether they even exist. In Chapter Four I defend the existence of seemings and more thoroughly explain their nature. These chapters prepare us for Chapter Five where I develop my main argument for common sense epistemology, based in part on Reid's response to the skeptic in Chapter Three. Finally, in Chapter Six I respond to a prominent objection called "The Problem of Cognitive Penetration" that arises while formulating my argument in Chapter Five. With this loose end tied up, I retire.

Before we begin, allow me to explain why I have chosen to call this theory "common sense epistemology." It is not because its truth is a matter of common sense but because it embodies a common sense approach to epistemology. In particular, it recommends a common sense philosophical methodology. The methodology I have in mind is the one traditionally associated with common sense epistemologists: *Start with the obvious, and never give up the more obvious for the less*. There are two elements to this methodology: where you start (with the obvious) and how you proceed (never giving up the more obvious for the less). Both are adopted by G.E. Moore in "A Defence of Common Sense". There he begins with a list of common sense propositions that are obviously known and rejects skeptical challenges to these propositions precisely because those challenges are less obvious to Moore than the the fact that he knows them. Moore writes,

Some of these philosophers have brought forward, in favour of their position, arguments designed to show, in the case of some or all of the propositions in (1),

[i.e. the obvious propositions,] that no propositions of that type can possibly be wholly true, because every such proposition entails both of two incompatible propositions. And I admit, of course, that if any of the propositions in (1) did entail both of two incompatible propositions it could not be true. But it seems to me I have an absolutely conclusive argument to show that none of them does entail both of two incompatible propositions. Namely this: All of the propositions in (1) are true; no true proposition entails both of two incompatible propositions; therefore, none of the propositions in (1) entails both of two incompatible propositions. (1959, 41)

Rejections of this sort have become known as “G.E. Moore shifts”.⁴

Though this common sense methodology is strongly associated with Moore, it was brought to prominence much earlier by Thomas Reid. In fact, Reid almost certainly served as Moore’s inspiration.⁵ The G.E. Moore shift can be found throughout Reid’s work, especially in his influential response to skepticism. He even captures the principle behind it (in typical pithy fashion) in the following passage:

A traveller of good judgment may mistake his way, and be unawares led into a wrong track; and while the road is fair before him, he may go on without suspicion, and be followed by others; but when it ends in a coal-pit, it requires no great judgment to know that he hath gone wrong. (1997, 23)

Contemporary philosophers will also endorse something like Reid and Moore’s common sense methodology on occasion. David Lewis commands us to “Collect all the platitudes you can think of” and use these as our starting point (1972, 256). James Pryor recommends,

[W]e start with what it seems intuitively natural to say about perception, and we retain that natural view until we find objections that require us to abandon it. (2000, 538)

Examples can be multiplied.

⁴ The term “G.E. Moore shift” is coined in Rowe 1979, 339.

⁵ See Greco 2002.

Those who employ this methodology think that they are being rational in proceeding thusly. This commits one to an epistemological system that can rationalize this methodology—a system like common sense epistemology. When something seems very strongly to be true we call it evident, manifest, unmistakable, absolutely apparent, crystal clear, clear-cut, clear as day, clear as the noon day sun, or just plain *obvious*. Obvious propositions, then, are naturally understood as those that strongly seem true (or are obviously supported by propositions that strongly seem true). According to common sense epistemology, we will have strong evidence for all obvious propositions, since all seemings provide evidence for their content and do so in proportion with the strength of the seeming. This is why it makes sense to start with the obvious. Furthermore, if obviousness (something's seeming true) is the only ultimate source of justification, then we can't be obligated to give up an obvious proposition until it is opposed by things that are together even more obvious. So common sense epistemology not only justifies a common sense methodology, it requires it. This is why it deserves the title "common sense epistemology".

CHAPTER TWO

Common Sense Epistemology

§1 The Guiding Question

Behind every philosophical project worth doing is a question worth answering. The question at the heart of this project arises from a predicament troubling all non-divine intellectual agents. Insofar as believing is governed by intellectual norms and we are intellectual agents who must form beliefs, it matters whether or not our beliefs meet the requirements issued by those norms. The same is true of the other doxastic stances—disbelieving and withholding. The predicament stems from the fact that it is not always clear when we are permitted to believe, disbelieve, or withhold assent. We know not what we ought to do. I seek a partial resolution to this predicament.

A full resolution is impossible. There are no guarantees that we believe truly about anything (or nearly anything) including what doxastic stances we are permitted to take. Nor can careful reflection ensure that we are taking only those stances permitted to us. Such is the implication of fully general fallibilism.¹ The lack of guarantees does not, however, license apathy. It is reasonable to think that knowing what is intellectually required puts one in a better position to meet those requirements. Thus, I address this predicament by partially answering the following question: *What stances am I permitted to take?*

¹ Kvanvig 2014, chapter 2.

A couple of initial specifications are in order. First, I am investigating what stances are permitted by one's purely intellectual requirements as opposed to what is permitted from a practical or an all-things-considered point of view. Second, I am focused on the stances one might take towards propositions as opposed to more general intellectual orientations. Third, my investigation is limited to *doxastic* stances and certain types of doxastic stances at that. The three types of stances at issue are degrees of belief, degrees of disbelief, and withholdings. It is useful to think of one's credence in a proposition as falling somewhere between 0 and 1. A credence over .5 is a degree of belief; one below .5 is a degree of disbelief; and one at .5 is a withholding. Withholding assent is to be contrasted with not taking any attitude at all towards a proposition. Though I am ultimately interested in degrees of belief and disbelief, I will often use the terms "belief" and "disbelief" for convenience. Fourth, I am asking which stances are permitted *at present*. Thus the driving question becomes: *Which degrees of belief or disbelief am I now intellectually permitted to place in p?*

One can approach this question from a variety of starting points. Every starting point but the most general requires controversial assumptions. These assumptions are unavoidable if one wishes to reach conclusions at a significant level of specificity, as is my goal. The best I can do is to be clear about what assumptions I'm making, which I will do in §2. The obvious disadvantage of making controversial assumptions is that some of your passengers get off the train before it leaves the station. To limit the exodus, I will give a brief rationale for my more controversial assumptions in §3. My discussion will not be thorough enough to persuade a dedicated objector, but it may help those who are merely

hesitant get on board. In §4, I will say why my project is important even to those who reject my starting assumptions.

I spend a fair amount of time discussing my assumptions in §2-§4. This time is well spent. These sections explain how I am thinking of the guiding question and how the following chapters constitute a partial answer to that question. I also introduce an epistemic framework in these sections that will feature prominently throughout the project. Without this groundwork, the rest of the project simply won't make sense.

Once this framework is in place, I will describe my answer to the guiding question (in §5) and how I plan to defend it in the following chapters. My overall strategy is to defend a theory of evidence called “common sense epistemology”. Common sense epistemology offers a partial answer to our guiding question. Given my starting assumptions, it implies that which doxastic stance or stances you are permitted to take towards any proposition will ultimately depend on what seems true to you, where what seems true to you is entirely a matter of which seemings—a specific kind of mental state—you possess. This isn't a complete answer to our guiding question, but it lays the foundation for one.

§2 *Starting Assumptions*

The first assumption I'm making is that there *are* intellectual norms or duties. These are *intellectual* duties in that we are subject to them precisely because we are intellectual agents.² These duties issue purely intellectual requirements concerning which doxastic stances we take towards propositions. I will not assume that there are positive

² I leave open whether such norms are moral or irreducibly epistemic. See Chisholm 1991 and Firth 1959 for the classic debate.

intellectual duties that require us to take stances towards specific propositions.³ I only assume that there are negative intellectual duties and that these duties permit us to take some stances but not others. There are those who deny that there are any genuine normative requirements about which doxastic stances to take, often because the taking of such stances is usually, if not always, involuntary.⁴ I will set these concerns aside.

I will assume the classic understanding of our intellectual duties: that we are required to pursue truth and shun falsehood.⁵ The early Roderick Chisholm offers a more precise characterization of this basic idea:⁶

We may assume that every person is subject to a purely intellectual requirement: that of trying his best to bring it about that for any proposition p he considers, he accepts p if and only if p is true. (1977, 14)

We can refine Chisholm's formulation to fit our purposes. First, Chisholm's formulation requires that we try our best to take a stance towards every proposition we consider. This might require us to take stances towards trivial propositions if those trivialities happen to come to mind. But it seems we are intellectually permitted to not take any stance towards such propositions. Arguably, we are permitted in taking no stances towards any propositions.⁷ Let us limit our scope, then, to just those propositions that we actually do take a stance towards. Second, Chisholm talks about acceptance. We are concerned instead

³ See Nelson 2010 for an argument that there are no positive epistemic duties of this sort. Kvanvig 2014 also contends that there are few, if any, propositions we are obligated to believe but does so for different reasons.

⁴ A classic statement of these worries is Alston 1988.

⁵ I am not hereby assuming that truth is the *only* epistemic goal (see Kvanvig 2005) but only that it is an important one.

⁶ See Plantinga 1993b, chapter 2, for a classic discussion of Chisholm's deontological internalism.

⁷ See footnote 3.

with degrees of belief and disbelief. So our duties are, for all propositions that we take a stance towards, to try our best to believe p iff p is true and disbelieve p iff p is false.

There are two balancing aspects to our intellectual duties. The first is accuracy: trying to believe p only if p is true and trying to disbelieve p only if p is false. This is to shun falsehood. The second is comprehensiveness: trying to believe p if p is true and trying to disbelieve p if p is false. This is to pursue truth.⁸ If we were only required to shun falsehood, then we could fulfill our duties just by always withholding assent. If we were only required to pursue truth, then we could fulfill our duties just by believing and disbelieving every proposition. Thus, both the pursuit of truth and the shunning of falsehood must be required.

Once we grant that there are intellectual duties to pursue truth and avoid falsehood, we face a number of decision points regarding what, precisely, these duties require of us. The first decision point is between a norm of truth and a norm of justification.

T Necessarily, for all p , S permissibly believes p only if S 's belief that p is true.

J Necessarily, for all p , S permissibly believes p iff S justifiably believes p .⁹

Gibbons (2013) argues that a preliminary case could be built for both of these norms. The problem is that these norms are inconsistent. In cases of justified false belief, you are permitted to believe by *J* and not permitted to believe by *T*. At least one must be rejected. Rather than argue for *J* over *T*, I will assume *J* and reject *T*. In fact, I have already done as much in the way I formulated our duties to pursue truth and shun falsehood. We are only

⁸ Foley 1993, 19, characterizes the intellectual goal as that of “now having an accurate and comprehensive belief system.” Foley does not think there is just one intellectual goal, of course, but this is the same goal that I am trying to characterize here.

⁹ I've taken these principles from Gibbons 2013 and altered them significantly.

required to *try our best* to believe p iff p . Below I offer a rationale for accepting J over T, but I do not pretend that this will convince all parties.

J can be generalized to cover all doxastic stances: necessarily, S permissibly takes stance s towards p iff S justifiably takes s towards p . When I say “J” I am including this generalized principle. Given J, we can figure out which stances we are now permitted to take by determining which stances we now have justification for taking. Thus, to answer our guiding question we must look into the nature of justification.

There are disparate views about even the most basic features of justification, so if I am going to make any headway I will need to make some controversial assumptions. I’ll begin by introducing a relatively neutral framework for understanding justification, one that introduces key concepts and allows me to situate my project within a larger theory of justification. I’ll then introduce my most controversial assumption.

I will assume that, necessarily, S justifiably takes s towards p only if

- (i) S has, on balance, good reason for taking s towards p , and
- (ii) S properly bases s .

When S has, on balance, good reason for taking s towards p , S has *propositional justification* for taking s towards p . Generally, to say that one has “justification for p ,” without further specification, means that one has propositional justification for *believing* p . A stance itself is justified when one has propositional justification for taking that stance plus proper basing. In the case of belief, this latter form of justification has been called “doxastic justification”.

Reasons here are to be understood as *motivating* reasons. Motivating reasons are the sorts of things that are capable of serving as the psychological cause or explanation of some stance. That is, motivating reasons are potential explanatory reasons. Some think of

motivating reasons as facts or true propositions.¹⁰ I am thinking of them as mental states. Defending this point at any length would take us too far afield. If necessary, I am happy to treat ‘motivating reasons’ as a term of art, though my usage is not new.¹¹ As I use the term ‘motivation’, anything that moves us to take a stance—i.e. that prompts the intellect into *motion*—motivates.¹² In particular, motivation is not limited to acts of the will. I will also talk about the taking a doxastic stance as an “act” of the intellect. As I use the term ‘act’, acts do not need to be voluntary or involve the will.

Good motivating reasons for believing or disbelieving *p* are those mental states that are capable of appropriately motivating some degree of belief or disbelief in *p*. A perfectly rational intellectual agent could be motivated to believe *p* by a good motivating reason but not by a bad one. A desire that it’s sunny, for instance, is a motivating reason for believing that it’s sunny but not a *good* one. It’s perfectly acceptable, however, to believe that it is sunny because one perceives it to be sunny. Both the desire and the perceptual experience are motivating reasons, but only the latter is a good one.

Moreover, the reasons at issue are *purely intellectual* reasons. In general, we can easily distinguish between a purely intellectual reason to take *s* towards *p* and, for example, a practical reason to take *s* towards *p*. One attempt at characterizing the difference is that purely intellectual reasons derive their status as reasons from the intellectual agency of the subject and the intellectual duties that stem from this agency. For instance, say *S* possesses

¹⁰ For example, see Dancy 2000 for the former and Alvarez 2010 for the latter.

¹¹ It is common to identify explanatory and motivating reasons, or at least see them as closely related. See Gibbons 2013, 31-2, for example.

¹² Smith 1994 and others want to limit motivation to a specific kind of psychological explanation—namely, those involving desires and belief-desire complexes. Beliefs, by themselves, may psychologically explain a stance but do not *motivate* it. This is packing more into the notion of motivation than is called for.

a mental state that counts in favor of p 's truth. That mental state is a reason for S to believe p precisely because S has a duty to pursue truth. Practical reasons to believe do not similarly arise from one's intellectual duties. From hereon, "reasons" refers to purely intellectual reasons.

I will identify one's good intellectual reasons to believe p with one's evidence for p and one's good intellectual reasons to disbelieve p with one's evidence against p . Foley (1993, 27-30) challenges this identification, but I will not address his concerns here. Speaking about one's evidence will give us a convenient way to isolate the good reasons from the rest.

Given this understanding of justification, it is easy to see how J flows naturally from our duties to pursue truth and shun falsehood. A good intellectual reason for believing p counts in favor of p 's truth—this is, in fact, why it's an intellectual reason in the first place. Similarly, a good intellectual reason for disbelieving p counts in favor of p 's falsehood. If, on balance, your total body of reasons counts in favor of p 's truth, then the only stance your duty to pursue truth permits towards p is some degree of belief (but not to a higher degree than your duty to shun falsehood will allow). Parallel claims could be made about disbelief and withholding assent. Thus, J should be understood as following from our more fundamental intellectual duties to pursue truth and shun falsehood.

Now there are two things that J requires of any stance: propositional justification and proper basing.¹³ I won't be giving any theory about what proper basing consists in. We have an intuitive grasp of what it is for a stance to be based on a mental state or some body of mental states. We also understand that some mental states constitute proper bases

¹³ Having justification for taking s towards p requires only propositional justification. Justifiably taking s towards p requires not only having justification for taking s towards p but that s be properly based.

for a stance and others do not. The proper basing condition merely points out that S's actual taking of *s* needs to be connected with the good reasons S has for *s* in the right sort of way. This basic understanding is sufficient. My project will focus solely on propositional justification. For if we know when we have on balance reason for taking *s* towards *p*, then we will know which stances we are permitted to take.

Unfortunately, I will not be giving a comprehensive theory of propositional justification. What I will do is develop and defend a theory of good reasons or evidence. That is, I will specify which reasons are *good* reasons and what makes them good. But this, in itself, won't tell us when one has propositional justification for taking *s* towards *p*. There are still two things missing. First, to have propositional justification for taking *s* towards *p* requires one to have *on balance* good reason to do so. This means that having justification for *p* depends on your total body of good reasons. I will not give a theory of how reasons are weighted against one another or whether the on-balance support for a proposition might differ between two fully rational subjects with the same total body of reasons.¹⁴ All I will assume is that, for each subject, there is some on-balance measure of support for *p* provided by one's total body of good reasons. Some stances will match this level of support and are thereby permitted while others will not and are thereby forbidden. Second, one's total body of good reasons consists in all of the good reasons that one *possesses*, but I will not be providing a theory of possession. I will assume, however, that we possess many mental states that we are not currently conscious of such as past perceptual experiences.

¹⁴ See Kvanvig 2014 for a defense that one's reasons can always (or nearly always) be rationally weighted in different ways. See Feldman 2007 and White 2005 in defense of the opposite.

Despite these absences, my project, if successful, makes significant progress in answering our guiding question. A theory of evidence is the cornerstone on which a complete answer to our guiding question can be built. Thus, the fact that I only provide a partial answer is no strike against the theory.

The assumptions about justification I've made so far are compatible with a wide variety of views in epistemology including major forms of internalism, externalism, and knowledge-first approaches. It is a psychological fact about humans that we base our stances on motivating reasons,¹⁵ but not all motivating reasons are fit to serve as bases. Everyone agrees, for instance, that beliefs based entirely on desires are not justified. Thus, everyone seems committed to justified stances being based on good motivating reasons.

Where the debate unfolds is over what makes a mental state a good motivating reason. A basic process reliabilist might say that a mental state m is a good reason to believe that p iff forming the belief that p on the basis of m is a sufficiently reliable belief-forming process. A virtue epistemologist might say that m is a good reason to believe p iff basing the belief that p on m would manifest an intellectual competency. Someone like Timothy Williamson says that one's knowledge states just are one's good reasons.¹⁶ I will make the internalist assumption that whether something is good reason depends on *what it is like* to be consciously in that mental state—i.e. with the felt character of that mental state when one is conscious of it. Let's call those properties that affect what it is like to be

¹⁵ This is even true of basic beliefs. Basic perceptual beliefs, for instance, are based on perceptual experiences. The only exceptions are beliefs that have no psychological cause: e.g. a belief that is programmed into us by a neurosurgeon or one that pops into existence without any explanation at all.

¹⁶ Williamson 2000.

consciously in a mental state “phenomenal properties”. Good reasons are just those with right sorts of phenomenal properties.

If you think that beliefs have no phenomenal properties, you might worry that this assumption rules them out as good reasons. First of all, the position that beliefs have no phenomenal properties strikes me as implausible. If there’s nothing that it’s like to consciously believe, then how can we ever tell through introspection whether we believe something? Even so, we can remove this worry by limiting the assumption to non-derivative good reasons, which we might call “ultimate evidence”.¹⁷ Non-derivative good reasons are those whose status as good reasons is not derived from *other* good reasons. A belief that *p* might be a good reason for believing some other proposition *q* but only if one already has good reason for believing *p*.¹⁸ Thus, beliefs are at most derivative good reasons. On a foundationalist picture, all justification ultimately depends on one’s non-derivative good reasons. Thus, a theory of non-derivative good reasons, or ultimate evidence, will still be a significant step towards answering our guiding question.

The idea that a mental state’s status as ultimate evidence depends on its phenomenal properties is closely related to the common internalist position that evidence is “narrow”. If evidence is narrow, then a mental state’s status as evidence is determined by the intrinsic properties of that mental state. For instance, if we assume physicalism, then a particular mental state’s evidential status is settled by the internal physical goings-on of the agent.¹⁹ This contrasts with “broad” or “wide” conceptions of evidence on which a mental state’s

¹⁷ See Conee and Feldman 2008 on ultimate evidence.

¹⁸ I’m making the plausible (though not uncontroversial) assumption that wholly unjustified beliefs aren’t good reasons.

¹⁹ See Williamson 2000, 51-52, on narrowness.

status as evidence can at least partially depend on one's environment. I will make the plausible, though not uncontested, assumption that the phenomenal properties of a mental state are intrinsic properties. Given this, my focus on phenomenal properties is one way of developing the position that evidence is narrow.²⁰

A unique form of internalism results from the assumption that our ultimate evidence consists in those mental states with the right sorts of phenomenal properties. To characterize this kind of internalism, it will be helpful to introduce the notion of a phenomenally individuated mental state. A phenomenally individuated mental state is “a mental state that is individuated by its phenomenal character in the sense that all and only tokens of that type have the same phenomenal character” (Smithies 2014, 109). We can use this notion to articulate a position that I call “phenomenalism”:

Phenomenalism S's total body of ultimate evidence at t strongly supervenes on the phenomenally individuated mental states S possesses at t .²¹

Phenomenalism captures the idea that one's ultimate evidence tracks the phenomenal properties of one's mental states. There won't be any change in one's total body of ultimate evidence unless there's a change in phenomenology. Furthermore, two subjects can only differ evidentially if their mental states have different phenomenal properties. Phenomenal duplicates will always have the same ultimate evidence.

Phenomenalism, as a form of internalism, grows out of mentalism, which states:

Mentalism For all p , the justificatory status of p at t for S strongly supervenes on the mental states S possesses at t .²²

²⁰ You might even think that the narrow content of a mental state is exhausted by its phenomenal properties. See, e.g., Horgan and Tienson 2002.

²¹ Note that the supervenience base includes all the mental states one possesses, not just those that are occurrent.

²² Mentalism is introduced in Conee and Feldman 2004, chapter 3.

There are two main differences. The first is that phenomenalism is about one's total body of ultimate evidence rather than the justificatory status of propositions. Phenomenalism thus leaves open the possibility that two subjects with the same total body of ultimate evidence have different justificatory statuses, as might be the case if there is optionality in how evidence is weighted. Mentalists, on the other hand, are committed to a uniqueness thesis.²³

The second is that phenomenalism points specifically to phenomenally individuated mental states. This is helpful in capturing certain central internalist intuitions. Consider S and evil demon victim S*. S and S* are phenomenal duplicates. An internalist theory must say that S and S* have the same total body of evidence.²⁴ But if, for instance, disjunctivism is true or there are *sui generis* knowledge states,²⁵ then S and S* will have significantly different mental states. On mentalism, this leaves open the possibility that the total bodies of ultimate evidence for S and S* differ widely. Phenomenalism, on the other hand, closes off this possibility. Since S and S* are phenomenal duplicates, they have all the same phenomenally individuated mental states. Others try to close off this possibility by appealing to non-factive mental states,²⁶ but such appeals only work insofar as the epistemically relevant non-factive mental states are phenomenally individuated. If

²³ See Feldman 2007 on the uniqueness thesis. Mentalism may not strictly entail a uniqueness thesis, but it would be very odd to endorse the one without the other.

²⁴ See Cohen 1984.

²⁵ See, e.g., Martin 2002 and McDowell 1982, 1994 on the former and Williamson 2000 on the latter.

²⁶ According to Wedgwood 2002, 358, "The defining mark of a 'factive' mental state, such as knowing or seeing that *p* is the case, is that it must consist in standing in some relation to a true proposition." Non-factive mental states are just those mental states that are not factive.

phenomenal duplicates can differ in epistemically significant non-factive mental states—as is plausible given content externalism—then the possibility that S and S* have different bodies of evidence is once again left open.

Phenomenalism thus proves to be a more precise articulation of some central internalist intuitions. This shouldn't be surprising. In large part, internalism is motivated by the conviction that justification and evidence are relative to the first-person perspective. The first-person perspective, however, is not a matter of one's mental states *per se* but what it is like when consciously in those mental states. The upshot is that someone already inclined towards internalism should find phenomenalism attractive.

At this point I must acknowledge some complications that I will quickly introduce and conveniently ignore (until they briefly resurface in Chapter Five). These complications await any view on which evidence is narrow, but they are made particularly salient by phenomenalism. Given content externalism, the propositional content of your mental states might differ considerably from that of a phenomenally indistinguishable counterpart. It seems, however, that the propositional content of a mental state should have some bearing on what proposition one thereby has evidence for believing or disbelieving. Let's assume, for instance, that my perception that *p* is evidence for believing *p*. If my phenomenally indistinguishable counterpart has a perceptual experience with different propositional content *q*, then he will have evidence for believing *q*, not *p*. But this violates phenomenalism.

The resolution is that, if propositional content is wide content, then we don't have evidence for believing or disbelieving propositions *per se* but for standing in a doxastic or proto-doxastic relation some other narrow semantic content such as Fregean senses or

guises or sentences in the language of thought.²⁷ Fregean considerations provide independent reason to think that beliefs involve such narrow content.²⁸ This narrow content, furthermore, serves as the primary bearer of cognitive significance. As such, it is natural to think that justification will attach to this narrow content.²⁹ (See Chapter Five, §5.4, for more discussion of related issues.) In which case there is no pressure to say that the evidence of phenomenally indistinguishable counterparts differs when the wide content of their mental states differs. For convenience, I will ignore such complications throughout this project. I will continue to speak as if the propositional content of our mental states is narrow.

All my starting assumptions are on the table. Some of these assumptions are controversial—particularly phenomenalism. As a result we must be careful to distinguish between cases in which one objects to these assumption and cases in which one objects to the conclusion drawn from these assumptions. Say I conclude that S is permitted to take stance *s* towards *p* in circumstances C. My overall reasoning might be put as follows:

1. If my starting assumptions are true, then S is permitted to take stance *s* towards *p* in circumstances C.
2. My starting assumptions are true.
3. So, S is permitted to take stance *s* towards *p* in circumstances C.

Let's say you think that the argument is unsound. You might make either of these objections.

Type 1 Objections Deny premise 1.

Type 2 Objections Deny premise 2.

²⁷ See Salmon 1986 on guises.

²⁸ See Salmon 1986 and Braun 1998, 2002.

²⁹ Giersson 2002.

Type 2 Objections contend that my starting assumptions are false. Type 1 Objections contend that my conclusion doesn't follow even if those assumptions are granted. I won't be responding to Type 2 Objections beyond what I say in §3 and in Chapter Six. This is important to keep in mind when assessing the arguments. For one's hesitancy may have more to do with phenomenalism or one of my other starting assumptions than with the conclusions I infer from these assumptions.

§3 Why J+Phenomenalism?

At this point, I'm going to offer some rationale for accepting both J and phenomenalism, the conjunction of which I'll call "J+Phenomenalism". The goal is not to settle the debates surrounding these positions but to explain why one might find these to be reasonable and attractive starting points for a project. In the following section, I'll make the case that one can find value in a project with these starting points even if one rejects them both.

I'll start with an argument for J over T. This argument builds on the point that our intellectual duties stem from our intellectual agency. When we look closely at the nature of intellectual agency, the resulting notion of intellectual duties fits with J but not T. After completing this argument, I'll introduce a second line of thought in favor of a phenomenalist understanding of J.

Let's begin with the following datum about rationality: rational creatures (as contrasted with non-rational creatures) are rational precisely because they are able to act for reasons. This is why humans are rational creatures but trees are not: humans can act for reasons while trees cannot. Certain domains of human activity are rational activities (as opposed to non-rational activities) precisely because those activities are done for

reasons. This is why practical action is a rational activity but digestion is not. The domain of rational activity that concerns us here is intellectual activity—specifically, the taking of doxastic stances as described above. Doxastic stances are taken for reasons and so the taking of such stances is a rational (as opposed to non-rational) activity. You are an intellectual *agent* iff you are able to engage in rational intellectual activity. The point I'm building up to is that you are an intellectual agent precisely because you are able to take doxastic stances for reasons.³⁰

If taking stances *for reasons* is what makes you an intellectual agent, then the duties you possess precisely because you are an intellectual agent are going to center around your reasons for acting. It would be exceedingly odd if intellectual agency came with no requirements on the proper exercise of the very activity that gave rise to it. The natural thought is that our intellectual duties will require us to take stances for good reasons or (if we are avoiding positive epistemic duties) forbid us from taking stances for bad reasons or for no reasons at all. This, of course, means that only those stances for which we have good reasons are permitted. Another way of reaching this conclusion is the thought that one's intellectual duties will require us to be good intellectual agents. Since being an intellectual agent is about taking stances for reasons, it seems to follow that being a *good* intellectual agent will be a matter of only taking stances for *good* reasons. Thus, our intellectual duties require us to only take stances for good reasons.

This is just the picture of our intellectual duties offered by J. The only stances permitted to us by J are those for which we have on-balance good reasons. T, on the other

³⁰ Taking doxastic stances is not the only rational intellectual activity and so is not the only explanation for your intellectual agency, but the ability to take doxastic stances for reasons is sufficient for your intellectual agency.

hand, issues no requirements whatsoever about the reasons for which one believes. It has nothing to say on that matter. You could act for bad reasons and satisfy T so long as you happen to believe truly. My point is that T fails miserably to express the duties that derive from our identity as intellectual creatures. Thus, a careful examination of intellectual agency yields a conception of intellectual duties that supports J over T.

We still need a rationale for J+Phenomenalism. I will argue that J+Phenomenalism uniquely promises to revitalize traditional arguments for internalism in light of recent threats posed by the non-transparency of the mental. Not all will share the internalist intuitions underlying such arguments, but those that do will have reasons for endorsing J+Phenomenalism.

Two of the most traditional arguments for internalism are that the norms generated by internalism uniquely satisfy the following requirements:³¹

Controllability It is, to some significant degree, up to S whether S violates the norm or not.

Responsibility S is at least partially blameworthy every time S violates the norm.³²

If Controllability and Responsibility are not *requirements*, they are at least central desiderata for those intellectual norms governing our doxastic stance formation—or so they are treated by a large number of epistemologists. I won't take up the issue of whether they are, in fact, desiderata. My argument is just that one has reason to endorse J+Phenomenalism insofar as one has reason to maintain Controllability and Responsibility.

³¹ These are two of the most traditional arguments for internalism, *given a deontological conception of justification*. Internalists who are not primarily driven by a deontological conception of justification (see, e.g., Conee and Feldman 2004) appeal to different considerations.

³² If we limit ourselves to purely intellectual considerations, that is. There may be times where S is blameworthy from a purely intellectual point of view but not from an all-things-considered point of view.

Non-internalist norms are widely accepted to fail at Responsibility. Whether the norm is to believe only what's true or to believe only what's in accordance with what you know or to believe only if that belief is formed by an objectively reliable belief forming process, there will be completely excusable violations of these norms. Evil demon victims, for instance, violate all of these norms and yet cannot be blamed for these so-called mistakes. It is controversial whether non-internalist norms can satisfy Controllability. The perennial internalist intuition has been that we do not have sufficient control over whether we satisfy these ostensible norms. The source of this intuition seems to be that satisfying non-internalist norms relies too much on the world cooperating with our best efforts—we cannot be evil demon victims, for instance—and whether the world cooperates isn't up to us. Again, I will not defend this intuition; I will merely show that those who have it thereby have reason to endorse J+Phenomenalism.

Internalist norms are traditionally thought to fare better with respect to these requirements. Given J+Phenomenalism, our intellectual obligations ultimately depend on our phenomenally individuated mental states, which are entirely within the first-person perspective. Thus, we need only do what's best from our own first-person perspectives in order to satisfy these obligations. It is thought that we have significantly more control over doing what's best from our own perspectives than we do over satisfying the requirements imposed by non-internalist norms. Furthermore, it is natural to think that any time we do less than what's best from our own perspectives this failure will ultimately be attributable to some blameworthy error on our part.

Recently, several important lines of thought have cast doubt on these traditional lines of reasoning. Internalism only gains an advantage, it is claimed, if we are always in

a position to know or justifiably believe which stances are permitted by our duties. In the past, internalism was thought to create such a situation, but this relied on a misestimation of our cognitive situations. In particular, it falsely assumes the transparency of certain mental states as well as the ability to always discern what our duties are and how they apply to our current situations.³³ Once we fully appreciate the non-transparency of our (non-trivial) mental states³⁴ as well as our general fallibility regarding the rules and how they apply,³⁵ we should admit that internalism is on par with its non-internalist alternatives regarding Controllability and Responsibility.³⁶ We don't have significantly more control over doing what's best from our perspectives than we do over, for instance, believing only what's in accordance with what you know. So Controllability provides no reason to favor internalism over the alternatives. Furthermore, even given internalism, there will be cases where the subject is completely excusable: for example, when the subject is non-culpably ignorant of which mental states she's in. So Responsibility provides no reason to favor internalism over the alternatives either. Or so this influential line of thought goes.

Allow me to admit for the purposes of our discussion that, even given J+Phenomenalism, we are not always in a position to know or justifiably believe what's required of us. J+Phenomenalism does not need to rely on this to gain advantage over the relevant alternatives with respect to Controllability and Responsibility.

³³ A condition C is transparent iff one is always in a position to know (or, we might add, justifiably believe) whether one is in C. See Williamson 2000, chapter 4.

³⁴ Williamson's anti-luminosity argument (Williamson 2000, chapter 4) has been most influential on this front.

³⁵ See Kvanvig 2014 on fully general fallibilism.

³⁶ See Srinivasan 2015 for an excellent overview of the supposed normative implications of these views.

The first step is to adopt a model of acting for reasons involving direct guidance.³⁷ If good reasons are mental states, then we can act on those reasons directly—in the way that one mental state can immediately prompt the formation of another. For example, you can respond to a perception of a car braking without reflecting on the fact that you have this perception. The perceptual experience itself prompts action. In the same way, good reasons can directly move you to form some doxastic stance, even if you are not aware that you have these reasons. On this model, we display what Williamson calls “unreflective causal sensitivity to evidence” (2000, 180). As Williamson explains,

One can be causally sensitive to a factor without being in a position to have exact knowledge of it, as when one is causally sensitive through unaided perception to the distances between objects in one’s environment. One can be casually sensitive to appropriate properties of one’s evidence without being in a position to know them exactly. (2000, 180)

The key is that to act for a reason, you do not need to reflect on this reason or realize that you have this reason.

This opens up the following possibility: if our intellects are so constituted as to be directly motivated to the right extent by all and only our good reasons, then we will always meet our duties without being aware of what those duties require of us. Imagine a perfectly rational person. We can imagine this person going through life, forming only rational doxastic stances, and never reflecting on her reasons or whether she is meeting her intellectual duties. So long as she responds appropriately to her mental states—being moved to the right extent by her good reasons and remaining unresponsive to the bad—she will never violate her intellectual duties. What’s needed, then, is just an intellect with the right constitution: one that responds to all and only good reasons and does so to the right

³⁷ See Gibbons 2013, 139-40, on direct guidance.

extent. Being aware of which reasons we have or the content of our intellectual duties or how those duties apply to our current situation is unnecessary.

This picture is only possible for creatures like us given J+Phenomenalism or, at least, a view on which our obligations ultimately depend on narrow features of our mental states. Before defending this position, I must note that the argument pertains only to epistemic agents with the sort of intellectual constitution that humans as a matter of fact possess. I am bracketing out epistemic agents that are constituted differently from normal humans. This is fair since Controllability and Responsibility are supposed to be true *for creatures like us*. It's no comfort to the alternatives if Controllability and Responsibility are only true for epistemic agents with radically different constitutions. J+Phenomenalism still gains an advantage if it uniquely preserves Controllability and Responsibility for creatures like us.

A central feature of the human intellectual constitution is that our stances are, on the most fundamental level, formed in response to the narrow features of our mental states. Allow me to explain. A belief or disbelief might be formed in response to facts about the world but not immediately.³⁸ Facts can only lead us to believe or disbelieve by causing us to possess certain mental states that serve as the proximate cause of stance formation.³⁹ For instance, a cat's presence might cause us to believe that a cat is here by way of causing us to have a certain perceptual experience. Keeping with the cat example, Michael Huemer offers the following insight:

Furthermore, the appearance probabilistically *screens off* my belief from the external fact. That is, *given* that I experience exactly the sort of appearance I am

³⁸ This is true, at least, for a large and important domain of facts. You might think that certain facts about one's own mental states are an exception.

³⁹ Huemer 2007, 39-40.

now experiencing, the probability of my forming the belief that there is a cat is unaffected by the actual existence or non-existence of the cat. If I have this sort of appearance caused by a cat, I will believe that there is a cat; but equally, if I have the same appearances when no relevant cat exists, I will believe that there is a cat. (2007, 40)

If the belief is indeed screened off from the external fact in this way, then the belief is not, at the fundamental level, a response to that fact.

We can turn this same argumentative strategy on our mental states to determine which features are doing the fundamental work in stance-formation. That is, if certain features of our mental states probabilistically screen off our beliefs from other features, then our beliefs are not, on the most fundamental level, a response to those screened off features. Consider a factive mental state like seeing a cat. The wide features of this factive state are screened off from our belief by its narrow features. To mimic Huemer's reasoning, given that we possess a mental state with the same narrow features as seeing that there is a cat, the probability of my forming the belief that there is a cat is unaffected by whether I actually see a cat or just appear to see a cat. Thus, on the fundamental level, our beliefs are not responses to factive mental states or, at least, not to any of their wide features.

The same reasoning seems to be applicable to any wide features of our mental states. Just consider S and her evil demon victim counterpart S*. It is widely acknowledged that, given the same attitudes and preferences, S and S* will form the same stances no matter how you vary the wide features of their mental states. Even Williamson seems to admit this.⁴⁰ This shows that, on the most basic level, their stances are not formed in response to those wide features. Narrow mental states seem to be doing all the

⁴⁰ Williamson 2000, 180. He also maintains, of course, that, "Our causal insensitivity to any difference in evidence between the [good case and bad case] does not show that there is no difference in evidence between them."

fundamental work. S and S* form the same beliefs and disbeliefs precisely because they share the same narrow mental states.

We can see this all playing out on the physical level. The normal way to get an agent to form a belief is to bring about some change in the internal physical state of the agent. Trees bring about beliefs, for instance, by causing certain physical changes in the eye which cause certain physical changes in the brain which lead to belief. Those brain states, moreover, are sufficient to bring about belief. At this level, there is no need to specify whether those brain states also (partially) ground a wide mental state like knowledge. Indeed, any explanation of belief formation that appeals to wide mental states will have an underlying physical explanation in terms of the internal physical states of the agent.

This is confirmed by the fact that our folk-psychological explanations of belief bottom out in narrow mental states.⁴¹ That is, the proximate explanation of a belief in a fully articulated, folk-psychological explanation will appeal to narrow mental states. Take our cat belief. The proximate explanation of our belief is not that there's a cat here or that we see a cat here but that there appears to be a cat here (where an "appearance" is some kind of narrow mental state that we might share with an evil demon victim counterpart). This suggests that, at the most basic level, our stances are formed in response to the narrow features of our mental states. This short discussion obviously isn't sufficient to establish the point, but there at least seems to be a strong initial case for the position.

⁴¹ See Wedgwood 2002, 356-57. C.f. Williamson 2000, 60-64, chapter 3, on the ineliminability of knowledge in explanations of action. Responding to the Williamson's sophisticated arguments here would take us too far astray.

Let's apply this conclusion to the larger discussion. In order for the intellect to automatically respond to the presence of all and only good reasons within the first-person perspective, there needs to be a principled way of differentiating good from bad reasons—certain features that belong to all and only the good mental states. The intellect can then be programmed to respond to the presence of these features in the appropriate way. What we just learned is that, fundamentally, we form stances in response to narrow mental states. In other words, the triggering conditions of our most basic stance-forming procedures are always narrow mental features. This means that we cannot be programmed to respond to all and only good reasons unless the features uniquely marking them are, or supervene on, narrow features. Since no narrow features perfectly track knowledge states or any mental state that appeals to environmental conditions, as evil demon cases show, it follows that, on the relevant alternatives to J+Phenomenalism, no one with our kind of intellectual constitution can be programmed to directly respond to all and only good reasons

J+Phenomenalism, on the other hand, implies that certain sorts of phenomenal properties belong to all and only good reasons. Since the phenomenal properties of a mental state are narrow (or so I'm assuming), our intellects can be programmed to form stances in response to all and only mental states with those particular phenomenal properties and to do so in proportion to the strength of those phenomenal properties. If we are so disposed, then we will always form permissible stances.

This shows that, despite the concerns raised by the non-transparency of the mental and our general fallibility, J+Phenomenalism allows us to maintain a robust degree of control over whether we satisfy our duties. For whether we meet those duties depends entirely on how we directly respond to our first-person perspectives, and how we directly

respond to our first-person perspectives depends entirely on our own intellectual character. On the alternative views, whether we satisfy our duties depends not only on our own intellectual character but also on features of the environment. On neither view is satisfying our duties a voluntary matter. Nevertheless, there is still a clear sense in which we have more control over those states of affairs that our intellects can bring about by themselves than those states of affairs that require environmental cooperation. Thus, J+Phenomenalism gives us a kind of sourcehood-based control over meeting our duties that we lack on the alternatives.

The above reasoning ignores an important complication: namely, there is no state of affairs that our intellects can bring about without at least *some* environmental cooperation. For instance, whatever laws or powers sustain our intellects in existence are required for our intellects to bring anything about. Moreover, our intellectual make-ups are themselves largely determined by environmental factors. This complication doesn't threaten the main thrust of the argument, however, for there are different kinds and degrees of control. On all views, we need help getting and sustaining a functioning intellect. It is from this point onward that J+Phenomenalism separates itself from the pack. For on J+Phenomenalism, what the environment does from this point is irrelevant; no further environmental cooperation is needed to satisfy one's intellectual duties. The alternatives, in contrast, require that you be in the right sort of environment. J+Phenomenalism thus requires significantly less environmental cooperation than the alternatives. This creates enough separation between J+Phenomenalism and the relevant alternatives to claim that it gains an advantage with respect to Controllability.

J+Phenomenalism also gains an advantage with respect to Responsibility. Since the quality of a reason is always reflected in the first-person perspective, forming an impermissible stance always involves an error from that perspective: we over/underappreciated some of our information or were swayed by desires and the like.⁴² This implies that every violation of our duties is attributable to a deficiency in us—to some defect in our intellectual constitutions. We might be partially excused for a mistake; but insofar as that error ultimately traces back to some deficiency in our handling of the evidence, we are always at least somewhat at fault.

J+Phenomenalism thus promises to retain the traditional advantages of internalism in light of recent challenges. This discussion is not intended to be conclusive. These issues deserve far more nuance than I can provide here, not to mention that some won't share the internalist intuitions driving these lines of thought in the first place. The goal is only to show that J+Phenomenalism is a plausible, or at least understandable, starting point.

§4 The Importance of Doing Your Best

I began by asking about which stances I'm presently permitted to take. This is our guiding question and it is unquestionably one worth answering. A potentially worrisome point, though, is that if my assumptions are wrong, then I might be going about this question entirely the wrong way. For instance, if a knowledge-first view turns out to be correct, then, whatever else my project may do, it's not telling us about which stances we are permitted to take. The point I want to make in this section is that even if my assumptions are false and I'm going about the guiding question in entirely the wrong way, this project

⁴² To over/underappreciate a reason is just to be directly moved to a greater or lesser extent than was appropriate given the strength of that reason. It does not involve a higher-order judgment about the weight of that reason.

is still one worth doing. That is, I want to say why proponents of T, externalists, knowledge-firsters, and anyone else who disagrees with my controversial starting assumptions should stick around.

In the previous section we briefly encountered the notion of doing the best with what you've got, or doing what's best from the first-person perspective. Let's call this "doing what's subjectively best." There may be a number of stances you can take while doing what's subjectively best. On J+Phenomenalism, these are just those stances that are permitted to you. Perhaps you disagree. My point in this section is that it is *still* worth figuring out which stances you can take while doing what's best from your perspective, even if this comes apart from what you ought to do.

Most don't need an argument to convince them of this. How could we *not* care about doing the best with what we've got? To say otherwise sounds ridiculous. Even those who think that doing what's subjectively best comes apart from doing what one ought still respect its importance. For instance, it is commonly thought that if you violate your duties while doing what's best from your perspective (as an evil demon victim might), then this violation is completely excusable. So doing what's subjectively best bestows an immunity to criticism—not *all* criticism, of course, but a certain kind of epistemic criticism that we all have a vested interest in avoiding. A positive epistemic status that allows us to escape such criticism is clearly worth investigating. So I may be preaching to the choir, but even the choir needs to be reminded of the gospel truths occasionally.

Let's begin with a truism: the first-person perspective is *your* perspective. This may seem trivial but its significance is often unappreciated. There's no way for you to step outside of this perspective and adopt a neutral viewpoint. Your first-person perspective

just is your view of the world. This means that nearly every stance you take will be formed on the basis of what's in your first-person perspective. The only substantial optionality resides in how you respond to your perspective. If you do what's subjectively best, you will (at least) believe p only if p is indicated to be true from your perspective. Seems sensible. Now consider the alternatives. You could believe p when p is indicated to be false. That's a horrendous option. You could believe p when p is neither indicated to be true nor false. That's only a slightly less horrendous option. You could completely disregard your perspective and believe randomly. No improvement there. Or you could take an arbitrary combination of these strategies; for example, believing p when it's indicated to be true one moment and then believing q when it's indicated to be false the next. None of these alternatives are in the least bit tolerable.

Each of these alternatives requires that you at least sometimes do less than what's subjectively best. Consider what it would be like to actually *express* these attitudes. For instance:

“Given everything I have to go on, believing that it's cold and rainy is best, but I believe it's sunny and 65°.”

“All indications are that my coffee cup is empty, so I believe it's full.”

“My information doesn't indicate whether my cell phone is charged or not so I believe it is.”

“I believe that I ate a bagel this morning but that's not based on anything whatsoever.”

If these aren't harrowing to a philosopher then I don't know what is. Some might insist that, so long as the world is cooperating, these subjects believe precisely as they should. Yet these same people would be severely distressed if they heard their students or loved ones genuinely making such assertions. Everyone must admit that these utterances

manifest a deep-seated irrationality in the speaker that we have an interest in avoiding. The upshot is this: your doxastic stances *will* be based on your first-person perspective and there's only one sensible way of going about this—namely, doing the best with what you've got.

It may be that, ultimately, all you really want is knowledge or understanding. Doing what's subjectively best will still have immense instrumental value. Your pursuit of knowledge or understanding must be undertaken from the first-person perspective, and the only sensible way to pursue it is to do what's best from that perspective. Say you are out and you want to get home. There's only one sensible way of trying to get there: go in a direction that your perspective indicates will take you home. This is to do what's best from your perspective. What's the alternative? Go in a direction that your perspective indicates *won't* take you home? Or in a direction that you have no indication about either way? The lesson applies to our epistemic goals as well. There's only one sensible way to pursue knowledge or understanding, and that's by only believing when it's what's best from your perspective.

The point I'm hammering on is that *everyone* should care about doing what's subjectively best. This is the only sensible way of proceeding through the world. If proceeding sensibly isn't sufficient to satisfy our intellectual duties, that doesn't make it unimportant. For unless we are willing to stomach the alternatives, this is how we are committed to proceeding.

My project will investigate which stances you can take while doing the best you can with what you've got. Accordingly, the subject of my project is of immense value. This remains true even if my starting assumptions are false. Of course, my project may be

more valuable if my assumptions are correct, but its merit doesn't stand and fall with those assumptions.

§5 *Common Sense Epistemology (in Outline)*

We started with the question, *Which degrees of belief or disbelief am I now intellectually permitted to place in p?* Given the assumptions in §2, we can answer this question by determining which stances you have propositional justification for taking towards *p*. This depends in turn on your total body of good intellectual reasons. Thus, we can partially answer our guiding question by giving a theory of reasons.

I call my theory “common sense epistemology”. It has two main theses, both of which make reference to a specific type of mental state. I call these mental states “seemings” because they are the mental states one has when something *seems* true or false. The rest of this chapter will be spent detailing the theses of common sense epistemology and their implications. But to give us a picture of the forest before we go barreling into the trees, allow me to formulate the two tenets of common sense epistemology loosely. Once these theses and their chief implications are out on the table, I'll start filling in the details.

Common sense epistemology claims:

- (A) All seemings are non-derivative good reasons to believe or disbelieve their content.
- (B) All of our non-derivative good reasons to believe or disbelieve are seemings.

(A) and (B), properly understood, have a couple of key implications, including the following:

Appearance Internalism S's total body of ultimate evidence at *t* supervenes on the seemings S possesses at *t*.⁴³

⁴³ Huemer 2006 introduces Appearance Internalism, though he formulates it differently.

Appearance internalism makes it overt that one's ultimate evidence—and in turn, which stances one is permitted to take—supervenes on one's seemings. Appearance internalism is a version of phenomenalism since seemings are phenomenally individuated mental states—i.e. all and only seemings possess a distinctive phenomenal character, which I will describe momentarily.

A second implication of common sense epistemology—specifically, (A)—is an oft-discussed, Chisholmian-style epistemic principle called “phenomenal conservatism”.⁴⁴ Phenomenal conservatism has been formulated in a number of different ways.⁴⁵ The version I will defend is as follows:

PC_R If it seems true to S that *p*, then S thereby has *pro tanto* good reason to believe *p*; and if it seems false to S that *p*, then S thereby has *pro tanto* good reason to disbelieve *p*.⁴⁶

Since I identify evidence for or against *p* with good reasons to believe or disbelieve *p*, respectively, then *PC_R* can be reformulated as:

PC_E If it seems true to S that *p*, then S thereby has some evidence for *p*; and if it seems false to S that *p*, then S thereby has some evidence against *p*.⁴⁷

⁴⁴ Those who have endorsed phenomenal conservatism include Cullison 2010, Dougherty 2008, 2011a, 2014, Huemer 2001, Lycan 2013, Tucker 2010, 2011, and Skene 2013. (Matheson 2011 and Gage 2014 discuss phenomenal conservatism favorably and have endorsed it in conversation.) Pryor 2000 and proponents of perceptual dogmatism can be thought of as endorsing a version of phenomenal conservatism restricted to perceptual experience. (Pryor points to Thomas Reid and G.E. Moore as early dogmatists. See Reid 1997, 2002a and Moore 1959.) Phenomenal conservatism also bears similarities to Swinburne's principle of credulity (Swinburne 2004), Lycan's principle of credulity (Lycan 1988), and some of Chisholm's epistemic principles (Chisholm 1977). See Gage 2014 for a detailed overview of the history of conservatist principles. See Huemer 2014, Moretti 2015, and Tucker 2013 for overviews of phenomenal conservatism and the debates surrounding it.

⁴⁵ The formulation in Huemer 2007 has become the predominant formulation.

⁴⁶ The first conjunct is called “Reasons Commonsensism” in Dougherty 2011a, 333; 2014.

⁴⁷ For *PC_E* to be a true reformulation of *PC_R*, there needs to be a parallel to the “pro tanto” qualification in *PC_R*. (See below for an explanation of “pro tanto reasons”.) There is no convenient way of doing this, so I'll leave this qualification to *PC_E* as part of the tacit background.

I will use “PC” to refer to both of these principles. There are a number of differences between the formulations of PC I defend and others in the literature. I’ll make these differences clear in a moment. (A) only goes beyond PC in actually identifying seemings with good reasons or evidence—something that PC suggests but does not imply.

Now that the big picture is in view, we can focus in on the details. I begin by saying a little more about seemings. I’ll then say more about the epistemic role that common sense epistemology assigns to seemings and how it is different from other views in the vicinity.

Seemings, often called “appearances”, come in at least four kinds. There are perceptual seemings (e.g. it seems that the water is warm), memorial seemings (e.g. it seems that I voted in the last election), introspective seemings (e.g. it seems that I’m thinking), and rational seemings or intuitions (e.g. it seems that bachelors can’t be married). This last category—rational seemings—is broad and includes all seemings that result from the use of reason. For instance, an argument may convince me that p is true and, as a result, it seems to me that p . This is a rational seeming. Most seemings fall into one of these categories, but there are possible exceptions. You might, for instance, add a new category for moral seemings (e.g. it seems that torturing for fun is wrong) or religious seemings (e.g. it seems that I am guilty before God) or subsume these under rational seemings.

Perhaps the most pressing question is, *What are seemings?* This is a big question—too big to answer here. Still, it would be hard to understand common sense epistemology without at least a basic understanding of seemings. So, I’ll say a little about seemings now and a lot more in Chapter Four where I give my full characterization. To begin, seemings are experiences. More specifically, they are a particular kind of representational mental state with propositional content. When it seems to one that p , it *feels* different than when

one imagines that *p* or when one merely considers, or entertains, *p*. The difference between these kinds of experiences cannot be accounted for by differences in the vividness or detail of the content. What sets seemings apart is that they possess a unique phenomenal character called “assertiveness”.⁴⁸ Assertiveness comes in two varieties. There are two kinds of seemings corresponding to these two kinds of assertiveness.

The first variety of assertiveness, and the one always discussed in the literature, belongs to what we might call “seemings-true”. Presumably, this is the phenomenal character that Locke metaphorically describes as an “evident luster” or as “clarity and brightness to the attentive mind.”⁴⁹ By virtue of their assertiveness, seemings-true are said to have “the feel of truth, the feel of a state whose content reveals how things really are” (Tolhurst 1998, 298-9). Imaginings represent states of affairs but not in such a way that they feel actual. For instance, I may imagine that I am in Middle Earth during the events of the Lord of the Rings, but the content of these mental states doesn’t feel true to me. Seemings-true, on the other hand, represent the world as being a certain way and *assert* that the world actually is that way. They present their content to the subject as true. It is for this reason that seemings-true incline one to believe their content while imaginings don’t.

The second variety of assertiveness might be called “the feeling of falsity”.⁵⁰ A seeming with this variety of assertiveness is called a “seeming-false”. A seeming-false

⁴⁸ The distinctive phenomenological character of seemings has been called “assertiveness” by Tucker, “felt veridicality” by Tolhurst, and “forcefulness” by Huemer. Tolhurst 1998 coins “felt veridicality”; Huemer 2001 first coins “forcefulness”. Rather than add to the growing list of names, I will stick with the term “assertiveness”.

⁴⁹ See Plantinga 1993a, 105-6.

⁵⁰ This feeling is mentioned, though not in the terms discussed here, by Plantinga 1993a, 104, and Koksvik 2011, 188-9.

feels as though it is asserting the falsity of its content; it presents its content as false. This second variety of assertiveness is as familiar to us as the first. Quite frequently, someone makes a philosophical claim that immediately strikes me as false. Sometimes I am able to articulate where I think the error lies, but other times I cannot. All I have is a lingering feeling that *something* is wrong with that claim. This kind of experience is common to us all.⁵¹

It is worth asking whether it is necessary to distinguish between these two varieties of assertiveness. Can't we just re-describe a seeming-false that p as a seeming-true that $\sim p$? I don't think so. In some seemings-false, it is clear that the propositional content of my experience is p , not $\sim p$. Furthermore, the phenomenology of $\sim p$ feeling true is plainly different from the phenomenology of p feeling false. The feeling of truth just isn't the same as the feeling of falsity, though they are closely related.

It's surprising that no phenomenal conservative has noted the existence of seemings-false until now. All prior formulations of phenomenal conservatism focus exclusively on seemings-true and their epistemic value. PC rectifies this absence. Still, because of the focus on seemings-true, the phrase, "it seems to S that p ," has come to mean that p seems *true* to S and " p is justified for S" has come to mean that S is justified in placing some degree of belief in p . I will not fight these conventions. If I want talk about a seeming-false, I will explicitly state, " p seems *false* to S." In general, I will stick to

⁵¹ You might worry that similar reasoning will lead you to posit many different kinds of seemings. For instance, there is plausibly a unique feeling associated with something's feeling childish or absurd or interesting. Do we need to posit the existence of a seeming-childish or a seeming-absurd or a seeming-interesting? I don't think so. First of all, these mental states wouldn't be seemings, since seemings have an assertive phenomenal character. Second, they are better characterized as kinds of emotions. (In Chapter Four, §7, I present a theory of emotions that explains how one might emotionally evaluate a situation as childish or absurd or interesting.) Finally, even if there *were* many kinds of seemings, it wouldn't be a problem for my project. My theses are about the evidential value of seemings-true and seemings-false—whether there are other kinds of seemings is beside the point.

discussing seemings-true. This is for the sake of convenience. For any claim I make about seemings-true, an analogous claim could be made about seemings-false.

Little else has been said about the nature of assertiveness other than to give examples of representative states that have it and others that don't. This has left a number of philosophers unsatisfied. I discuss assertiveness far more thoroughly in Chapter Four where I give my full account of the nature of seemings.

My conception of seemings is not hostage to the ordinary language usage of "seems" and its cognates. I will argue in Chapter Four that the manner in which I use the term 'seemings' is quite natural and reflects the predominant usage, but I will not rest my project entirely on the claim that this is the ordinary language conception of seemings. I will instead take on the additional burden of showing that we do, in fact, have experiences of the sort I am calling seemings (with ordinary language considerations forming part of my case).

I'll leave further discussion of the nature of seemings to Chapter Four. Let's turn to the epistemic status of seemings. (A) claims that all seemings are good reasons to believe or disbelieve their content. (A) should be understood as PC plus the claim that seemings are themselves the good reasons to believe or disbelieve. Thus, I can elucidate (A) by explaining PC.

The basic idea behind PC is if you possess a mental state representing p and asserting p , then you should approach that mental state with credulity—you give it the benefit of the doubt. If you approach the testimony of other people credulously, then the mere fact that someone asserts p gives you some reason to believe p . Treating assertive mental states with credulity works the same way. If a seeming asserts that p , then one

immediately has a reason to believe p . There is no need to confirm the reliability of that seeming prior to giving weight to its testimony. Thus, if we go on to identify the seeming as a good reason, it is a *non-derivative* good reason in that its reason-giving status does not depend on the possession any *other* good reasons.

Any justification to believe provided by a seeming is thus immediate and non-inferential. That is, any justification afforded a proposition by virtue of its seeming true “doesn’t rest on any evidence or justification you have for believing other propositions” (Pryor 2000, 532). S needn’t even have prior evidence that it seems to S that p or that its seeming that p makes p more probable. When it seems to S that p , S gains evidence for p straightaway—by virtue of possessing that seeming and nothing else.

Thus, PC is *not* a form of what Fumerton calls “inferential internalism”. Inferential internalism “takes the truth that it seems to one as if P as a potential premise that can be known noninferentially, a premise from which one can infer (in the absence of defeating evidence) that P ” (Fumerton 2007, 72). It’s important that PC doesn’t get falsely charged with the difficulties of inferential conservatism.

PC contends that we should treat *every* seeming with the above sort of credulity. Some endorse restricted versions of phenomenal conservatism, suggesting that some but not all seemings provide good reasons.⁵² PC is unrestricted. No seeming’s testimony is rejected out of hand—there must be some reason to think it false or unreliable. Thus, even the most ill-formed, misleading, or otherwise scandalous seemings are reasons to believe their content. (As we’ll see in Chapter Six, important objections are aimed at precisely this

⁵² Brogaard 2013, Markie 2013, McGrath 2013, and Steup 2013 accept restricted or amended versions of phenomenal conservatism.

feature of PC.) Of course, if the subject has any reason to believe that a seeming is ill-formed, misleading, or otherwise scandalous then one has a defeater—a reason countering the reason provided by the seeming—that will diminish or eliminate any justification provided that seeming. Any alternative to this position requires that we reject the testimony of some seemings without any indication of their unreliability.

Here, once again, there is a helpful analogy with testimony. If we adopt a credulous position regarding testimony, then no person’s testimony—no matter how dishonest, untrustworthy, or otherwise scandalous the person may be—should be rejected unless we have *reason to believe* that they are dishonest, untrustworthy, or otherwise scandalous. Any alternative to this position involves dismissing people’s testimony *without* reason to think them untrustworthy, and that’s just plain rude.

PC says that seemings provide the subject with *pro tanto* reason to believe or disbelieve. Pro tanto reasons differ from prima facie reasons in the following way. Prima facie reasons can be defeated, in which case they were not (or are no longer) genuine reasons. Pro tanto reasons are always genuine reasons, even when they are countered by stronger reasons to the contrary.⁵³ The term “pro tanto” also indicates that the subject has a reason to believe *p to the extent* that *p* seems true. To make sense of this we must think of both seemings and reasons as coming in varying degrees, or strengths. The strength of the reason is then positively correlated with the strength of the seeming. The strength of a seeming is a measure of its assertiveness. Since assertiveness is just a particular phenomenal character, it’s easy enough to understanding how the strength of a seeming’s assertiveness can vary. Just as a pleasant feeling may feel more or less pleasant than some

⁵³ See, e.g., Kagan 1989, 17.

other feeling, so one proposition might feel more true or false than another. The more true or false some content feels, the stronger the seeming and, in turn, the stronger the reason one has to believe or disbelieve that content.

The fact that seemings vary in strength is confirmed by introspection. It seems to me that Golbach's conjecture is true; it also seems to me that blue is a color; but the latter seeming is considerably stronger than the former. The content of both seemings feels true, but it does so to varying degrees. This discrepancy in strength explains why I believe Golbach's conjecture but not nearly to the degree that I believe blue is a color. In some cases, the seemings might be exceptionally weak. If, for instance, I am in a room with poor light, it may seem to me that a pen is red, but only very slightly.

Once we admit that seemings come in degrees, it is natural to conclude that stronger seemings provide one with stronger reasons. It would be very odd if strong seemings didn't provide stronger reasons to believe or disbelieve their content than weak seemings. Consider the weak seeming that the pen is red and the strong seeming that blue is a color. It's implausible that both of these seemings provide me with reasons of the same strength.

Furthermore, the reason seemings are often taken to provide reasons to believe or disbelieve but other representational mental states, like imaginings, are not, is that seemings, but not imaginings, are assertive—the content of seemings feels true or false. I argue in Chapter Five that this assertiveness is *precisely* why seemings provide reasons to believe their content: it associates their content with truth or falsity within the subject's first-person perspective. It makes sense, then, that a *more* assertive seeming would provide one with more reason to believe or disbelieve than a less assertive seeming.

Some seemings may be sufficient to justify some degree of belief or disbelief in its content, but this is not guaranteed. Let's focus on seemings-true for the moment. Justification for believing p requires that one have *on balance* good reason to believe p . So a seeming that p might be countered by other reasons resulting in no on balance reason to believe p . Consider more generally situations in which the prior probability of p is low for S .⁵⁴ It may seem to S that p , and this may increase the probability of p for S , but the seeming may not be strong enough to give S on balance reason to believe p . Perhaps S is just permitted to place a lower degree of disbelief in p or to withhold assent. That being said, if the prior probability of p is at .5 and it subsequently seems to S that p , then, in the absence of countering reasons, S will have justification for placing some degree of belief in p . It may even be that a strong seeming is sufficient to fully justify believing p ,⁵⁵ where S is fully justified in believing p iff S is permitted to place a degree of belief in p qualifying as belief full-stop.⁵⁶ A weak seeming, on the other hand, may not fully justify believing its content, even in the absence of countering reasons.

This separates my version of PC from more ambitious principles such as the original formulation of phenomenal conservatism put forward in Huemer (2001, 99):

*PC** If it seems to S as if p , then S thereby has at least *prima facie* justification for believing that p .

⁵⁴ Thanks to Trent Dougherty for pushing such cases.

⁵⁵ This claim is logically independent of PC. One may endorse PC but maintain that the justification provided by a seeming is never, by itself, sufficient to fully justify its content.

⁵⁶ For convenience, I'll speak as though to believe p is just to place a high enough degree of belief in p , though there are reasons to doubt this.

Prima facie justification for p implies that p will be fully justified in the absence of defeaters.⁵⁷ Huemer has now recognized that such a principle is too strong. A weak seeming that p may provide some degree of justification for believing p without this degree of justification being sufficient to fully justify S in believing p (see Huemer 2007, 30, note 1). Thus Huemer (2007, 30) shifted from PC^* to

PC^{**} If it seems to S that p , then, in the absence of defeaters, S thereby has at least some degree of justification for believing that p .

Even then, PC^{**} might come apart from PC in cases where the S has a low prior probability in p . For then S 's seeming might permit placing a higher credence in p but one still falling short of .5.

A seeming can be a reason for a subject only if that subject possesses that seeming. As admitted beforehand, I will not provide a theory of possession. I will assume, however, that one can possess a seeming even if one isn't presently conscious of that seeming. There are obvious difficulties here but addressing them would take us too far afield.⁵⁸ I should note, however, that these problems are not specific to common sense epistemology. Anyone who admits experiences that aren't presently conscious into one's total body of evidence faces similar difficulties.

We can now turn to (B), which says that all non-derivative good reasons are seemings. (B) does not rule out the possibility that there be reasons other than seemings. Beliefs, for instance, may be good reasons. They just cannot be *non-derivative* good reasons. Assuming foundationalism, all justification must ultimately arise from non-

⁵⁷ This is taken to be true, even definitionally true, by most epistemologists, though some deny it (see Graham 2006, 104).

⁵⁸ Moon 2012 raises some challenges on this front that will eventually need to be dealt with.

derivative reasons. In this way, (B) implies that seemings are our ultimate reasons to believe anything and, thus, the ultimate sources of justification. Arguments, on the other hand, are mediate sources of justification. They can be thought of as conduits passing along the justification that originates from seemings. Thus, the justification of your belief in p , even if supported by an argument, ultimately rests on a foundation of seemings. When talking about our total evidence, we often include those propositions we justifiably believe or else the justified beliefs themselves. This practice can continue in common sense epistemology as long as we recognize that such things are not ultimate evidence and have no justificatory force beyond the seemings that underlie them.

Common sense epistemology does *not* entail that no proposition is justified unless it seems true. All justification originates from seemings, but this justification can be passed on through inference to other propositions that do not themselves seem true. You could have justification for p without it seeming to you that p if, for instance, you have justification for q and that q supports p . In fact, you could even have justification for a proposition that seems *false* (if, say, p is a counterintuitive conclusion supported by strong arguments).

If it turns out that there are other ultimate sources of justification, this will not be devastating to my overall project as long as seemings still play an extensive and prominent role in supporting our noetic structures. That is, the main thrust of common sense epistemology remains intact even if we must retreat to:

(B*) For significant domains of belief, seemings are the predominant kind of non-derivative good reason justifying our beliefs and disbeliefs.

Regardless, I defend the more robust position for at least two reasons: first, I think it's probably true; and second, the system that results is too enticing to resist. All justification

originates from a single kind of mental state in accordance with a single epistemic principle—an elegantly simple principle with enormous explanatory power: one principle to rule them all...

By now the overall shape of my project should be in clear focus. In Chapter Three, I find historical precedent for common sense epistemology in the work of Thomas Reid, laying the foundations for later chapters. In Chapter Four, I explain the nature of seemings in more detail and argue for their existence. I argue for common sense epistemology, including PC, in Chapter Five and address an objection in Chapter Six. There are many important and controversial aspects of common sense epistemology that I will not be able to discuss, though I take up some in other work and plan to take up more.⁵⁹

If I can defend common sense epistemology, then we will have a substantial answer to our guiding question: which stances you are permitted to take ultimately depends on what seems true or false to you. This isn't a complete answer, as I have stressed, but it is a significant step in the right direction.

⁵⁹ E.g., McAllister and Dougherty ms contains an account of how intellectual seemings are formed as well as an application of PC to religious epistemology.

CHAPTER THREE

Thomas Reid

§1 Introduction

Thomas Reid is the predecessor of common sense epistemology. Underlying both Reid's theory and common sense epistemology are mutually shared convictions about fundamental epistemic issues including the nature of evidence and justification and the proper philosophical methodology. With one significant exception, the epistemological differences between these theories are surface-level and speak more to metaphysical disagreements about the nature of experience. I consider common sense epistemology to be in large part a contemporary outworking of the fundamental epistemic principles endorsed by Reid—a refinement of Reid's system. We can, therefore, gain a deeper understanding of common sense epistemology by studying its origin in the thought of Thomas Reid. For this reason, a thorough investigation into Reid's system will prove invaluable.

In addition, some commentators unfairly portray Reid's system as mere posturing—a dogmatic appeal to common sense that refuses to face the truly difficult epistemic questions. There is a temptation to see common sense epistemology in this same light. In this chapter, we will see that the charges against Reid are unfounded. Though it is not without flaws, Reid offers a formidable defense of his theory. A careful examination of this defense will help us see how common sense epistemology can likewise avoid

conviction. I co-opt Reid's overall strategy to defend common sense epistemology in Chapter Five.

After laying out some of the ways in which common sense epistemology builds off Reid's system, we'll take a more detailed look into Reid's theory and how he defends it. My interpretation of Reid represents a valuable historical contribution in addition to preparing us for the work of later chapters.¹

§2 Reid and Common Sense Epistemology

This section highlights some of the fundamental epistemological principles endorsed by Reid and appropriated by common sense epistemology. Instead of tracing out each of many ways in which common sense epistemology borrows from Reid, I'll focus on the most crucial area of agreement: namely, the justificatory role of experience. It is best to begin with a broad overview of Reid's system (as I interpret him).

Reid is a moderate foundationalist. He is a foundationalist insofar as the justification of our entire noetic structure must ultimately trace itself back to first principles—the contents of properly basic beliefs—that are non-inferentially justified. He is moderate insofar as these foundational principles need not be certain.

First principles are justified in accordance with a form of doxastic conservatism:²

DC_J If S naturally believes *p*, then, in the absence of defeaters, S has some justification for believing *p*.

¹ Passages from Reid's *An Inquiry into the Human Mind on the Principles of Common Sense* are taken from Reid 1997 and will be cited as "*Inquiry*" followed by the chapter and section number, then the page number. Passages from Reid's *Essays on the Intellectual Powers of Man* are taken from Reid 2002a and will be cited as "*Essays*" followed by the essay and chapter number, then the page number.

² The name "epistemic conservatism" is sometimes used to refer to doxastic conservatism. Other times it is used to refer to all of the different forms of conservatism including both doxastic conservatism and phenomenal conservatism. I cast my vote for the latter usage.

Natural beliefs are those formed by the proper functioning of one's natural faculties. According to DC₁, the content of these natural beliefs is immediately and non-inferentially justified. Simply *having* a natural belief provides justification for believing its content. There is, for instance, no need to confirm the reliability of one's faculties prior to receiving justification.

Reid doesn't think natural beliefs are immediately justified because they are certain or even objectively probable but because you are not violating any intellectual obligations in maintaining them. For Reid, having justification for *p* is just being rationally permitted to believe *p*, and Reid thinks we can't be at fault for naturally believing something—unless, of course, we have reason to doubt it. (These interpretations of Reid are controversial and are defended in §5 and §6, respectively.)

Reid's conception of evidence is tied to his deontological conception of justification. "Reasonable evidence" or "good evidence" is that which provides an epistemically respectable psychological motivation for belief—as that which both inclines the mind to assent and constitutes an epistemically appropriate basis for assent.³ (See §4 for the Reidian conception of evidence.) Every justified belief will be based on good evidence.

Common sense epistemology follows Reid closely in all these regards—substituting, of course, seemings for natural beliefs. Common sense epistemology contends that all our properly basic beliefs are non-inferentially and fallibly justified by

³ Epistemically respectable motivations are those that one can base a doxastic stance on while meeting one's intellectual duties to now pursue truth and avoid falsehood. I'll say more about what I think makes something an epistemically respectable motivation later in this section and in Chapter Five, §3.

seemings in accordance with a form of epistemic conservatism—namely, phenomenal conservatism:

PC_E If it seems true to S that p , then S thereby has evidence for p ; and if it seems false to S that p , then S thereby has evidence against p .⁴

According to PC, merely *having* a seeming is sufficient to gain evidence for its content. The subject needn't confirm the reliability of the seeming beforehand. The evidential value of a seeming, moreover, resides in its ability to rationally permit the subject to increase her credence in the content of that seeming—to serve, in other words, as an epistemically respectable psychological motivation for becoming more confident. The plausibility of PC and common sense epistemology thus derives from the same conceptions of justification and evidence underlying Reid's theory.

This last fact enables me to adapt Reid's defense of his theory into an argument for common sense epistemology. Reid defends DC_J by attempting to show that, in the absence of defeaters, you are not violating any intellectual duties in maintaining a natural belief. (See §6 for Reid's full argument.) Reid offers both direct and indirect arguments for this conclusion. In the direct argument, Reid presents a number of reasons why one cannot be at fault for maintaining a natural belief absent defeaters. In the indirect argument, he highlights the impermissibility of doing anything else. If we assume that *some* course of action is permissible, then proving the irrationality of rejecting natural beliefs (apart from reasons to doubt them) also proves the rationality of maintaining them.

⁴ As far as I know, Reid doesn't talk about natural disbeliefs, but the principles he relies on apply equally to both. If I naturally disbelieve that triangles can have more than three sides, presumably Reid will say that I thereby have just grounds for disbelieving that proposition. For convenience, I'll limit the discussion to seemings-true.

Though many of the details differ, I adopt Reid's strategy to defend common sense epistemology in Chapter Five, §3-4. The goal is to argue that when p seems true, other things being equal, you're permitted to at least slightly raise your credence in p —even if you have no evidence to confirm the seeming's reliability. (The precise circumstances at issue will be described in Chapter Five, §2.) Like Reid, I make both a direct and an indirect argument. In the direct argument, I show how raising your credence absent defeaters seems perfectly in line with your intellectual obligations. In the indirect argument, I show how the logical alternatives are unsustainable. Given the conception of evidence and justification shared by Reid and common sense epistemology, this is sufficient to establish PC_E .

The most apparent difference between Reid's theory and common sense epistemology is that the latter focuses on seemings and the former on natural beliefs. This difference is not fundamentally epistemic, however, and can be traced to a metaphysical dispute about the nature of experience. Reid thought of experience as partially consisting in belief. Of perception, for instance, Reid writes,

The external senses ... give us a conception, and an invincible belief of the existence of external objects. This conception of the external objects is the work of Nature. The belief of their existence, which our sense give, is the work of Nature; so likewise is the sensation that accompanies it. This conception and belief which Nature produces by means of the senses, we call *perception*. (*Essays* 2.17, 210)

So in endorsing DC_1 , Reid is affirming the role of experience in justifying our beliefs. Common sense epistemology adopts this epistemic principle and develops it using a better understanding of experience.⁵ Beliefs are caused by experiences, not components of them.

⁵ It is worth noting that common sense epistemology borrows heavily from Reid's theory of experience as well. Unlike his predecessors (and prior to Kant), Reid thought experience contained propositional content. Common sense epistemology requires this sort of view.

Basic beliefs do not pop into our minds but are formed on the basis of seemings. These seemings, then, are the experiences from which justification originates. In this way, common sense epistemology offers a better way of working out a shared epistemic commitment with Reid.

Perhaps the only major epistemological disagreement between Reid and common sense epistemology concerns the importance of naturalness. For Reid, naturalness is the property belonging to those beliefs that are produced by the proper functioning of one's natural faculties. Reid thinks that the naturalness of a belief makes it rational to maintain in the absence of defeaters. This is because those beliefs were produced by Nature, not anything we did, so we cannot be at fault for having them. (See §6 for Reid's full reasoning.) Reid also thinks that the foundations of our noetic structure consist entirely in natural beliefs. Common sense epistemology disagrees on both counts.

First, the fact that our beliefs are natural does not always make it rational to hold them. As I mentioned earlier, beliefs are not immediately caused in us. Beliefs are formed on the basis of mental states that incline one to believe. A variety of mental states can incline one to believe: seemings and desires are two examples. When desires alone are driving belief formation, the resulting belief is irrational. What Reid doesn't recognize is that one can have natural dispositions to form beliefs on the basis of desires. Perhaps we are naturally constituted so as to form overly positive evaluations of our own intentions based on a desire to see ourselves as good. The fact that this belief-forming process is natural does not make the resulting belief even *prima facie* rational.

The problem with a belief based wholly on desire is that the belief-forming process is not *aimed at truth*. That which is driving the formation of the belief is the *desirability*,

or apparent goodness, of the proposition rather than its apparent truth. This places one in violation of her duties to pursue truth and avoid falsehood. What matters, then, is not whether the belief is formed by a natural process but whether the belief is formed by a process that is properly aimed at truth. This is part of how I maintain that seemings are respectable motivations for belief. A seeming presents its content as *true*, and it is the apparent truth of that content that inclines one to believe it. Thus, when a belief is based on seemings the process is aimed at truth. (I return to this crucial insight in Chapter Five, §3.)

If being aimed at truth is what's crucial, then Reid is also wrong to restrict properly basic beliefs to those that result from our natural constitution. It is possible that there be a non-natural belief-forming process aimed at truth. These non-natural, truth-directed processes also seem capable of producing rational beliefs. In short, rational belief isn't about being *naturally* compelled to believe, it's about being compelled by *truth*.

There are other important ways in which common sense epistemology coincides with Reid's system. For instance, I mentioned in Chapter One that both recommend the common sense methodology of starting with the obvious and never giving up the more obvious for the less. I will not discuss these other similarities here as they aren't essential to our current aims. It should already be clear that common sense epistemology is, in some important ways, simply a contemporary outworking of the fundamental epistemological insights contained in Reid's system. For this reason, understanding Reid's theory and the principles underlying it prepares the way for common sense epistemology.

§3 Reid's Response to Skepticism

We can understand Reid's epistemology as a reaction to skepticism. It is particularly unfortunate, then, that Reid's response to the skeptic is widely misunderstood. I argue that some of the most prominent interpretations of Reid neglect a crucial aspect of Reid's thought: namely, that our common sense beliefs meet whatever normative standards of rationality that the skeptic might fairly demand of them. After reviewing the nature of the skeptical problem, as Reid understood it, we will turn our attention towards Reid's proposed resolution.

In Reid's mind, the skepticism of Berkeley and Hume was conceived in Descartes (e.g. *Inquiry* 7.3, 210). The Cartesian system, fertile as it was, gave birth to two distinct forms of skepticism.⁶ No-concept skepticism denies knowledge of, for instance, the external world by contesting our ability to form a conception of mind-independent objects. No-justification skepticism denies that we have epistemic justification for forming such beliefs, even if we could. Reid responds to the no-concept skeptic by rejecting the dreaded Way of Ideas: the position that only ideas are the immediate objects of thought. But there is widespread disagreement about the nature of Reid's response to the no-justification skeptic, which is what our discussion will focus on.

The source of no-justification skepticism reveals how Reid must respond to it. Descartes' original error, according to Reid, is accepting only one principle of common sense:

The [Cartesian] system admits only one of the principles of common sense as a first principle; and pretends, by strict argumentation, to deduce all the rest from it. That our thoughts, our sensations, and every thing of which we are conscious, hath real existence, is admitted in this system as a first principle; but ever thing else must be

⁶ See Greco 1995, 2004 and Sosa and Van Cleve 2001, 184.

made evident by the light of reason. Reason must rear the whole fabric of knowledge upon this single principle of consciousness. (*Inquiry* 7.3, 210)

In rough terms, the principles of common sense state that the basic beliefs produced by our various natural faculties and belief-forming mechanisms are true (*Essays* 6.5).⁷ To admit a principle of common sense involves treating the immediate deliverances of that faculty as first principles. Though Reid uses “first principles” in a variety of ways, we will understand first principles as propositions that are immediately and non-inferentially justified.⁸ Descartes treated the content of his introspective beliefs as justified apart from any argument but refused to do the same for all our other faculties, including perception. The “natural issue” of Descartes’ refusal is skepticism. To respond to this skepticism, Reid argues that the deliverances of *all* our natural faculties should be admitted as first principles. This vindicates the principles of common sense from skeptical accusations.⁹ Reid’s task, then, is to show that we have justification for believing the content of all those basic beliefs produced by our natural faculties—at least until we have reason to doubt them.

Any interpretation of Reid on skepticism must explain how we come to have immediate justification for first principles (particularly first principles of perception) and how Reid argues for this position. What we are *not* looking for is an argument that justifies

⁷ At least this is true of the first principles of contingent truths, which seem to be the crux of the matter.

⁸ Some argue that Reid’s characterization of first principles is ambiguous between two distinct kinds (see, e.g., Van Cleve 1999, 8; Somerville 1987, 425; and especially Wolterstorff 2001, 218 and 2004, 82). Poore 2013 shows that there is less confusion in Reid than these commentators think.

⁹ This is at least the first and most important step in vindicating the principles of common sense. It shows that we are being rational in taking these principles for granted, or at least acting as if they are true, in the way we form basic beliefs. It also puts us in a position to show that belief in the principles of common sense is itself justified. Reid thinks that competent adults will immediately believe such principles upon considering them. Given our earlier conclusion, this means that, in the absence of defeaters, we have immediate justification for believing in the principles of common sense. The crucial step, then, is showing that we have immediate justification for the deliverances of all our faculties.

first principles.¹⁰ First principles are *non-inferentially* justified: “Their evidence is not demonstrative, but intuitive” (*Essays* 1.2, 41).¹¹ The goal, then, is to see how Reid argues *that* first principles are justified.

Reid’s argument to this end has proven difficult to find. What we get are reminders about the centrality and importance of first principles: how we would be epistemically and prudentially incapacitated without them (see, e.g., *Essays* 6.4, 455; *Essays* 1.2, 39; *Essays* 6.2, 433). The following claims are especially pervasive in Reid’s writings and will prove to be of special importance: (i) belief in first principles is psychologically irresistible (e.g. *Inquiry* 6.20, 169) and (ii) belief in first principles results from the constitution of our nature (e.g. *Inquiry* 5.7, 71-2). The trouble is that it’s not immediately clear how these facts are supposed to show that we have epistemic justification for believing in first principles. As James Somerville, quoting Reid’s *Essays On the Active Powers of Man*, notes:

It is one thing to hold that “it is necessary for our preservation, that we should believe many things before we can reason;” that our belief “is regulated by certain principles, which are parts of our constitution.” This is only what Hume holds. It is another that such instinctive principles are true. (1987, 425)

This interpretive difficulty has led to a variety of perspectives on Reid. Some see Reid as offering a purely reliabilist or proper functionalist response: roughly, beliefs in

¹⁰ Reid actually recommends against offering arguments for the truth of first principles for the arguments offered for them will be less certain than the principles themselves, tempting one to mistakenly reject them as inconclusive (*Essays* 1.2, 41).

¹¹ It is more accurate to say that first principles are neither entirely nor primarily justified by discursive reasoning. As Poore 2013 and forthcoming, §4, argues, it may be possible to formulate non-circular arguments in support of some principles of common sense by relying on *other* principles of common sense to formulate these arguments. This is impossible only for the seventh principle of contingent truths, which attests to the general reliability of our faculties (*Essays* 6.5, 480-2). But any inferential justification provided by such arguments is merely in addition to the non-inferential justification of first principles.

first principles are justified since they result from the proper function of reliable faculties.¹² Others say Reid is only defending the *practical* justification of believing first principles.¹³ Still others interpret Reid less charitably as providing no substantial response to no-justification skepticism at all.¹⁴

The position I will defend is that Reid uses the above facts to show that we are rationally permitted to believe in first principles, which, on my interpretation, amounts to justification. The term ‘rational’ is often associated specifically with the faculty of Reason, but this is not how I am using the term here. One is rationally permitted to believe something iff believing it doesn’t violate the normative standards or duties that ought to regulate our cognition as intellectual agents. It is true that Reid’s predecessors commonly *assumed* that all of our beliefs (excepting introspective ones) were permitted only if supported by reason, but Reid rejects this assumption. Basic perceptual beliefs, for instance, are not supported by reason but are perfectly rational because we violate no obligation in holding them. Reid sees our intellectual obligations as closely connected with the notions of intellectual criticism or blame. We are not in violation of our duties iff we are not blameworthy or cannot be criticized for believing as we do. Reid appeals to the naturalness and irresistibility of first principles (including first principles of perception) to

¹² See Alston 1985b, Bergmann 2008, De Bary 2002, Greco 2004, and Poore 2013, forthcoming for reliabilist or proper functionalist interpretations. To be precise, these interpretations do not contend that Reid fully worked out a reliabilist or proper functionalist theory, but only that this is the sort of theory that results from his underlying assumptions (see Alston 1985b, 437).

¹³ Lundestad 2006, Baumann 1999, and Magnus 2004. Addressing these interpretations directly would take us too far afield. However, these interpretations seem to be primarily motivated by an inability to see how Reid is making a plausible defense of the epistemic justification of first principles. So the discussion that follows is itself a response.

¹⁴ Daniels 1974 and Popkin 1980 appear to interpret Reid as simply declaring his confidence that God ensures the reliability of our beliefs. See also Thomas Brown’s quote in §5.

show that we are not at fault for believing in them; thus, believing in first principles is rationally permissible, or justified.

This picture of Reid stands in sharp contrast to most others, which ignore or downplay the importance of rationality to Reid.¹⁵ Reliabilist or proper functionalist interpretations are perhaps the most popular. On these interpretations, justified beliefs are just those that result from a reliable belief forming process or that result from the proper functioning of reliable faculties. Given this understanding of justification, all that matters to Reid is that our beliefs in first principles do, in fact, result from properly functioning, reliable faculties. Whether they meet any additional intellectual standards is ultimately irrelevant.

Despite these differences, there is substantial common ground between reliabilist or proper functionalist interpretations and the deontological view. I agree that Reid is a proto-reliabilist or proper functionalist about *knowledge*. Reid learned from Descartes' failure that being rationally permitted to believe *p*, or having justification for believing *p*, doesn't guarantee that one is in a position to know *p*. We need our faculties to be reliably tuned to the world in order to gain knowledge. But it is an overreaction to thereby conclude that Reid stopped caring about meeting one's intellectual duties. Reid thought you need both for knowledge. Interpretations that ignore rationality miss half the story.

The following discussion fills in this missing half. I begin by explaining Reid's views on evidence, which are crucial to understanding the nature of justification. I then build a case that we ought to think of good evidence, and hence justification, in terms of

¹⁵Houston 2000, Rysiew 2002, 2005, 2011, and Wolterstoff 1983a, 1983b, 2001 are exceptions.

rationality. I end by showing how Reid defends the justification of first principles, so understood, against the skeptic.

§4 Evidence and Reasonable Evidence

Reid thought that having justification for p was just to have good evidence for p . This is true even for non-inferentially justified first principles. This last part can be puzzling for those living with a paradigm on which evidence must come from arguments. How can propositions be based on good evidence *and* non-inferentially justified? The answer lies in Reid's unique conception of evidence. If we can understand how Reid thinks of evidence, then we'll be in a position to see how first principles can be supported by good evidence and how Reid can show this to be true.

There are major disagreements about the nature of evidence for Reid. The first decision point we face is whether Reid endorses a psychological conception of evidence or a normative one.¹⁶ On the psychological conception, evidence is a certain kind of psychological cause or explanation of belief. On the normative conception, evidence is the sort of thing that we *should* have for our beliefs. If we admit that evidence has normative features, there are further questions about the nature of these feature which must be addressed.

On my interpretation, evidence in the broadest sense is a merely psychological notion; however, Reid speaks of a special kind of evidence called "good evidence" or "reasonable evidence" that has both psychological and normative dimensions.¹⁷

¹⁶ Rysiew 2005 sets up the debate in this way.

¹⁷ Rysiew 2002, 2005, 2011 also interprets Reid as endorsing a psychological-normative account of evidence. My interpretation follows his on a number of points.

Reasonable evidence—the sort needed for justification—not only psychologically grounds belief but also serves as a *just* ground for belief. Ultimately, Reid claims that all of our evidence is reasonable evidence, but it is at least conceivable that evidence be unreasonable. I'll start with Reid's general conception of evidence.

Reid thinks that there are many different kinds of evidence, each stemming from a different natural faculty. As to what unites them all as evidence, Reid states:

They seem to me to agree only in this, that they are all fitted by Nature to produce belief in the human mind. (*Essays* 2.20, 229)

Elsewhere, Reid says that, “The Judgment is carried along necessarily by evidence” (*Essays* 6.4, 452). The message seems to be that evidence is a psychological cause or explanation of a belief. This understanding is supported by Reid's proclamation, “We give the name of evidence to whatever is a ground of belief” (*Essays* 2.20, 228). We should not, however, conclude that any psychological ground of belief is evidence. Rysiew notes that a moment after this proclamation, Reid adds, “To believe without evidence is a weakness which every man is concerned to avoid, and which every man wishes to avoid” (*Essays* 2.20, 228).¹⁸ On the modest assumption that all beliefs possess *some* psychological ground—a generalization that is violable only in extreme cases that Reid doesn't have in mind—Reid implies that some psychological grounds of belief do not or might not qualify as evidence. Prejudice, for instance, can ground belief in a purely psychological sense but is not evidence.

The fact that evidence is tied to our natural faculties gives us a clue as to which psychological grounds count as evidence. These faculties are designed to produce belief

¹⁸ Rysiew 2005, 111.

on the basis of some grounds but not others. Those grounds on which it is proper function to base belief are evidence. Thus Reid writes, “we measure degrees of evidence by the effect they have upon a sound understanding” (*Essays* 7.3, 482). This partially explains why Reid is so interested in showing that our common sense beliefs result from our natural faculties rather than prejudice. It also explains why Reid thinks that a prejudice might be mistaken for a first principle or a first principle for a prejudice (*Essays* 1.2, 41). We may be in error about whether believing a proposition results from the proper function of our faculties.

What counts as evidence for an individual will vary with her natural constitution. While one human may have greater powers of reasoning than another, humans all share similar natural constitutions. For instance, the power to judge self-evident principles common to all humans is called the faculty of common sense (*Essays* 6.2, 432-3). Reid talks about evidence in general (as opposed to evidence for a particular person) as that which grounds belief in the properly functioning, normal, competent, unbiased, attentive adult.

Evidence is not to be limited, however, to that which, in fact, grounds a belief. Reid conveys that evidence can be undiscerned (*Essays* 6.5, 481), which implies that not all evidence actually grounds a belief. More generally, we may encounter something on which it is proper function to believe but fail to do so because of bias or inattention or many other reasons. What is crucial to evidence is that it is proper function to base belief on it.

We are zeroing in on a conception of evidence as that on which it is proper function to ground assent. This is not to say that, when functioning properly, evidence always leads to a belief. Say you have evidence for p and stronger evidence for $\sim p$. The properly

functioning human will believe $\sim p$ despite having evidence for p . What seems to be essential to evidence is that it pushes or inclines us to believe when functioning properly.

At one point Reid writes:

What this evidence is, is more easily felt than described. Those who never reflected upon its nature, feel its influence in governing their belief. (*Essays* 2.20, 228-9)

The phrase Reid uses later is that which “commands my belief” (*Essays* 2.20, 233). The crucial feature of evidence is not that it succeeds in bringing about assent but that it motivates it, where this implies only that one feels a compulsion to assent to p . So evidence is that which engenders a compulsion to believe in the properly functioning mind. In this way, all evidence might be called “natural evidence”, since it is by virtue of how we are naturally constituted that something counts as evidence.

Evidence, so understood, comes in degrees. When functioning properly, different evidence will compel different degrees of assent. Reid says of the different forms of evidence:

They seem to me to agree only in this, that they are all fitted by Nature to produce belief in the human mind, some of them in the highest degree, which we call certainty, others in various degrees according to circumstances. (*Essays* 2.20, 229)

Reid then links the degree to which we are naturally compelled to assent to p to the degree of evidence we have for p . Recall Reid’s statement that, “we measure degrees of evidence by the effect they have upon a sound understanding” (*Essays* 7.3, 482). So the strength of our evidence is correlated with how strongly the properly functioning mind is naturally compelled to believe.

This conception of evidence unites all the different types of evidence stemming from our various natural faculties. But what evidence actually consists in will differ between kinds. The evidence of sense, for instance, consists in sensations since they serve

as the natural signs that occasion the formation of perceptual beliefs. Evidence stemming from the faculty of reason, on the other hand, consists in propositions. This is confirmed in Reid's endorsement of foundationalism:

When we examine, in the way of analysis, the evidence of any proposition, either we find it self-evident, or it rests upon one or more propositions that support it. The same thing may be said of the propositions that support it; and of those that support them, as far back as we can go. But we cannot go back in this track to infinity. Where then must this analysis stop? It is evident that it must stop only when we come to propositions, which support all that are built upon them, but are themselves supported by none, that is, to self-evident propositions. (*Essays* 6.4, 455)

The evidence of reason for any proposition comes from being either (i) supported by other propositions or (ii) self-evident. In an argument, the premises are evidence for the conclusion because consideration of the premises compels assent in the conclusion in the properly functioning human mind. With a self-evident proposition, merely considering that proposition triggers a compulsion to believe it in the properly functioning human mind.¹⁹ In this way, self-evident propositions are *self-evidenced*—i.e. evidence for themselves. So the evidence of reason either consists in the propositions of a supporting argument or a self-evident proposition. Either way, the evidence of reason consists in propositions.²⁰

So far, we have a purely psychological notion of evidence. To say that something compels assent in the properly functioning human mind is, in itself, a merely descriptive claim about the psychological operations of the mind. For this reason, Reid's most general notion of evidence is purely psychological. Reid, however, draws a distinction between

¹⁹ At least, if a competent and unbiased adult attentively considers the proposition, then she will be compelled to believe that proposition.

²⁰ It is natural to wonder why Reid thought that *propositions* were evidence rather than the mental states one has when conceiving of those propositions. I don't know why Reid came to the former conclusion, just that he did.

evidence and good, or reasonable, evidence. All reasonable evidence is evidence, but possibly not all evidence is reasonable evidence. Right after characterizing evidence as “whatever is a ground of belief,” Reid gives the defining characteristic of reasonable evidence.²¹

All good evidence is commonly called reasonable evidence, and very justly, because it ought to govern our belief as reasonable creatures. (*Essays* 2.20, 230)

All evidence compels belief in the properly functioning mind, but only reasonable evidence does so *justly*. Reasonable evidence, then, is both a psychological and normative notion. It is also the only sort of evidence that is of epistemic value, for only good evidence provides justification.

Reid acknowledges the possibility that the evidence of our faculties, or natural evidence, is not reasonable evidence. He writes:

I shall take it for granted, that evidence of sense, when the proper circumstances concur, is good evidence, and a just ground of belief. (*Essays* 2.20, 229)

Here Reid assumes that the natural evidence provided by our sensory faculties is reasonable evidence. If there were no conceptual distinction between natural evidence and reasonable evidence, then Reid would have no need to make this assumption. In fact, Reid’s dispute with the skeptic can be reframed as a dispute over whether natural evidence is reasonable evidence. The skeptic agrees, of course, that we are naturally constituted to form beliefs in things like the external world. Hume, for example, was quite candid about his inability to throw off a belief in first principles—a fact that Reid is careful to note (see especially *Inquiry* 1.5). The skeptic simply contests whether we have *just* grounds for these beliefs. It is to this charge, then, that Reid must respond.

²¹ In the next line he calls this the “meaning” of good evidence.

§5 Reid and Rationality

The nature of Reid's defense will depend a lot on how we are to understand the notion of a "just ground of belief." Clearly, beliefs with just grounds (or their contents) have some positive epistemic status—namely, *justification*—that other beliefs do not. But what does Reid take the nature of this positive epistemic status to be?

Many claim that Reid is only interested in defending the positive epistemic status characterized by contemporary externalist theories like reliabilism or proper functionalism. On these views, natural evidence justly compels assent iff one's natural belief-forming processes are sufficiently reliable. Thus, Reid need only insist that our faculties are, in fact, reliable to respond to the skeptic. In particular, these views contend that reasonable evidence has nothing to do with rationally entitling one to believe. Alston writes,

The basic question concerns whether beliefs that are formed in a certain way can be relied on to give us the truth, rather than whether beliefs that satisfy certain conditions thereby satisfy a certain *normative* standard of rationality or whatever. (1985b, 437)

The natural result of such interpretations is that evidence becomes peripheral. As John Greco explains:

Once we are reliabilists about evidence, inference or reasoning is not so special any more. In fact, once we are reliabilists about evidence, *evidence* is not so special any more. What matters is however we form our beliefs, they are formed in ways that are reliable. ... We can see that this is exactly what happens in Reid's epistemology. (2002, 562)

This sort of perspective on Reid has become fairly entrenched.

Despite their popularity, these interpretations face serious problems. Most troubling is that they completely miss a crucial element of Reid's response to skepticism. I will argue that, for Reid, a just ground for belief is something that rationally entitles one to believe—that is, we are not violating any intellectual obligation in believing on that

ground. On this understanding, having justification for first principles is simply a matter of being rationally permitted to believe them. After defending this interpretation, I show how Reid defends the permissibility of believing first principles in §6.

The first thing to note is that Reid pretty overtly characterizes reasonable evidence in terms of intellectual obligations.

All good evidence is commonly called reasonable evidence, and very justly, because it ought to govern our belief as reasonable creatures. (*Essays* 2.20, 230)

This passage apparently implies that we have a duty to form our beliefs in accordance with reasonable evidence. That we have such a duty was standard fare for modern epistemologists. Even Hume famously held that “A wise man, therefore, proportions his belief to the evidence” (Hume 1999, 170). Reid, it appears, is no different. It is in this same section of the *Essays*, moreover, that Reid repeatedly talks about reasonable evidence as a “just ground” for belief (*Essays* 2.20, 228-9). This suggests that we should think of “just grounds” as having deontological significance—as being the sort of thing that makes belief rationally permissible.

Allow me to bolster the case. Reid casts his epistemological theory as a response to the no-justification skeptic. So if we can determine which positive epistemic status the skeptic is denying, then we have strong evidence about which positive epistemic status Reid is defending; for we should, if possible, interpret Reid as defending first principles against the very charge leveled by the skeptic. The positive epistemic status under contention is probably what Reid is thinking of as justification.

Wolterstorff asks himself which status Reid’s skeptic contests. His answer:

Reid’s skeptic has his eye on *entitlement*—on what one is permitted to believe—on what one may believe and on what one must not believe.” (2001, 188)

Indeed, Reid articulates the skeptic's challenge in precisely this way:

[The skeptic says] There is nothing so shameful in a philosopher as to be deceived and deluded; and therefore you ought to resolve firmly to withhold assent, and throw off this belief of external objects. ...

Reason, says the sceptic, is the only judge of truth, and you ought to throw off every opinion and every belief that is not grounded on reason. (*Inquiry* 6.20, 169)

The Cartesian skeptic insists that there are intellectual obligations governing our beliefs. In particular, we shouldn't hold any belief that isn't based on sound reasoning. The only exceptions are for introspective beliefs. This position leads to skepticism because many of our beliefs—perceptual beliefs, for instance—simply aren't supported by reason. Thus, a straightforward response to the skeptic will involve a denial that we are obligated to base all of our non-introspective beliefs on reason.

We can confirm this position by looking at Hume, who is Reid's paradigm skeptic. What's important is not what Hume actually said so much as what Reid *took* Hume to be saying, for it is Reid's interpretation of the skeptic's challenge that would shape his response. In Reid's view, Hume insisted that one can reasonably infer very little from the immediate contents of one's mind. For instance, no argument for the external world can be crafted on the basis of our impressions. Hume readily acknowledges, of course, that humans *do* believe in the existence the external world, but these beliefs are based on "custom or habit," not reason (Hume 1997, 121). Clearly Hume sees it as a fault that our beliefs are based on custom rather than reason. What exactly does this fault consist in? Hume's conclusion seems to be that such beliefs stand in violation of our intellectual obligations. While the vulgar may be content to rely on custom, the wise man should cast off such beliefs as unfounded.

In contrast, Hume is *not* contesting the reliability of our belief-forming mechanisms. It may be that custom is a perfectly reliable guide and that all our beliefs about the external world are true. Hume would still insist that there is something deficient about beliefs formed by custom rather than sound reasoning: namely, they are irrational. The mere claim that our beliefs are, in fact, produced by reliable faculties would do nothing to ward off Hume's attack. So if we interpret Reid as only being interested in the reliability of our faculties, then we are stuck with a Reidian response to Hume *that doesn't actually contest anything Hume said!*

Indeed, some commentators have accused Reid of missing Hume's point in precisely this way. Thomas Brown reportedly quipped:

Reid bawled out, We must believe an outer world; but added in a whisper, We can give no reason for our belief. Hume cries out, We can give no reason for such a belief; and whispers, I own we cannot get rid of it. (Mackintosh 1837, 346)²²

In the same spirit, Popkin contends that Reid's response to the skeptic, "tried to rest on a weak middle ground, not answering the sceptics, but insisting on the importance of what people have to believe."²³ Charity demands that these interpretations be a last resort. It can hardly be denied that Reid took himself to be disagreeing with Hume. But on these interpretations, Reid is doing nothing of the sort. Unless we think that Reid just missed this fact, it's not clear how to explain this discrepancy.

Proponents of a purely reliabilist or proper functionalist interpretation might insist that Reid simply rejected Hume's way of framing the debate. What matters is not the rationality of our beliefs but that they have some other positive epistemic status belonging

²² Quote taken from Grave 1960, 109.

²³ Popkin 1980, 71.

to beliefs produced by reliable natural faculties. This is unsatisfying as a response to skepticism. On this view, Reid wouldn't really be disagreeing with Hume so much as making a friendly addition to Hume's conclusions. Reid's critique of Hume is not that he was in error about the rationality of our beliefs but that he neglected to notice that they possess some other positive epistemic status.

To drive the point home, let's assume that Reid did effectively ignore Hume's charge by changing the nature of the debate. What *would* Reid say about the rationality of believing in first principles? It's not as if the existence of some other positive epistemic status does away with the original problem. If Reid thought that Hume's charge could be met, then we would expect to have Reid's response. Since on these interpretations there is no such defense, Reid presumably concedes to Hume that such beliefs are in violation of our obligations as intellectual agents. If this is true, then Reid should relinquish his title as a defender of common sense, for he has given Hume everything he wanted. Belief in the external world is irrational and should be dismissed. Reid is, in effect, a Humean mitigated skeptic. This implication is untenable. If our interpretation leads us here, then we've fallen in a coal-pit (*Inquiry* 1.8, 23). The misstep that led us here is the claim that Reid ignores the skeptic's charge of irrationality. Instead, we should interpret Reid as arguing that belief in first principles is not irrational despite lacking the support of reason.

The interpretation I suggest is borne out when we take a close look at Reid's response to the skeptic. Reid does not simply appeal to the reliability of our natural faculties: he is evidently concerned with the rationality of accepting first principles. For instance, the blamelessness of those who admit first principles and the blameworthiness of skeptics are common themes (see, e.g., *Inquiry* 6.20, 168-9, and *Inquiry* 2.7, 37,

respectively). In the next section, I examine Reid's main defense of the rationality of believing first principles. Before we look at that, I need to clarify what I am *not* saying.

Once again, I am also not saying that Reid *only* cared about whether we can rationally believe first principles. It was also vital to Reid that reliable faculties produce such beliefs. Reid's predecessors saw rationality and truth as a joint package. They thought we could guarantee that our beliefs were true by adhering perfectly to our epistemic duties. Reid knew, as we do, that this is a pipe dream. Being perfectly rational doesn't guarantee truth. Thus Reid boldly proclaims, "If we are deceived in [believing in first principles], we are deceived by Him that made us, and there is no remedy" (*Inquiry* 5.7, 72). But far from rejecting either side of this package, Reid tries to *reunite* rationality and truth through the reliability of our natural faculties. That is, if we have reliable faculties, then believing in accordance with our intellectual duties guarantees the objective probability of our beliefs.²⁴ Both these elements—rationality and reliability—are necessary for knowledge. My point, then, is not that reliabilist or proper functionalist interpretations are wholly mistaken but that they have been missing half of the story.

§6 *The Argument for Trust*

In this section we'll see how Reid defends the rationality or justification of believing first principles. We begin with Reid's observation that first principles are supported by natural evidence. Reid then argues that natural evidence is reasonable evidence—i.e. that natural evidence rationally entitles one to believe. It follows that first principles are justified in the absence of defeaters. Since there are no defeaters, Reid

²⁴ If our faculties were perfectly reliable, then being fully rational would guarantee truth. Unfortunately, our faculties are imperfect (*Essays* 2.22, 244, 251).

concludes that we have justification for believing in first principles. The most crucial step will be arguing that natural evidence rationally entitles one to believe. This will be the key to seeing *how* first principles comes to be justified.

We can start with Reid's contention that all of us, even would-be skeptics, are irresistibly compelled to believe first principles. For example,

My belief is carried along by perception, as irresistibly as my body by the Earth. And the greatest sceptic will find himself to be in the same condition. He may struggle hard to disbelieve the informations of his senses, as a man does to swim against the torrent; but ah! it is in vain. . . . when his strength is spent in the fruitless attempt, he will be carried down the torrent with the common herd of believers. (*Inquiry* 6.20, 169)

Elsewhere he quips, "a man may as soon, by reasoning, pull the moon out of orbit, as destroy the belief of the objects of sense" (*Essays* 2.20, 230). Reid also frequently emphasizes that this compulsion to believe first principles comes not from prejudice or bias but from of our natural constitutions (e.g. *Inquiry* 5.7, 71-2; *Essays* 2.20, 229; *Essays* 6.4, 452).

Nature has subjected us to [natural beliefs] whether we will or not. They are neither got, nor can they be lost by any use or abuse of our faculties. (*Essays* 6.1, 412)

It follows that first principles are supported by natural evidence, since the compulsion to believe such propositions results from the proper functioning of one's natural faculties. Let's call the beliefs formed on the basis of natural evidence "natural beliefs".²⁵ Reid calls them "judgments of Nature" (*Essays* 6.1, 412).

²⁵ We can naturally believe *p* even if we have no *innate* disposition to believe *p*. If we follow our innate dispositions to believe, then along the way we will pick up new dispositions to believe. Beliefs resulting from these naturally acquired dispositions also count as natural beliefs, though we often hold them with less certainty than beliefs formed by innate principles. See Wolterstorff 1983a; 1983b.

From this point, Reid is in a position to run what has come to be called “the argument for trust”.²⁶ The first step is perhaps the most important. Reid thinks that naturally believing p makes it rationally permissible to continue believing p until one encounters reason to doubt. But how can a belief be rational simply by virtue of the fact that one is irresistibly and naturally compelled to believe it? In evaluating Reid’s answer, we must keep two things in mind. First, it is rational to believe p iff you can believe p without violating any intellectual obligations. So to show that natural beliefs are rational, Reid does not need to point to any cogent, non-circular line of reasoning supporting them. As Joseph Houston explains:

The claim is no longer that of most epistemology, that our beliefs are vindicated or justified by an exhibited rational case showing them to be at least probably true; rather it is that when standardly formed by the belief-generating mechanisms of our constitution, they are permitted, and we are entitled to them. (2000, 14)

Second, Reid sees violations of our intellectual obligations as inextricably tied up with the notions of fault, blame, or criticism. If you are blameworthy for believing p , then your belief is irrational, and vice versa. So all Reid must do is show that we are not blameworthy for holding natural beliefs.

Reid does this very thing by appealing to the irresistibility and naturalness of natural beliefs. First, the fact that we cannot resist them provides immunity from criticism.²⁷ In a letter to Lord Kames, Reid writes:

An invincible Error of the Understanding, of Memory, of Judgment or of Reasoning is not imputable for this very Reason that it is invincible. (Reid 2002b, 66)

²⁶ The name “Argument for Trust” comes from DeRose 1989, 326-31. See discussions of this argument in Alston 1985b, 446; Greco 2004, 152-4; Rysiew 2002, 445-6; Vernier 1976, 114; Wolterstorff 1987, 411ff and 2001, 197-212.

²⁷ See Houston 2000, 10-14, and Wolterstorff 2001, 194-7.

Reid seems to be relying on an “ought implies can” principle.²⁸ If believing in first principles is impermissible, then one ought not do so. Since believing cannot be resisted, then it cannot be the case that one ought to refrain. This means that we are rationally entitled to maintain such beliefs.

This cannot be the whole story, however. Reid admits that the beliefs resulting from our natural faculties come in degrees and explicitly acknowledges that natural beliefs can be less than certain (*Essays* 2.20, 229). It’s likely that some of the less certain of these beliefs are resistible, in which case they would not be exonerated by the above line of reasoning. But Reid wants to say that these less-than-certain natural beliefs are also rational to maintain in the absence of defeaters. They too are based on reasonable evidence—albeit a lesser degree of evidence than that enjoyed by our most evident beliefs. A defense of these first principles is still required.

Reid’s second line of reasoning applies to all of our natural beliefs, be they irresistible or not. Reid builds on the fact that our natural beliefs result from our natural constitution and can’t be attributed to us.

This belief, Sir, is none of my manufacture; it came from the mint of nature; it bears her image and superscription; and, if it is not right, the fault is not mine. (*Inquiry* 6.20, 169)

Reid’s point seems to be that if these judgments aren’t our doing, then we cannot be at fault for having them—no more than we can be at fault for having an experience. The comparison with experience is particularly apt since Reid thinks of at least some natural beliefs as components of experience. Perceptions, for instance, partly consist in natural beliefs about the external world. Perhaps you could be blamed for having an experience if

²⁸ Wolterstorff 1983a.

that experience ultimately resulted from your vicious behavior. Consider a guard at Auschwitz who comes to see the imprisoned people as unworthy of human dignity after repeatedly treating them as undignified. But such critiques do not apply to natural beliefs, which result from our natural constitutions. If believing was *our* doing, then things might be different; but it is more proper to say that naturally believing is done *to* us than *by* us.

Reid compares our situation to being swept downstream by the current (*Inquiry* 6.20, 169). The one who trusts her natural beliefs is not swimming downstream; she is simply being carried along. This is an important distinction for Reid. If we were swimming—i.e. if the belief came from us—then we would need to have considerations to rationalize moving in this direction. But if you find yourself being “carried down the torrent” then such considerations cannot be demanded of you. The only thing you can be criticized for is not resisting when there is reason to do so.

In effect, having natural evidence for a belief makes believing the default stance, and you only need arguments to rationalize deviations from the default. In most cases, taking no stance at all is the default. It’s where we begin. And until there is compelling reason to do otherwise, maintaining the default position is perfectly rational. Prior to writing this sentence, I was perfectly rational in never taking any doxastic stance towards the proposition that Fyodor Dostoyevsky published *The Brothers Karamazov* in 1880 (which I now believe). I didn’t need any arguments to justify not taking a stance. Only deviations from the default require arguments to be rational. Natural evidence shifts the default position to belief. Belief is thereby permitted until there is reason to doubt.

Obviously, none of these considerations apply to the one who would exchange her natural belief for disbelief or withhold assent. These skeptics are actively opposing their

beliefs—they “swim against the torrent” (*Inquiry* 6.2, 169). Nor are they following the irresistible compulsion of Nature. For this reason, skeptics must have arguments to rationalize their behavior. The burden is on the skeptic to show that there is reason to doubt, not on the person of common sense to show that there is reason to trust.

All this adds up to the position that natural beliefs are fully rational in the absence of reasons to disbelieve or withhold assent. We can express Reid’s conclusion in the following principle:²⁹

DC_R If S naturally believes p , then, in the absence of defeaters, S is rationally permitted to believe p .

This principle suggests that natural evidence—that on which natural beliefs are based—is reasonable evidence since it rationally entitles one to believe. This leads us to the following:

DC_E If S naturally believes p , then S has good evidence for p .

If natural beliefs are supported by good evidence, then they are justified in the absence of defeaters. Thus, Reid endorses the following form of doxastic conservatism:³⁰

DC_J If S naturally believes p , then, in the absence of defeaters, S has some justification for believing p .

We can add that the level of justification will be correlated with the degree to which one is naturally compelled to believe since “we measure degrees of evidence by the effect they have upon a sound understanding” (*Essays* 7.3, 482).

²⁹ Lycan 1996, McGrath 2007, 17, and Wolterstorff 1983a, 163 and 1983b, attribute some such principle to Reid.

³⁰ DeRose 1989, 327, and Wolterstorff 1983a, 163, and 1983b, among others, interpret Reid as endorsing this sort of principle, though this does not mean they agree with me about the nature of justification for Reid. Gage 2014, 116-8, may also attribute this sort of principle to Reid.

Once Reid has shown that first principles have justification in the absence of defeaters, all that remains is showing that there are no defeaters. Obviously, Reid is happy to admit that the justification for particular natural beliefs might be defeated. What Reid is concerned to deny is that there are *general* skeptical defeaters that threaten the justification of all beliefs arising from faculties other than consciousness and reason. Let me reiterate that you don't need to prove the absence of defeaters prior to receiving justification for natural beliefs: only the absence of defeaters is required, not that you *prove* their absence. But Reid is currently defending the second-order position that we have justification for our natural beliefs. Defending this proposition requires that skeptical worries be addressed.

Reid examines the considerations offered in favor of skepticism and finds them lacking. There are actually two kinds of skepticism: complete skepticism and semi-skepticism. Together with common sense, these positions logically exhaust the approaches one might take towards natural beliefs:

Common Sense Do not resist any of our natural beliefs until one has a reason to doubt their truth.

Complete Skepticism Resist all of our natural beliefs until one has a reason to support their truth.

Semi-Skepticism Do not resist some natural beliefs until one has reason to doubt their truth; resist all other natural beliefs until one has reason to support their truth.

Reid argues that there are no compelling reasons to adopt either form of skepticism; thus, adopting either is irrational.

Let's begin with complete skepticism. The complete skeptic resolves, categorically, to withhold assent from the deliverances of our faculties until it is proven that those faculties are not fallacious (*Essays* 6.5, 480). Reid is insistent that there can't be

a complete skeptic who successfully resists one's natural beliefs for any significant time. But Reid is interested in showing that one *shouldn't* be a complete skeptic, even if no one can be.

For the most part, Reid is content to let the absurdity and ridiculousness of complete skepticism speak for itself. He relays, for instance, the following yarn about the complete skeptic Pyrrho.

Pyrrho the Elean, the father of this philosophy, seems to have carried it to greater perfection than any of his successors; for if we may believe Antigonus the Carystian, quoted by Diogenes Laertius, his life corresponded to his doctrine. And therefore, if a cart run against him, or a dog attacked him, or if he came upon a precipice, he would not stir a foot to avoid the danger, giving no credit to his senses. But his attendants, who, happily for him, were not so great sceptics, took care to keep him out of harm's way; so that he lived till he was ninety years of age. (*Inquiry* 1.5, 20)

At a later point he says of the complete skeptics, "To such a sceptic I have nothing to say" (*Inquiry* 5.7, 71). A position with such consequences is so obviously irrational that Reid doesn't spend a lot of time explaining *why* it is irrational. Still, Reid does give us something of a story.

Reid's critique is that if complete skepticism is adopted, then we will have no justification for believing anything, including complete skepticism or the considerations that supposedly lead us to it. The complete skeptic says that if the content of a natural belief is to be justified, then one must have independent reason to believe that this content is likely to be true. For example, if one naturally believes *p*, then that belief will be justified only if one has justification for believing in the reliability of the faculty that produced this natural belief (call this proposition *q*). But we cannot stop there. Recall Reid's challenge to Descartes, who claimed to prove the reliability of his faculties by reasoning to God: "if our faculties be fallacious; why may they not deceive us in this reasoning as well as in

others?" (*Essays* 6.5, 481) Thus, before q can serve as a "proper voucher" for our belief in p (*ibid*), we need a proper voucher for the faculties at work in producing our belief in q . Clearly this same process will continue indefinitely; justification being always anticipated, never conferred.

What's particularly important is that this includes whatever beliefs were supposed to support complete skepticism. Hence, Reid remarks,

To pretend to prove by reasoning that there is no force in reason, does indeed look like a philosophical delirium. It is like a man's pretending to see clearly, that he himself and all other men are blind. (*Essays* 7.4, 563)

He must either be a fool, or want to make a fool of me, that would reason me out of my reason and senses.

I confess I know not what a sceptic can answer to this, nor by what good argument he can plead even for a hearing; for either his reasoning is sophistry, and so deserves contempt; or there is no truth in the human faculties, and then why should we reason? (*Inquiry* 1.8, 24)

Reid's point seems to be this. For complete skepticism to be rational, one must have reasons to adopt it. But if complete skepticism is correct, then one can't have reasons for *anything* and, thus, no reasons to accept complete skepticism. In short, complete skepticism is self-defeating. In offering reasons for complete skepticism, you simultaneously defeat those reasons. The result is that a complete skeptic resists her natural beliefs for no good reason. The complete skeptic is therefore irrational.

This doesn't mean, of course, that a thoroughgoing complete skeptic can be argued out of their complete skepticism. So long as the complete skeptic sustains his irrational demands, Reid acknowledges that "it would be impossible by argument to beat him out of this strong hold, and he must even be left to enjoy his scepticism" (*Essays* 6.5, 480). But Reid's task is to provide good reasons for the irrationality of complete skepticism, not reasons *that the complete skeptic would accept*. The inability to convince the complete

skeptic that his position is irrational is a symptom of the complete skeptic's irrationality, not a deficiency in Reid's arguments.

What of the semi-skeptic? The semi-skeptic picks and chooses which natural beliefs to accept and which to resist prior to confirming their reliability. Reid is specifically addressing those semi-skeptics that discriminate against natural beliefs based on the faculty from which they originate. Hume, for instance, privileged natural beliefs of reason and introspection over those of perception. The semi-skeptic is vulnerable to different criticisms than the complete skeptic. Like the complete skeptic, the semi-skeptic ultimately fails to have good reasons to adopt semi-skepticism, but the semi-skeptic at least has the potential of providing such reasons since they accept some natural beliefs prior to securing a proper voucher. Reid's criticism is just that there are no good reasons for systematically resisting a particular type of natural belief while trusting others. So the semi-skeptic is ultimately being arbitrary and, therefore, irrational.

Reid's argument is that any considerations that justify acceptance of a particular kind of natural belief are equally applicable to all; any considerations that justify resistance of a particular kind of natural belief are equally applicable to all. For example, the semi-skeptic might try to justify semi-skepticism by appealing to the fallibility of perception.

Here Reid replies,

There is no more reason to account our senses fallacious, than our reason, our memory, or any other faculty of judging that Nature hath given us. They are all limited and imperfect. ... [Jumping back a few lines] But as this imperfection is common to them all, it gives no just ground for accounting any of them fallacious. (*Essays* 2.22, 251-2)

Or consider the suggestion that our perceptual faculties might be inherently deceptive.

Reid cleverly retorts,

Why, Sir, should I believe the faculty of reason more than that of perception; they came both out of the same shop, and were made by the same artist; and if he put one piece of false ware into my hands, what should hinder him from putting another? (*Inquiry* 6.20, 169)

A discrepancy in treatment cannot be justified by these considerations since they apply equally to all types of natural beliefs. Reid's claim is that this will be true for any relevant considerations one might offer.³¹

Furthermore, anything that counts in favor of one kind of natural belief could be claimed for the other kinds as well. Why, for instance, does Hume accept the deliverances of introspection? Reid speculates:

[O]f the semi-sceptics, I should beg to know, why they believe the existence of their impressions and ideas. The true reason I take to be, because they cannot help it; and the same reason will lead them to believe many other things. (*Inquiry* 5.7, 71)

We are irresistibly compelled to believe in the existence of external objects, just as we are irresistibly compelled to believe in the existence of certain impressions or ideas. If the irresistibility of a belief makes rational its acceptance, then this applies equally to both kinds.

In the end, Reid thinks that the semi-skeptic must be demanding more of some first principles than others. The semi-skeptic accepts the deliverances of introspection on the basis of natural evidence but refuses to accept the deliverances of perception on the same basis. The semi-skeptic is arbitrarily favoring certain kinds of natural beliefs and is therefore irrational.

The irrationality of both complete and semi-skepticism yields an additional argument in favor of common sense. If we assume that *some* position must be rational—

³¹ There will be particular situations where one has reason to doubt a first principle—say, when you are knowingly shown an illusion. Reid's claim is just that there are not good reasons for systematically doubting the output of certain faculties like perception.

as all-sides in the debate seem willing to grant—then Reid has shown the permissibility of trusting our natural beliefs by showing the impermissibility of doing otherwise. When we encounter natural beliefs, what are we supposed to do? We can't categorically mistrust them or arbitrarily favor some over others. Our only remaining option is to trust them all until there is reason to doubt. Interestingly enough, this not only shows that trusting our natural beliefs is permissible; it shows it to be *obligatory*. As our only permissible option, it is what we *must* do.

At this point, Reid has argued for DC₁ and shown that there are no general defeaters. He is therefore entitled to conclude that we have justification for believing first principles. We can summarize our overall findings using the following passage from William Alston:

I am subject to reproach for believing that p, provided that I am to blame for being in that doxastic condition, in the sense that there are things I could and should have done, such that if I had done them I would not now be believing that p. If that is the case I am [irrational] in that belief. (1985a, 66)

Is there anything we could or should have done to avoid some natural belief? Not at all. There's nothing we *did* to bring about this belief since our natural beliefs result from our natural constitution. There's nothing we *could have done* to avoid believing since our natural beliefs are irresistible. There's nothing we *should have done* to avoid believing since there are no general defeaters for natural beliefs. Thus, holding on to natural beliefs is perfectly rational even if we don't have any non-circular arguments for trusting them. It follows that natural evidence is reasonable evidence. Since first principles are supported by natural evidence, we thereby have justification for believing them.

§7 Conclusion

Having explored the origins of common sense epistemology in Reid's system, we are now in a position to defend it. The first step is to shore up its foundations. I give my account of seemings and defend their existence in Chapter Four. My Reidian argument for common sense epistemology comes in Chapter Five, and I address an objection in Chapter Six.

CHAPTER FOUR

Seemings

§1 Introduction

The plausibility of common sense epistemology hinges on our understanding of seemings. In Chapter Two, §5, I introduced my position that seemings are experiences with propositional content and an assertive phenomenal character. Seemings, so characterized, are *sui generis* propositional attitudes, irreducible to other mental states like beliefs or inclinations to believe.¹ The fact that seemings are *sui generis* comes with some disadvantages. First, by admitting new sorts of mental states we complicate our ontology. Second, the fact that seemings are *sui generis* places some limitations on the sort of characterization one can give, and this can make seemings seem mysterious and obscure.² In short, one is left asking, “what exactly are [seemings], and what reason is there to believe in them?” (Lyons 2013, 23). This chapter will address both these concerns. In §2-§3, I present good reasons from both ordinary language and introspection to think that seemings—understood as assertive mental states with propositional content—exist. In §3-§6, I more thoroughly explain their nature. In particular, I develop a structural analogy between seemings and emotions. The cumulative result is one of the more detailed accounts of seemings to date.

¹ Bealer 2000, Bergmann 2013a, 2013b, Cullison 2010, 2013, Huemer 2001, 2007, 2013b, Pryor 2000, and Skene 2013 have all endorsed this view. Byerly 2012, 774-5, makes an interesting case that propositional attitudes aren't experiences. If his argument works, I am prepared to deny that seemings are propositional attitudes. My main claim is just that seemings are *sui generis*.

² See, e.g., Cullison 2010, 273, Lyons 2009, 69-70, and Tooley 2013, 310-11.

§2 *The Ordinary Conception of Seemings*

We begin by examining the way we ordinarily think and talk about seemings. I'll be assuming that there is a primary understanding of seemings that underlies most of our straightforward seemings talk. The word 'seems' can be used in a variety of ways, of course, and not all of these usages reflect the primary understanding.³ The existence of these secondary uses is no problem so long as we are able to tell, at least most of the time, when we are using the primary understanding. When I talk about our "ordinary understanding of seemings" I'm referring to this primary understanding.

I will argue that our ordinary understanding of seemings is that they are assertive mental states with propositional content. The ordinary person does not think of seemings in these terms, of course. I suspect the ordinary person never speculates about the nature of seemings at all. What I mean is that the way people ordinarily talk and think about seemings best fits with the view that seemings are assertive mental states.

There have been numerous debates about the ordinary understanding of seemings. I cannot rehash them all here. I will limit myself to sketching the most important points, each of which deserves more detail than I can give it, while adding my own insights.

Chris Tucker (2013, 3-7) divides the various conceptions of seemings into four main camps. On the *Belief View*, a seeming that p is a belief that p .⁴ On the *Inclination*

³ Chisholm 1957, for instance, famously highlighted some of "seems" many uses.

⁴ Tucker cites early Lycan 1988 and Swinburne 2001 as proponents of the Belief View. It is also worth including in this camp those who think of intuitions as beliefs since intuitions are often taken to be one kind of seeming. These include Devitt 2006, Goldman and Pust 1998, Gopnik and Schwitzgebel 1998, Kornblith 1998, Lewis 1983, and Ludwig 2007 among others. Chudnoff notes that conceiving of intuitions as beliefs (or inclinations to believe) is especially prominent among those who focus on the experimental data concerning intuitions. See, for example, some of the essays in French and Wettstein 2007 and Knobe and Nichols 2008.

View, a seeming that p is a conscious inclination to believe p .⁵ On the *Experience View*, a seeming that p is an experience of some sort with p as its content.⁶ A fourth view has come onto the scene relatively recently due to Conee (2013) and Tooley (2013).⁷ This view says that a seeming that p is a belief or inclination to believe that one has evidence for p or a mental state displaying the truth of p . Tucker calls this the *Taking-Evidence View*.

I defend the Experience View. In what follows I will offer criticisms of each of the alternatives, showing how each of them conflict with the ways we ordinarily think about seemings. The Experience View, in contrast, appears to have no such difficulties.

2.1. *The Belief View*

Let's start with the Belief View. The standard objection to this view is that there are cases in which it seems to S that p but S does not believe p .⁸ The standard example is the Müller-Lyer illusion. When looking at the illusion, one line seems longer than the other. This appearance persists (or may persist) even when one ceases to believe that one line is longer than the other.⁹ Other examples are not hard to find. The Naïve

⁵ Tucker points to Rogers and Matheson 2011, Sosa 1998, 2007, and once again Swinburne 2001 as proponents of this view. Taylor 2015 defends this view though may not endorse it. We should also include those, like Earlenbaugh and Molyneux 2009 and (perhaps) Williamson 2004, 2007 who think that intuitions are inclinations to believe.

⁶ Tucker tags Bealer 2000, Chudnoff 2011, Cullison 2010, Huemer 2001, 2007, Lycan 2013, Pryor 2000, Skene 2013, and Tucker 2010 as proponents of this view. I would add Bedke 2008, Bengson 2010, Bergmann 2013a, 2013b, Koksvik 2011, Markie 2013, McGrath 2013, and Pust 2000.

⁷ The view in Conee 2013 seems to be present all the way back in Conee 2004, but it was not discussed until recently.

⁸ Among those who raise this objection are Bealer 1998, Bergmann 2013, Cullison 2010, Chudnoff 2011, Huemer 2001, 2007, Koksvik 2011, and Tucker 2013.

⁹ Gage 2014, 30, suggests that what still seems true is only that one line *appears* longer, not that one line *is* longer. This may be true of some, but to others it remains true that one line seems longer than the other. At the very least, it certainly seems *possible* that there be intuitions for something we know to be false, in which case it would likely seem that p whilst not believing that p .

Comprehension axiom may seem true to someone despite the fact that they do not believe it. This is a commonly reported phenomenon. Indeed, it is entirely felicitous to report this phenomenon. The following sounds completely natural.

Thomas: It certainly *seems* like the lines are the same length but I don't in any way believe it.

If it can seem that p when one doesn't believe that p , then the seeming that p cannot be the same as the belief that p .

Lyons claims that this argument is “woefully inadequate.”¹⁰ The example, he insists, does not show that “there is a seeming state distinct from the belief state, *even in cases where I do believe things to be the way they seem*” (2013, 24; emphasis mine). Lyon's idea is that there might be one token representation that is either a belief or a mere seeming depending on its functional role. In the example above, let's call the token representation that one line is longer than the other “R”. When the subject first sees the illusion at t_1 , R is both a seeming and a belief—that is, this same token representation plays the functional role of both a seeming and a belief. When the subject becomes aware of the illusion at t_2 , R ceases to perform the functional role of a belief and thereby becomes a mere seeming or, in Lyon's terminology, a mere “precept”. Lyons takes this to show that, possibly, “the belief and percept may be numerically identical in cases where the percept and belief agree; I grant that they are distinct otherwise” (2009, chapter 3, footnote 40).

Lyon's reasoning is problematic. There are three things at t_1 : the representation R, the seeming state, and the belief state. None of these can be *numerically identical* at t_1 , unless we are willing to reject Leibniz's Law—specifically the Indiscernability of

¹⁰ Lyons 2013, 23. Lyons' argument is discussed in Lyons 2005, 2009a, 2009b, 2013.

Identicals—since they each have different persistence conditions (among other things). Similarly vexing is Lyon’s insistence that a seeming and belief can be numerically identical at t_1 but not at t_2 . Perhaps Lyons is using a non-standard account of numerical identity, but this is never mentioned. Overall, it seems more plausible to say that a belief state and a seeming state can be (partially) *constituted* by the numerically same token representation R, but none of these things is numerically identical to any of the others. The upshot is that, given Leibniz’s Law, the above example does indeed show that seemings and beliefs are non-identical, even in cases where the seeming and belief agree.

It is difficult to see what else a proponent of the Belief View could say in response. One might try to argue that in these cases the subject *does* believe, e.g., that one line is longer than the other; they just believe this *and* that one line is not longer than the other. In other words, they hold at the same time obviously inconsistent beliefs. This move doesn’t help the proponent of the Belief View. It commits them to the untenable conclusion that anyone who looks at the Müller-Lyer illusion and knows that it is an illusion is being irrational.¹¹ Nor is the problem mitigated if one argues that the subject only partially believes (with some low degree of belief) that one line is longer than the other. A subject is not irrational to any degree for believing that the lines are the same length while it seems otherwise.

Regardless, this entire line of defense is built on an implausible assumption. Subjects report straightforwardly that they do not believe the two lines to be the same length. It is unlikely that these subjects are mistaken about their own beliefs (or lack of beliefs). So there is little promise in this sort of defense.

¹¹ See Koksvik 2011, 44ff, for more discussion on these matters.

Let's look at another example to drive to point home. Say Magdalene is in class and her professor asks her to carefully consider whether a proposition is true. It's possible that the proposition immediately seems true to Magdalene but, in an attempt to be a rigorous and conscientious thinker, she takes no stance towards the proposition until she has carefully considered all of the evidence. This sort of situation happens quite frequently, in fact. The possibility of these sorts of cases is supported by the felicity of the following statement: "What you're saying seems right but I'm not ready to believe it quite yet." While less exciting than the illusion examples, this example has the advantage of being a common, everyday situation. If a theory fails in extreme cases, it's bad; but if a theory fails in mundane cases, it's *really* bad.

I should quickly note that the Experience View has no trouble handling these cases. There's nothing impossible or even odd about having a particular kind of experience with p as its content while not believing p .

Here's another problem for the Belief View. Believing p comes with certain norms that do not come with its seeming to one that p . If Peter believes p , then he can be criticized if he lacks sufficient evidence for p or if he fails to properly base his belief on that evidence. Beliefs are subject to rational criticism; they are justified or unjustified. Seemings, on the other hand, are not.¹² It is nonsensical to demand that one have sufficient evidence for p before it seems to one that p . Seemings aren't even the sort of thing one can *have* evidence for.¹³ For this reason, seemings cannot be beliefs.

¹² Huemer 2001, 97-8, discusses this point. C.f. McGrath 2013 on quasi-inferential seemings. See Huemer 2013a for more differences between beliefs and seemings.

¹³ See McCain 2012, 48.

All of this makes sense, of course, if seemings are experiences. Experiences are not the sort of thing that can be justified or unjustified. Of course, a *person* can be unjustified for putting herself into a position to have certain experiences. Suppose someone lets one's fear and insecurity decay into prejudice and bigotry and, because of these biases, he has an experience with the content that a certain people group is unworthy of respect. The man is blameworthy for allowing himself to become the sort of person who has experiences of that sort, but the experience itself is not unjustified. Nor can one have evidence for an experience. You can have evidence for the content of an experience or for the reliability of that experience, but the experience itself is not something that can be supported by reasons.

A third problem with the Belief View is that its seeming to us that *p* plays an important role in our coming to believe that *p*.¹⁴ A seeming that *p* paradigmatically motivates belief in *p*. This is why, when asked to explain why we believe something, we often respond by saying that it seems that way. We also make statements like the following:

“I believe *p* because it seems that way.”
“When it seems that *p* it usually causes me to believe *p*.”
“Believing *p* results from its seeming to me that *p*.”
“My belief in *p* is based on its seeming that way.”

The Experience View has no difficulties here. If seemings are experiences of the right sort—say, with propositional content and a distinctive phenomenal character that inclines us to believe that content—then it makes perfect sense that they would cause or explain our beliefs. The Belief View, on the other hand, seem unable to accommodate this data. A seeming obviously cannot cause or explain our belief if it *is* that very belief. (I'll critique

¹⁴ This argument is usually given argument identifying seemings with inclinations to believe, but it applies *mutatis mutandis* to beliefs. See §2.2.

a possible response to this argument in §2.2 when the same line of reasoning is leveled against the Inclination View.)

The cumulative weight of these problems is too much for the Belief View to bear. It fails to line up with our ordinary way of thinking and talking about seemings.

2.2. *The Inclination View*

The inclination view says that seemings are not beliefs but conscious inclinations to believe. There is some difficulty in saying precisely what these conscious inclinations are. Samuel Taylor suggests we think of inclinations to believe as dispositions.¹⁵ Taylor explains:

A sugar cube has the disposition to dissolve when placed in water. This is true because there is a categorical state of the sugar cube—weak molecular bonds—that causes the cube to dissolve when placed in water *provided no stronger countervailing causal factors are present*. Similarly, it's true that S has an inclination to believe *P* when there is a categorical state X [of S] that has the power to produce in S a belief that *P provided no stronger countervailing causal factors are present*.” (2015, 4)

Presumably this “categorical state X” will consist in being cognitively wired to form a belief that *p* in certain conditions. According to Taylor, being so disposed is sufficient for being inclined to believe *p*. *Conscious* inclinations, however, are complex mental states involving both the underlying disposition and the feeling that one is so disposed.

Taylor’s analysis cannot be right. On Taylor’s account, I have an inclination to believe just about any proposition. I’m disposed to believe that it’s raining, for instance, since I am cognitively wired to form the belief that it’s raining when I find myself outside in a Texas thunderstorm. Taylor seems aware of this fact, but he fails to appreciate that I

¹⁵ Taylor 2015, 4.

can become consciously aware of these dispositions with minimal effort. I just imagine myself in a thunderstorm and it quickly becomes apparent that I would form the belief that it's raining in those conditions. In Taylor's words, I have "a veridical feeling as of being inclined to form a belief" (2015, 5). This means I can easily make it seem that it's raining even whilst I gaze at the cloudless Texas sky. In similar fashion, I could make just about any proposition seem true simply by reflecting on the fact that I would form a belief in that proposition were an evil demon to feed me the right sorts of experiences.

Instead, I suggest we think of a conscious inclination to believe p as the feeling of being pushed or compelled to believe p . Ernest Sosa, a proponent of the Inclination View, characterizes inclinations, and thus seemings, in this way:

What *are* these seemings? It is helpful to compare deliberation on a choice or the pondering of a question, where we "weigh" reasons pro or con. Switching metaphors, we feel the "pull" of conflicting considerations. No matter the metaphor, the phenomenon itself is familiar to us all. There is something it is *like* to feel the pull of contrary attractions as we deliberate or ponder. Such intellectual seemings, such pulls, are distinct from sensory experiences. (2007, 47-8)

I'll understand conscious inclinations as felt attractions to believe for the purposes of this discussion.

Many of the problems facing the Inclination View are the same as, or similar to, those confronting the Belief View. As before, the first objection to the inclination view is that it can seem to one that p without one being inclined to believe p . Let us return to the Müller-Lyer illusion. To someone who is familiar with the illusion, it may seem that one line is longer while lacking any inclination to believe this—i.e. without feeling pushed or compelled to believe it. Taylor suggests that it is infelicitous to state, "It seems (or appears)

to me that *P* is true but I don't feel *at all* compelled to actually believe *P*,"¹⁶ but Taylor's claim is simply not true. That statement is perfectly felicitous. Consider also the statement, "One line seems longer than the other but, since I know better, I'm not at all inclined to believe it."

Earlenbaugh and Molyneux (2009, 106ff) offer what I consider to be the strongest response to this objection.¹⁷ Their first move is to distinguish between *competing* inclinations and *net* inclinations.¹⁸ As Chudnoff (2011, 633) points out, this distinction is analogous to the distinction between component and resultant vectors. One may have multiple inclinations that counter or supplement one another resulting in a net inclination that is stronger or weaker than any particular inclination. In the case of competing inclinations, two inclinations oppose one another (i.e. incline in opposite directions), negating to some degree the effects of the other. The example Earlenbaugh and Molyneux (E&M) give is of having "a competitive inclination to eat the cake and a simultaneous competitive inclination to stay on one's diet" (2009, 106). E&M argue that when looking at the Müller-Lyer illusion one has a *competing* inclination to believe that one line is longer but no *net* inclination to believe this. What people report, then, is that they have not *net* inclination to believe that one line is longer than the other, and this is compatible with the Inclination View.

This explanation is unacceptable. When I say, "I have no inclination to believe that one line is longer than the other," I am saying that I have no inclination *whatsoever* to

¹⁶ Taylor 2015, 10.

¹⁷ I would classify Earlenbaugh and Molyneux as proponents of the Inclination View, though they only claim that *intuitions* (rather than seemings more generally) are inclinations to believe.

¹⁸ See also Sosa 2007, 49-50, on *prima facie* vs. resultant attractions.

believe that one line is longer than the other. I have neither a competing inclination nor a net inclination to believe it. I think this is what many others are intending to report as well.¹⁹ Regardless, as long as there is one case where something seems true without the subject having any inclination to believe it, the Inclination View is false.

E&M need to change their strategy. Perhaps they should maintain that those who report having no competing inclination to believe what seems true are simply *mistaken*. When one of these people introspects, one sees that one has no net inclination to believe and mistakenly concludes that one has no competing inclination to believe.

To help us analyze this new response, let us label two scenarios as follows (p is the proposition that one line is longer than the other):

No Inclination S has no competing inclination to believe p and, hence, no net inclination to believe p .

Countered Inclination S has a competing inclination to believe p and a greater or equal competing inclination to resist believing p (or to believe $\sim p$) and, hence, no net inclination to believe p .

With respect to the Müller-Lyer illusion, many people report that p seems true and that *No Inclination* obtains. This is impossible if seemings are inclinations to believe. The explanation I'm proposing for E&M (which I will call "E&M's" explanation for convenience) is that these people mistake *No Inclination* for *Countered Inclination*.

For E&M's explanation to work, it must be the case that the phenomenology of *No Inclination* and *Countered Inclination* are the same or at least similar enough that one can

¹⁹ Chudnoff 2011 is explicit about this.

easily mistake being in *Countered Inclination* for being in *No Inclination*. Otherwise it is implausible that those who introspect are mistaking one for the other.²⁰

The problem (for E&M) is that the phenomenology of these two scenarios is very different. Let's take E&M's own example; that of having a competing inclination to eat cake and a competing inclination to stay on one's diet. Let's say that one's competing inclination to maintain one's diet is slightly stronger than one's inclination to eat the cake, resulting in a small net inclination not to eat the cake. If you have been in this situation (or one similar), recall how it felt. In my own experience, I was *well* aware of my competing inclination to eat the cake, to say the least. It felt like a war was raging between my various inclinations—each one tugging me in opposite directions. One inclination didn't mute the other; I just had both inclinations at full strength. Compare this to the situation in which you see some cake and you have no inclination to eat it and a slight inclination not to do so. There is no war raging in this case. I don't feel pulled in opposite directions. One scenario feels completely different from the other. Furthermore, if one is strongly inclined to eat the cake but barely manages to resist thanks to a stronger inclination to stay on one's diet, then this is often a difficult, draining event. In contrast, there is no distress in having no inclination to eat the cake and a slight inclination to not eat it. The upshot is that *No Inclination* and *Competing Inclination* feel completely different from one another.

This renders E&M's response untenable. It is implausible to think that people are frequently mistaking *No Inclination* for *Competing Inclination*. Thus, we should take people's reports at face value and, accordingly, as strong evidence against the Inclination View.

²⁰ Chudnoff 2011, 632-4, also stresses that Earlenbaugh and Molyneux need an error theory for their response to be plausible.

A second popular argument against the Inclination View arises out of reflection on the functional role of seemings.²¹ As we saw with beliefs, when asked *why* we are inclined to believe something it is common to cite the fact that it seems true. It is natural to say, for instance, “I am inclined to believe *p* because it seems that *p*.” In these cases we appear to offer our seemings as explanations for why we are inclined to believe. On reflection, we find that seemings are standardly thought of as the causes of our inclinations—as those things that *incline* us to believe. But if a seeming that *p* *explains* one’s inclination to believe *p*, then that seeming cannot itself *be* one’s inclination to believe *p*. The upshot is that the Inclination View is at odds with our ordinary understanding of seemings and their functional role in bringing about inclinations to believe.

Taylor provides one of the most promising responses to this charge.²² He suggests that when we say, “I am inclined to believe *p* because it seems that *p*,” we have slipped into using what Chisholm called the comparative use of “seems”.²³ What we are reporting is that our current sensations are of the sort that is typically present when *p* and that it is these sensations which incline us to believe. To use Taylor’s example, we come to associate certain sensations with there being a white cat on a couch. In this way it *comparatively* seems that there is a white cat on a couch. When these sensations incline us to believe, we are prone to state, “I am inclined to believe that there is a white cat on a couch because it (comparatively) seems that there is.” Thus, Taylor finds that such statements do not threaten the view that seemings are inclinations to believe.

²¹ The same argument, presented differently, is employed in Huemer 2007 and Cullison 2010.

²² Taylor 2015. Notice that Taylor’s response applies *mutatis mutandis* to the functional argument against the Belief View. The same is true of my response to Taylor.

²³ Taylor 2015, 17-20. See Chisholm 1957 on the comparative use of “seems”.

The main problem with Taylor's strategy is that it doesn't cover all the cases. In particular, it fails to account for intellectual seemings or certain memorial seemings (those associated with semantic memory) that do not have any accompanying sensations. For instance, say you find yourself inclined to believe that everything is identical to itself. When asked about the origin of this inclination, you report, "I'm inclined to believe that everything is identical to itself because it seems that this is true." Taylor cannot say that you're using "seems" comparatively since there are no sensations associated with everything's being identical to itself; much less can he appeal to these missing sensations as the cause of your inclination to believe. Thus, Taylor's explanation fails to square the Inclination View with the all the data.

In contrast, this functional role of seemings is easily accounted for on the Experience View. Some kinds of experiences incline us to believe their content. Seemings are experiences of this kind.

A third argument against the inclination view is that seemings are representational—they have accuracy conditions.²⁴ The seeming that my dog is sleeping can be accurate or inaccurate. Mere inclinations, however, are not accurate or inaccurate. At most, they can incline you to form some *other* mental state that's accurate or inaccurate. Nor are inclinations derivatively accurate or inaccurate by virtue of inclining us to form mental states with accurate or inaccurate content. An inclination towards something inaccurate is *misleading*, not inaccurate. The problem seems to be that inclinations don't have propositional content. Inclinations incline us towards mental states with propositional content, but this content is not a component of the inclination itself. In contrast, on the

²⁴ Even proponents of the inclination view admit this (see Taylor 2015, 2).

Experience View seemings might very well have propositional content and, thereby, accuracy conditions. Thus, insofar as we think that seemings can be accurate or inaccurate, we have reason to endorse the Experience View over the Inclination View.

I'll offer one final line of reasoning that displays the superiority of the Experience View over the Inclination View. A number of philosophers note that not all inclinations to believe are seemings.²⁵ For instance, I may desire p and so be inclined to believe p , but this inclination cannot plausibly be considered a seeming. Say I am an avid Chiefs fan and so desire to see the Chiefs win that I am inclined to believe the Chiefs will win the Super Bowl. It does not thereby *seem true* to me that the Chiefs will win the Super Bowl. It may even seem that the Chiefs will *not* win the Super Bowl, though I am still inclined to believe it by my desire to see it happen. The same reasoning will disqualify inclinations to believe caused by hopes, wishful thinking, or one's emotions or appetites more generally.

In light of this, proponents of the Inclination View need to limit seemings to some particular kind of inclination to believe. The natural amendment, considered by Cullison (2010, 266-9), is to restrict seemings to *truth-directed* inclinations to believe. Inclinations caused by desires are not aimed at the truth of the proposition but at the *desirability* of the proposition. Similarly, inclinations caused by positive emotions are not aimed at the truth of the proposition but at the *goodness* of the proposition. It is because that proposition *feels good* that we are inclined to believe it. Something similar can be said more generally about inclinations caused by any particular emotion or appetite. Thus, by limiting seemings to truth-directed inclinations to believe we can weed out those inclinations caused by emotions or appetites or the like.

²⁵ See Bergmann 2013, 156, Cullison 2010, 264-5, Huemer 2007, 31, and Tolhurst 1998, 297-98.

Obviously if one is to make this amendment one must be able to spell out what it is for an inclination to be truth-directed or aimed at truth. Cullison considers the following proper functionalist analysis.²⁶

It seems to S that P if, and only if,
(i) S feels an inclination to believe P, and
(ii) that inclination was caused by cognitive faculties designed to secure true beliefs.

This analysis, however, is untenable for multiple reasons. First, Cullison points out that in a brain-in-a-vat scenario, one's faculties may not be designed to secure true beliefs. According to this analysis, then, nothing could seem true to the brain in a vat. But, of course, things *would* seem true to the brain in a vat. The reason this is a common skeptical scenario is that, were you a brain in a vat, things could seem precisely the same to you as they do now. Second, say there is a benevolent demon watching over you. This demon implants a faculty in you that inclines you to believe *p* whenever you desire *p*, and then ensures that whatever you desire comes about. This faculty is designed to secure true beliefs in the sense that it is highly reliable and was intended to produce true beliefs by its designer.²⁷ But as we saw before, inclinations to believe produced by desires are not seemings. Thus, this analysis will not do.

Thankfully there is a more natural way to characterize truth-directed inclinations to believe. I said earlier that inclinations to believe caused by positive emotions are aimed at the *goodness* of the object rather than its truth. Perhaps, then, we should be looking at the

²⁶ Cullison 2010, 267.

²⁷ There may be other senses in which these faculties are not designed to secure true beliefs. If so, they are not obvious and require explanation. The result would be that we would not really have explained what it is for an inclination to be truth-directed. We just would have shifted the discussion to faculties designed to secure true belief. Without an answer to this new question, we've only moved the wrinkle, not removed it.

causes of our inclinations.²⁸ We can then characterize truth directed inclinations as those inclinations that have the right sort of cause.

At first, you might be tempted to characterize truth-directed inclinations as those that are caused by the *truth* of the proposition one is inclined to believe, but there can be truth-directed inclinations to believe things that are false—e.g. when one is inclined to believe by misleading evidence. You might try to characterize truth-directed inclinations as those that are caused by the *truthmaker* of the proposition one is inclined to believe, but this fails for the same reason as the first proposal. There can be truth-directed inclinations to believe false propositions, though these obviously lack truthmakers. Furthermore, it may be that some true propositions lack truthmakers (e.g. that there are no white ravens), and one can have truth-directed inclinations to believe these. The best characterization of truth-directed inclinations is that they are those caused by the *apparent truth* of the proposition one is inclined to believe.²⁹ That is, if an inclination is caused by a mental state in which the proposition is presented as true or feels true to the subject, then that inclination is aimed at truth.

Taking this position, however, requires one to posit the existence of assertive mental states with propositional content. Once you admit that there are assertive mental states, it becomes clear that *they* are the better candidates for seemings than the inclinations they cause. For example, all of the problems mentioned previously go away if one understands seemings as the experiences that cause truth-directed inclinations rather than

²⁸ Perhaps our mental states do not *cause* our inclinations but stand in some other explanatory relation to them: e.g. in the way that reasons are sometimes thought to non-causally explain choices. I'll talk about the "causes" of our inclinations rather than their "psychological explanations" for convenience.

²⁹ Or, perhaps, the apparent truth of propositions that apparently support the proposition one is inclined to believe.

the truth-directed inclinations themselves. Furthermore, one of the primary motivations for the Inclination View is to avoid positing (supposedly) mysterious experiences like assertive mental states. But if the Inclination View is forced to posit these kinds of experiences as well, then there is little reason left to endorse the view. Nevertheless, the ultimate point of this section is to show that we have assertive mental states with propositional content. This goal is accomplished so long as we are forced to admit the existence of such mental states. It matters little if one refuses to call them “seemings”.

2.3. *The Taking-Evidence View*

The last view we’ll discuss, the Taking-Evidence view, has come onto the scene relatively recently thanks to Conee (2013) and Tooley (2013).³⁰ The view comes in at least four varieties.

Option 1: Belief/Mental State

It seems to S that p iff S believes that S has a mental state displaying the truth of p .

Option 2: Inclination/Mental State

It seems to S that p iff S is inclined to believe that S has a mental state displaying the truth of p .

Option 3: Belief/Evidence

It seems to S that p iff S believes that S has evidence for p .

Option 4: Inclination/Evidence

It seems to S that p iff S is inclined to believe that S has evidence for p .

I am happy to leave the matter undecided as to whether we should prefer a belief or an inclination formulation. I will talk about S “taking herself” to have evidence for p or a mental state displaying the truth of p , but this is for the sake of convenience and not intended to privilege a belief formulation over an inclination formulation. I will, however,

³⁰ Though the view is hinted at in Conee’s earlier work. See Conee and Feldman 2004, 15.

have something to say in just a moment about whether a mental state formulation or an evidence formulation is to be preferred.

First, I want to clarify that Conee does not actually endorse the Taking-Evidence view; he at most suggests it as a possibility. Allow me to explain, as some of this will become very important later on.

Conee (2013) is focused on the conditions under which it is correct for S to report, “it seems to S that *p*.” He writes,

The topic of interpretation here is some correct uses of the terms *seems* and *appears* and their variants. This “correct” means nothing technical. It means that the terms are employed with semantic and conversational propriety to communicate something. The interpretation offers a description of the conditions that occasion this proper use. No more specific interpretive claim is intended. (2013, 53)

Conee eventually concludes that it is appropriate for S to report, “it seems to S that *p*,” when S takes oneself to have evidence for *p* or to have a mental state displaying the truth of *p*. At one point he suggests that seemings may actually *be* these beliefs (or inclinations to believe) but takes no stance on the issue himself.

No ontology is proposed for correct seeming truth attributions. The interpretation is neutral about whether a correct attribution is made true by a state of affairs of a proposition’s seeming true to a person. Some such state of affairs may be constituted by the occasioning mental event and the inclination that make correct some central uses of the “seemings true” terminology. Again, the aim here is epistemic assessment. This does not require determining the ontology. (2013, 54)

So, at most, Conee hints at the Taking-Evidence View. Regardless, the Taking-Evidence View is being treated as a major theory about the nature of seemings and so deserves our attention here.

Before I criticize this view we need to focus our discussion on a particular formulation. My strategy will be to criticize the most plausible formulation of the view. This, I think, is one of mental state formulations (options 1 or 2) as there are clear

counterexamples to the evidence formulations (options 3 or 4). Specifically, there are many cases in which one has evidence for p and takes oneself to have evidence for p , but has no seeming that p . Consider the case of the counterintuitive conclusion. For instance, if you fill a balloon with helium, suspend it in the middle of a non-moving vehicle, and then step on the gas, the balloon will move towards the front of the vehicle. This is extremely counterintuitive to many people. It doesn't seem like the balloon will move forward; in fact, it seems like it will *not* move forward. I could give these people evidence that the balloon will move forward by explaining why, according to unassailable physical theory, the balloon will move forward. They would thereby have strong evidence that the balloon will move forward and they would take themselves to have evidence for this conclusion. Nonetheless, it still won't *seem* to them that the balloon will move forward. Let's say I even perform an experiment and allow them to see the balloon move forward. If I reset the experiment and ask them whether it seems like the balloon will move forward when I repeat the experiment, many people will report that it *still* doesn't seem like the balloon will move forward. They *believe* that it will but, when they envision it, it just doesn't seem like it will. This is the case of the counterintuitive conclusion. There are many such cases. The point is that taking oneself to have evidence for p isn't enough for p to seem true.

The mental state formulations fare better. The case of the counterintuitive conclusion works against the evidence formulations precisely because you take yourself have evidence in those cases but don't take yourself to have a mental state displaying the truth of p . It is thus inert against a mental state formulation.

Some may argue that the mental state formulations have their own problems. For instance, Conee (2013, 56) describes a scenario in which he takes himself to have evidence that you are depressed but doesn't take himself to have a mental state displaying that you are depressed. In this case Conee thinks it is appropriate for him to assert, "it seems to me that you are depressed." The first thing to note is that it may be appropriate for Conee to assert this for many reasons besides its literal truth. It may manage to convey something important in this context while being literally false. For instance, etiquette may demand that Conee broach the topic cautiously, and saying, "it seems like you are depressed," sounds far gentler than, "you are depressed," or even, "I think you are depressed." So we must ask ourselves not whether Conee's assertion is appropriate but whether it is literally true. When I think of it in this context, my inclination is to say that Conee's assertion is *not* true. If Conee believes that you are depressed solely on the basis of cold, hard rational calculation, then it isn't true that you seem depressed to him, at least not if we're using "seems" in the standard way. At the very least, it's not at all clear that Conee has a seeming in this case. In contrast, the case of the counterintuitive conclusion is a clear counterexample to the evidence formulation. Hence, a mental state formulation is superior to an evidence formulation.

For this reason, I will focus the discussion on a mental state formulation—specifically, option 1.

Option 1: Belief/Mental State

It seems to S that p iff S believes that S has a mental state displaying the truth of p .

Again, the choice a belief formulation over an inclination formulation is merely one of convenience. From hereon, when I speak of the "Taking-Evidence View" I will be referring to option 1.

Ironically, the Taking-Evidence view is refuted by the same considerations that led Conee to suggest it. Recall, Conee is concerned with the conditions under which it is appropriate for S to report, “it seems to S that *p*.” He concludes that S can correctly report this when S takes oneself to have a mental state displaying the truth of *p*. Notice, however, that it is not appropriate to report, “I am in mental state M,” when I am in M but rather when I *take myself* to be in M.³¹ At the very least, it is necessary that I take myself to be in M before I can appropriately assert it to be so—otherwise I assert something I do not believe. The Taking-Evidence View says that a seeming, A, is the mental state involved in taking another mental state to display the truth of *p*. If A were a seeming, then it would only be appropriate for S to assert, “*p* seems true,” when S takes herself to be in A—that is, when she takes herself *to take herself* to have another mental state displaying the truth of *p*. This severely overcomplicates matters. As Conee argues, it is appropriate for S to assert, “*p* seems true,” when S takes herself to have a mental state displaying the truth of *p*—she needn’t take herself to take herself to have such a mental state. Thus, the Taking-Evidence View is falsified rather than confirmed by Conee’s conclusions about seeming reports.

What Conee’s analysis suggests, in fact, is that the mental state displaying the truth of *p* is the seeming. For it is appropriate for S to assert that *p* seems true to her precisely when she becomes aware that she is in a mental state manifesting *p*’s truth. And as we said before, it becomes appropriate to assert, “I am in mental state M,” when one takes oneself to be in M. So, ironically, Conee’s analysis of seeming reports ends up confirming the Experience View rather than challenging it.

³¹ I do not intend to hereby enter into controversies surrounding norms of assertion. I do not need to take a stance on these issues for my present purposes.

There are other problems with the Taking-Evidence View. Seemings, you may recall, are ordinarily thought to play a specific functional role in belief formation—namely, seemings explain *why* we believe by *inclining* us to believe their content. But I am inclined to believe *p* by a mental state displaying the truth of *p*, not by *taking myself* to have a mental state displaying the truth of *p*. I don't have to have any second-order reflection before being inclined to believe *p*. The first-order mental state displaying the truth of *p* is sufficient. Again, this suggests that the seeming is the mental state displaying the truth of *p* rather than the second-order belief that I have another mental state displaying the truth of *p*.³²

Worst of all, the Taking-Evidence View has the terribly implausible conclusion that nothing seems true to anyone unless they are engaging in second-order reflection about their own mental states.³³ Clearly, though, something can seem true to *S* without *S* having any sort of belief about her own mental states (or feeling any inclination to believe something about her own mental states). This happens *constantly*, in fact. The wood seems rough to the carpenter as he runs his hand along the board though he neither engages nor is inclined to engage in higher-order reflection on his mental states. Examples are endless. This problem alone is serious enough to warrant dismissing the Taking-Evidence View.

There are other problems that might be raised,³⁴ but our current discussion is sufficient to show that the Taking-Evidence View is severely out of joint with the ordinary way of thinking and talking about seemings.

³² Humer 2013b, 336, makes a similar point.

³³ See Huemer 2013b, 335-6, for more discussion on this point.

³⁴ See, for example, Huemer's powerful counterexample in 2013b, 335.

2.4. *The Experience View*

The previous discussion has shown that all of the alternatives to the Experience View are fraught with problems. In contrast, the Experience View has been able to easily explain all of the data discussed so far. If there are discrepancies between the Experience View and our ordinary conception of seemings, then I have yet to find them. Until such problems are raised (and found to be more serious than the problems facing the alternative views), I conclude that the Experience View best fits with the way we ordinarily think and talk about seemings.

The question now becomes, if seemings are experiences, then what *kind* of experience are they? For one, we can conclude that they have propositional content based on the way we commonly say, “it seems *that* such-and-such,” as well as the fact that propositions, like the Naïve Comprehension axiom, clearly seem true to us.³⁵ Furthermore, seemings can be accurate or inaccurate, which suggests that they have propositional content that can be true or false.³⁶ This last consideration also suggests that seemings have a mind-to-world direct of fit since their aim seems to be to accurately represent the world. We can also conclude that the propositional content of these experiences has an assertive phenomenal character. At multiple times in the previous discussion we were led back to this understanding. Conee’s conclusions about seeming reports were shown to support to view that seemings are experiences that display or make manifest the truth of *p*. To explain what a truth-directed inclination to believe is we were forced to posit experiences whose

³⁵ Cullison 2013, 34-5.

³⁶ Cullison 2013, 35-6, discusses this point in more detail.

content feels true. Furthermore, having an assertive phenomenal character explains why seemings incline us to believe in the first place.

There are no other candidates on offer. All this strongly suggests, then, that seemings, as we ordinarily understand them, are experiences with propositional content and an assertive phenomenal character.

This provides evidence that assertive mental states exist. Seemings-talk plays a prevalent role in our language and thinking. It is unlikely that assertive mental states would come to occupy such an important role if there were none. It's possible that ordinary language is just seriously misleading in this regard, but we ought to avoid this conclusion if there is a plausible alternative.

§3 Assertiveness and Introspection

This section will serve two purposes. The first is to produce additional evidence for assertive mental states through guided introspection. The second is to add to the description of assertive mental states provided in Chapter Two, §5. These tasks obviously coincide since introspection will only be helpful here if we have some idea of what we're looking for.

You may recall from Chapter Two that assertive mental states—which I will just call “seemings”—have a unique phenomenal character called “assertiveness”. Assertiveness can be tough to describe but is familiar to us all.³⁷ It comes in two varieties.³⁸

³⁷ Or at least to a great many of us. Those who mention the assertive phenomenal character (or something comparable to it) and, thus, indicate some introspective familiarity with it, include Audi 2013, Bealer 1998, Bedke 2008, Bengson 2010, Bergmann 2013, Chudnoff 2011, Heck 2000, Huemer 2001, Koksvik 2011, Markie 2013, McCain 2014, McGrath 2013, Plantinga 1993a, Polluck 1974, Pryor 2000, Pust 2000, Skene 2013, Tolhurst 1998, and Tucker 2010. Arguably, Augustine, Descartes, Locke, and a great many others could be in this list as well. I discuss seeming-deniers below.

³⁸ I argue that there are multiple kinds of assertiveness in Chapter Two, §5.

The first kind of assertiveness is often described as “the feel of truth” or “felt veridicality” (Tolhurst 1998, 298-9). Assertive mental states of this sort—which I call “seemings-true”—present their content as actually being the case. Chris Tucker explains,

The phenomenology of a seeming makes it feel as though the seeming is ‘recommending’ its propositional content as true or ‘assuring’ us of the content’s truth. (2010, 530)

The second variety of assertive mental states — what I call “seemings-false” — present their content as false. They feel as though they are recommending that you *disbelieve* their content. I will generally focus on seemings-true and the first variety of assertiveness. This is just for convenience. Any claim I make about the first variety of assertiveness can be turned into an analogous claim about the second variety of assertiveness.

Assertiveness can be isolated by comparing experiences that have it to those that don’t. Consider a proposition that you take to be obvious or evident or plain as day. What makes you describe that proposition as obvious? What sets it apart from other propositions that you also have conclusive reason to believe but that you would not describe as obvious? I suggest that *what it is like* to consider the obvious proposition is different from what it is like to consider the non-obvious proposition: the former proposition feels true in a way that the latter does not.³⁹ It is this distinct phenomenal character that inclines you to believe that obvious proposition, perhaps apart from any argument for it. This phenomenal character is the defining feature of an *assertive* mental state.

An example would be helpful. Say you open up a fictional children’s book and read the following words: “Long ago there lived a man named Alexander.” As a result, you enter into a mental state with the propositional content *that long ago there lived a man*

³⁹ At least, there are moments where this has been true in the past. As I explain in a moment, S doesn’t need to have an occurrent seeming that *p* in order for *p* to seem true to S.

named Alexander. This mental state does not, however, incline you to believe its content. You entertain this proposition in a purely *descriptive* mode: a state of affairs is described or represented but not presented as actual. Now consider whether the proposition that long ago there lived a man named Alexander is true. Dwell on this proposition for a moment. It may well seem to you that a man named Alexander lived long ago.⁴⁰ You're thinking about the same proposition as before but there is a phenomenological difference—the proposition now feels true. In the second case you're entertaining the proposition in the *assertive* mode: a state of affairs is not only described but presented as actually being the case.

When trying to isolate the assertive phenomenal character through example, one must proceed carefully. You might consider a proposition p of which it is correct to say, “ p seems true to me,” and not experience any occurrent seeming that p . This, however, does not threaten my position. The statement “ p seems true to S” can be used in two different ways. It might express that S has an *occurrent* seeming that p —i.e. that S is presently conscious of an assertive mental state with p as its content. Alternatively, it could just mean that S possesses a seeming that p . Though I haven't given a theory of possession, I'm assuming that one can possess a seeming that is non-occurrent in the same way that one can possess past perceptual experiences. The point is that just because a proposition paradigmatically seems true to you doesn't mean you, at present, have an occurrent seeming in its truth or even that you will have an occurrent seeming every time you consider it.

⁴⁰ Some may not experience any occurrent seeming. See the discussion just below about proceeding carefully.

Allow me to clarify. Let's say p is that torturing the innocent is bad. p seems true to me because at some time in the past I had an occurrent seeming that p and I am still in possession of that seeming. But I do not now have an occurrent seeming that p . Nor do I have an occurrent seeming every time I consider p . For instance, if I am looking over an argument with this proposition as a premise, I may consider it just long enough to acknowledge my assent and then move on. Often, it is only if I take the time to dwell on the proposition—to ruminate on it, to toss it around in my mind, to consider it afresh—that I have another occurrent seeming in its truth. The same is true of other propositions that seem true to me like $1+1=2$ or that a triangle has three sides. If I merely consider these propositions, I don't have any new seeming; I just believe them. Only after some rumination do I have a new seeming. The upshot is that if you want to evoke an experience in which something feels true, it usually takes more than just considering a paradigmatically obvious proposition.

The following comparison might help those who are still struggling to recognize assertive mental states. The phenomenology of an assertive mental state is like that of an emotion. Emotions, like seemings, come in positive and negative varieties. They also possess a particular affective tone—they present their objects as good or bad in a certain way. This affective tone colors the object of the emotion; it enriches or enhances what it is like to experience something. Say an empathetic person entertains the proposition that there are children in sex slavery. That proposition will be presented to the person as horrendous; as something that is terribly bad. The proposition, or the situation it represents, is bathed in a negative light. The phenomenology of a seeming works in much the same way. The assertive phenomenal character enhances what it is like to entertain a proposition.

It is as if you are thinking about that proposition in a new light—a light that makes the experience feel authentic, revelatory, veridical. Imagine, for example, that you are looking at a book from your shelf. Then go pick up that book and look at it. A phenomenal character subtly permeates the latter experience that is absent in the former. As a result, the latter but not the former feels as though it is representing the way the world actually is.⁴¹

Some mistakenly identify beliefs as kinds of assertive mental states.⁴² No doubt much of what you believe will also feel true, but you can have an occurrent belief that *p* when *p* doesn't feel true. Consider some counterintuitive conclusion reached through reasoning such as the balloon example given in §2.3. You believe that the balloon will move towards the front of the car because this is what physics predicts, but it doesn't *feel* true—it's not bathed in a veridical light like a proposition you find obvious or intuitive. If anything, that proposition feels false. Consider also a case of testimony. Say your physics professor states that the gravitational constant is roughly 6.67×10^{-11} N. You may believe this even though that proposition is not itself phenomenally presented to you as true. It may be that in almost all cases, what you believe feels true. Still, these exceptions show that this assertiveness does not belong to beliefs but to some other mental state that typically accompanies belief.

It's not clear how much disagreement there is on this point once we clear up the terminology. Huemer (2001, 54) uses the term 'assertiveness' to designate a mind-to-world direction of fit and the term 'forcefulness' to designate the particular phenomenal

⁴¹ I suspect that when we wonder whether or not we are dreaming, it is this phenomenal quality that we naturally check for and which assures us that all of this is really happening.

⁴² See Hanna 2011, Huemer 2001, Tooley 2013.

character I've been describing. Since beliefs also have a mind-to-world direction of fit, beliefs are, in Huemer's sense, "assertive mental states"; but Huemer does not seem to think that beliefs have forcefulness. Thus, it may be uncontroversial that beliefs are not assertive mental states in the sense of the term I'm using.

Some philosophers demand a more detailed explanation of assertiveness than I've given so far. Tooley (2013, 310-11), for instance, complains that the entire idea of assertiveness is built on a metaphor that is never cashed out. He writes,

Since mental states are not agents, they cannot literally assert anything, or recommend anything, or assure us that anything is the case. So such metaphorical talk needs to be jettisoned and replaced with characterizations that are literally true. Since Huemer and Tucker have not done this, they have not really provided us with a satisfactory account of what they take seemings to be. (2013, 310)

Such a literal account, I think, has already been given. Huemer and Tucker appeal to the above metaphors to describe what it is like to consciously possess a mental state with the unique phenomenal character distinctive of assertiveness: namely, the feeling of truth. The literal characterization of assertive mental states, then, is that they are mental states whose content *feels true*. This is no more metaphorical than when we claim that pleasant experiences are mental states whose content *feels good*. The feeling of truth—like the feeling of goodness—is a fundamental phenomenal character that cannot be analyzed further.

Still, it might be preferable if we could say more about this this feeling of truth. There is no way, however, to explain a fundamental phenomenal character except to elicit and target the feeling through example, compare its quality to other things with which we are familiar, and describe its functional role. I have done each of these things here and in Chapter Two, and I will extend my characterization in the following sections. However, I

need to finish showing that there *are* mental states with this phenomenal character before I continue to characterize it.

Despite examples and descriptions of the sort given here, there are still some who deny that propositions ever feel true (Conee 1998) or claim not to experience this feeling in cases where we would expect it to be present (Williamson 2007). Conee writes,

A proposition can harbor attractions of various sorts. It can be amusing to consider, or challenging to comprehend, or exciting to hope for. It is clear that none of these is relevant. Apprehending any such enticement in a proposition is clearly not at all like seeing that it is true. Further reflection shows that there is no special sort of attractiveness displayed by the propositions that are seen to be true. In fact, intrinsically obvious propositions are largely rather dull to consider, even while we see that they are true. (1998, 850)

And here is Williamson talking about his intuitions in the Gettier case:

Although mathematical intuition can have a rich phenomenology, even a quasi-perceptual one, for instance in geometry, the intellectual appearance of the Gettier proposition is not like that. Any accompanying imagery is irrelevant. For myself, I am aware of no intellectual seeming beyond my conscious inclination to believe the Gettier proposition. Similarly, I am aware of no intellectual seeming beyond my conscious inclination to believe Naïve Comprehension, which I resist because I know better. (2007, 217)

What can I say about such denials?

The first thing to note is that such denials seem to be extremely uncommon, at least if the literature is a reliable indication of such things.⁴³ So if I must leave a small minority behind, so be it. Still, it would be preferable if I had *some* explanation for why smart, serious people like Conee and Williamson can't seem to find assertive mental states through introspection. Since I have little access to the minds of Conee and Williamson, I can only offer an extremely general error-theory. To this end, Elijah Chudnoff offers the following insight.

⁴³ See footnote 37 for a sampling of those who acknowledge assertiveness or something very much like it.

In order to *find*—not just have—an intuition experience, your understanding of what intuition experiences are shouldn't be wildly mistaken. If your understanding of what intuition experiences are is wildly mistaken, then you might very well have many intuition experiences, but fail to recognize them as such. (2011, 644; 2013, 53)

Perhaps Conee and Williamson are expecting assertive mental states to present themselves differently than they actually do. Hence, when they introspect and do not find what they are expecting, they mistakenly conclude that these assertive mental states do not exist. Without knowing more about either Conee or Williamson's precise state of mind, this general error-theory is all I can give. But again, seemings-deniers seem to be a small minority. Overall, introspection still confirms the existence of assertive mental states with propositional content.

The evidence from introspection combined with the evidence from ordinary language amounts to a strong case for the existence of assertive mental states with propositional content, which I am calling "seemings".

§4 Seemings and Sensations

Before we take a closer look at the nature of seemings I need to distinguish them from other mental states with which they are sometimes confused. Let's call mental states with sensory phenomenology "sensations". Tucker describes sensations as follows:

I have a visual sensation when I look at my dog. It is the mental "picture" or visual image of a little white creature wearing a blue halter. I have an auditory sensation when I hear my dog barking. It is the mental "sound" of the bark, a mental phenomenon that causes me great irritation. At the very least, there are also tactile, olfactory, gustatory and perhaps even proprioceptive sensations. (2010, 530)

Sensations, so understood, are not perceptual seemings, though they are closely related to them.⁴⁴ There are a number of convincing arguments in the literature for why sensations and perceptual seemings should not be identified. Defending these arguments is beyond the scope of this chapter, but I will mention a few.

First, the informational richness of sensations often surpasses that of perceptual seemings. As Tucker notes, we might have a visual sensation of a hen with exactly forty eight speckles, yet to normal humans it will only seem that there is a many-speckled hen.⁴⁵ Taylor offers a second example.⁴⁶ As I revolve around a red table my visual sensations will be constantly changing, but it may seem to me all the while only that there is a red table. The sensations change but the seeming remains the same.

A second consideration is that two subjects might share the same sensations but differ in perceptual seemings. Taylor offers the following example:

Consider a novice and expert birdwatcher. Each might have the same visual and auditory sensations when looking at a Goldfinch while only the expert has the perceptual seeming that the bird is a Goldfinch. (forthcoming)

Tucker offers a similar case concerning a visual sensation of his wife.⁴⁷ Both Tucker and someone else might share this visual sensation, yet it might only seem to Tucker that this is his wife. This suggests that perceptual seemings are not sensations.⁴⁸

⁴⁴ Bergmann 2013, Cullison 2013, Tucker 2010, 2011, 2013 are proponents of the Experience View that affirm this distinction. Huemer 2001 disagrees.

⁴⁵ Tucker 2010, 534-35.

⁴⁶ Taylor 2015.

⁴⁷ Tucker 2013, 7.

⁴⁸ To draw this conclusion we must assume that the novice and the expert have only one perceptual seeming each—the seeming that there is a yellow bird, e.g., and the seeming that there is a Goldfinch, respectively—or that Tucker and the other subject have only one perceptual seeming each—that this is his wife and, e.g., that this is a woman. This assumption is plausible but contestable.

There are also other cases where sensations and perceptual seemings plausibly come apart. Tucker points to cases of associative agnosia.⁴⁹ Those suffering from associative agnosia have a detailed visual image of a familiar object in front of them but cannot recognize what it is. Plausibly, the subject has a visual sensation of, say, a pen but it does not seem to the subject that there is a pen. Tucker also appeals to instances of blindsight as ones in which the subjects have perceptual seemings but no sensations.⁵⁰ These subjects report blind spots in their visual fields—regions where there is no visual imagery—yet they are surprisingly adept at making judgments about objects in these regions. A plausible explanation is that the subjects have perceptual seemings about objects in the blind region despite lacking any sensations of those objects.

Another argument from Tucker begins with the following insight: for any sensation, it is possible, in principle, that there be an imagining—an output of the imagination—that is phenomenally indistinguishable from that sensation.⁵¹ Consider the sensations involved in eating some juicy BBQ brisket. Your imagination could, in principle, produce something phenomenally indistinguishable from your sensation—an imagining with the exact same sensory phenomenology. But, Tucker notes, just imagining that you're eating brisket does not make it *seem* that you are. What you imagine, no matter how vivid, does not feel true. In other words, your imagining lacks assertiveness, which is a defining feature of seemings. Since your sensation is phenomenally indistinguishable

⁴⁹ Tucker 2010, 531 and 2011, 58.

⁵⁰ Tucker 2010, 530-31 and 2011, 58.

⁵¹ See Tucker 2011, 57, for the following argument.

from an imagining, this means that your sensation, in itself, also lacks assertiveness. Thus, Tucker concludes that sensations are not seemings.

Finally, some (including myself) think that seemings possess *conceptual* content. So far I have only argued that seemings possess propositional content. It may be that all propositional content is conceptual,⁵² but I have not argued for this. If we grant, however, that seemings have conceptual content, then there are arguments in the broader perceptual literature that might be drawn on to distinguish sensations from perceptual seemings. We can, for instance, supplement the informational richness argument given above.⁵³ One might also argue that sensations are more fine-grained than seemings because we lack concepts, e.g., for every unique shade of red that might be present in a visual sensation.⁵⁴ Or one might argue that infants and animals can have the same visual sensations as us though they lack the concepts necessary to have the same seemings.⁵⁵

Perceptual seemings and sensations have a close relationship despite the fact that they are not the same. In normal, adult human perception, sensations will always (or nearly always) be accompanied by perceptual seemings and vice versa. In fact, sensations typically prompt or give rise to seemings. The content of the seeming may even include demonstrative concepts whose reference is fixed by the sensations that gave rise to it.⁵⁶

⁵² Peacocke 2001a, 243, for instance, seems to define things in this way.

⁵³ See, e.g., Dretske 1981 and Martin 1992.

⁵⁴ See, e.g., Evans 1982, Peacocke 1992, and Tye 1995.

⁵⁵ See, e.g., Bermúdez 1998, Evans 1982, Peacocke 2001a, 2001b.

⁵⁶ Those demonstrative concepts may refer to the cause of those sensations or what is represented by those sensations, for instance.

Presumably, parallel claims could be made for whatever memorial or introspective phenomenology accompanies memorial or introspective seemings.⁵⁷ The mental states with this phenomenology give rise to, but are distinct from, seemings. In this way, all types of seemings—be they perceptual, memorial, introspective, rational, or otherwise—share a uniform structure as assertive mental states with propositional content. Their grouping into various types of seemings stems only from the fact that these seemings find their origin in different intellectual faculties or, in some cases, that they are associated with different types of phenomenology.

Once we make this division between perceptual, memorial, and introspective seemings and those mental states with distinctively sensory, memorial, or introspective phenomenology, it is still an open question which mental states should be identified as perceptual, memorial, or introspective experiences. Some tacitly assume that the mental states with the distinctive phenomenology are the experiences and, thus, that seemings come downstream from perceptions, memories, and introspections.⁵⁸ This, however, is debatable. There are strong reasons to identify perceptions, memories, and introspections with perceptual, memorial, and introspective seemings, respectively.⁵⁹ For instance, if we think that perceptions justify beliefs and it turns out that perceptual seemings are doing all the justificatory work, then we have reason to think that perceptual seemings are perceptions (or components of them). I won't be arguing for this position here. I mention

⁵⁷ Rational seemings, I take it, have no accompanying phenomenology on par with sensations.

⁵⁸ E.g. Bergmann 2013.

⁵⁹ These reasons might also support identifying perceptions, memories, and introspections with the complex mental states including *both* the seemings and the mental states with the distinctive phenomenology.

it only because it is important not to tacitly assume that perceptual, memorial, and introspective seemings as described here cannot be identified with perceptions, memories, and introspections.

§5 *Seemings and Emotions*

Thus far I have described the unique phenomenal character of seemings, elicited this phenomenal character through example, described the functional role of seemings, and distinguished it from surrounding mental states. All existent descriptions of seemings stop here. Indeed, some proponents of the *sui generis* view talk as if nothing more can be said about them.⁶⁰ These proponents are missing some of the ways we might advance the discussion about seemings. I will extend my description of seemings through a structural comparison with emotions.

In this section I draw out a number of similarities between seemings and emotions. These similarities suggest that seemings and emotions share a common structure—a structure that I characterize in §6. My account will rely on some controversial theses about the nature of emotions. One may craft alternative accounts of seemings using different theories of emotion. Given the complexity of these issues, this discussion is only meant to be suggestive.

Let's start with a little about the nature of emotions. On many theories, emotions are intentional states that (at least sometimes) have propositional content. Emotions are also taken by many to have a mind-to-world direction of fit. They present their object to the subject in a certain way—e.g. anger presents its object as offensive—and are considered

⁶⁰ See, e.g., Huemer 2001, 77-9.

successful to the extent that their objects are as they are presented to be. More specifically, emotions present their objects either positively or negatively—i.e. as good in a certain way or bad in a certain way. This means that emotions have valence (they come in positive and negative varieties) and a particular affective tone. Positive emotions feel good; negative emotions feel bad.

All of this closely mirrors seemings. Seemings are intentional states with propositional content. Seemings have a mind-to-world direction of fit. They present their object to the subject in a certain way and are considered successful to the extent that the object is as it is presented to be. More specifically, seemings present their objects as true or false. Hence, seemings too have valence (they come in positive and negative varieties) and an affective tone. Truth or falsity is reflected in the affective quality of the seeming, just goodness or badness is reflected in the affective quality of an emotion

The parallels here are considerable and suggestive of a deep structural similarity. Something is going on in emotions whereby their content is presented as good or bad. It is tempting to think that the same thing is going on in seemings except that their content is presented as true or false.

One minor difference between seemings and emotions is that seemings always have propositional content and emotions do not. But this doesn't suggest that emotions and seemings aren't structural parallels. We can form a category of assertive, intentional mental states with either propositional or non-propositional content. We can call mental states in this category simply "assertive mental states". Seemings are a species of assertive mental states; those with propositional content. In this way, seemings are most closely paralleled to a particular kind of emotion; those with propositional content.

There are also functional similarities between seemings and emotions. Namely, there are impressive parallels between seemings and the role they play in the operation of the intellect and emotions and the role they play in the operation of the will.⁶¹

To begin, seemings are motivating reasons to believe or disbelieve.⁶² Even Alvin Plantinga, a proper functionalist, says that, in normal cases of belief formation, “the proposition in question has a sort of attractiveness, or perhaps inevitableness about it, or perhaps a sort of perceived fittingness; the phenomenology is hard to describe, but familiar to us all.”⁶³ Quite plausibly this feeling, which Plantinga struggles to name, is precisely the assertiveness belonging to seemings-true. Plantinga goes on to say that the “felt attractiveness” of a proposition—or what I call assertiveness—inclines one to believe that proposition. Plantinga’s imagery is vivid: he says that this feeling has a kind of impulsive force. On this basis he calls felt attractiveness “impulsive evidence”. Seemings provide impulsive evidence, so described. Plantinga then goes on to state:

And if we do take [felt attractiveness] to be evidence, then no doubt it will be true that in a well-formed noetic structure, belief is always on the basis of evidence. Indeed, how could it be otherwise? Could it really be that you should believe a proposition, even though it had none of this phenomenal attractiveness, this seeming-to-be-true...? (1993, 192)

⁶¹ Talk of the intellect and the will is purely illustrative. My intention is that all of my statements involving talk of intellectual or volitional faculties be reinterpreted to be consistent with whatever conclusions are reached in the cognitive sciences.

⁶² This is uncontroversial. What is controversial is whether they are always *good* motivating reasons. See Chapter Two, §2 on motivating reasons.

⁶³ Plantinga 1993, 191. In this section (190-3) Plantinga actually wavers between pinpointing the “perceived fittingness” of a proposition and “the felt inclination to believe” a proposition as the motivation for our beliefs. These are different in that in the former case, the feeling is about the proposition and its truth, and it is this feeling that inclines one to believe the proposition. In the latter case, the feeling is of one’s own *attraction* to, or inclination to believe, a proposition. The former is preferable since, when we believe a proposition, we do so because we feel something *about that proposition*, not about our own inclinations.

While Plantinga overstates things (an inferred proposition may be believed but not seem true itself), the point is well received. Seemings are paradigm motivating reasons and may very well underlie the formation of all our doxastic stances. Consequently, seemings are often *good* motivating reasons—at least insofar as the stances in our noetic structures are generally justified.

The motivational role filled by seemings with respect to the intellect corresponds closely to the motivational role that emotions fill with respect to the will. Emotions motivate; they *move* us to act. Just as seemings are the paradigm motivating reasons for the intellect, so emotions are paradigm motivating reasons for the will.⁶⁴ Moreover, just as seemings motivate the intellect by making some content feel true or false, emotions motivate the will by making some object or content feel good or bad. It also appears that, like seemings, many emotions are good motivating reasons to act.

The picture forming is one in which seemings indicate which states of affairs do or do not obtain while emotions indicate the value or disvalue of those states of affairs. Seemings then serve as a proper basis for intellectual action; emotions (informed by the intellect) serve as a proper basis for practical action. This picture is simpler and more elegant if seemings and emotions are the same kind of mental state—the major difference being that seemings aim at truth, emotions at value.

There are other similarities I might draw out, but I will leave things as they stand. There is already much here to suggest that seemings ought to be thought of as the intellectual parallels to emotions.

⁶⁴ Desires are also paradigm motivators. On some accounts of emotion, including the one I lay out in §6, desires are kinds of emotions.

§6 *Felt Evaluations*

Thinking of seemings in relation to emotions makes available a wide variety of theories about the nature of seemings, each corresponding to a different theory of emotion. I will not survey all of the options here, nor will I argue for a particular theory of emotion. Instead I will introduce a promising characterization of emotion and draw out a parallel characterization of seemings. This is only intended to a sketch of the view, a first approximation.

The theory of emotion I have in mind is that of Bennett Helm (2001, 2002, 2009) (see also Robert Roberts (1988, 2003, 2009) for a very similar view). Helm characterizes emotions as *felt evaluations* of an object *as good or bad* (in a certain way). The idea that emotions are in some sense evaluations is intuitive and endorsed by many.⁶⁵ The affectional tone of emotions, in which the object feels good or bad in a certain way, is naturally understood as an evaluation of that object as good or bad in that way. For example, the positive emotions you feel at your wedding are evaluations of these events as very good things.⁶⁶ Some theories explain the evaluative nature of emotions by analyzing emotions in terms of beliefs: you are making a judgment about the goodness or badness of the object.⁶⁷ This is not Helm's strategy.⁶⁸ Felt evaluations might be called "judgments"

⁶⁵ See the affective perception models of, e.g., Charland 1995, de Sousa 1987, Doring 2003, Elgin 1996, 2008, Johnston 2001, Roberts 1988, 2003, 2009, Tappolet 2011, Zagzebski 2003. See also judgmentalist theories like those of Nue 2000, Nussbaum 2001, and Solomon 1980.

⁶⁶ Most likely, you will experience a flood of complex emotions on your wedding day. Plausibly, there are as many emotions as there are axiological evaluations; and there are emotions as complex as the complexity of any axiological evaluation of an object. Thus, all of the complex evaluations you might make about your wedding can be captured emotionally. (At least this is plausible for things of finite value.)

⁶⁷ See the judgmentalist theories of, e.g., Nue 2000, Nussbaum 2001, and Solomon 1980. Broad 1971, Lyons 1980, Marks 1982, and Oakley 1992 also think emotions include but are not exhausted by evaluative judgments.

in some sense, but they are not judgments of the sort made in beliefs. The evaluation is carried out entirely through the *feel* of the emotion.

This is not as strange of an idea as it may seem at first. We all know what it is like to have a good feeling about something. This doesn't imply that you *believe* that the object is good. It just *feels* good. Clearly, then, there is some easily recognizable phenomenal character that we might call "the feel of goodness." This phenomenal character can color your experience of an object, bathing it in a positive light.⁶⁹ In this way the object is presented to the subject as good without there being any belief about the object's goodness. What are we to call this phenomenon? The term "felt evaluation" seems to capture it quite well. In an evaluative belief, some content is intellectually affirmed as good. In a felt evaluation, some content is phenomenally presented as good.

Since evaluations have an object, felt evaluations have intentionality. Let's follow Helm (2002, 15) in calling this object the *target* of the emotion. The *formal object* of the emotion "is the characteristic evaluation (of the target) implicit in that emotion type and distinguishing it from other emotion types" (2002, 15).⁷⁰ The formal object of anger, for example, is offensiveness.⁷¹ When Ryan sees his son disobediently take a cookie, Ryan has a felt evaluation of his son's stealing the cookie as offensive.⁷²

⁶⁸ This is consonant with our current project since we have already dismissed the view that seemings are analyzable into beliefs.

⁶⁹ Roberts 2009, 571, calls this is a kind of "structured perception" of the object. His technical term for the experience is 'construal'.

⁷⁰ See Roberts 2003, 180-313, for an impressively large description of the formal objects, or characteristic evaluations, of various emotions.

⁷¹ We could, of course, get more fine-grained if we wanted to talk about a particular kind of anger.

⁷² Typically, emotions like Ryan's anger arise because we care about things or because, in Helm's terminology, objects have *import* for us. Ryan is angry because Ryan cares about his son's upbringing, and his son's disobedience runs counter to his concern. Roberts says that emotions are "concern-based".

I suggest that we think of seemings as felt evaluations of a proposition *as true*. Like emotions, seemings are naturally thought of as evaluative states: they evaluate a proposition's veracity. But this evaluation should not be thought of as involving a belief. There is no doxastic affirmation of any content's truth. Seemings do, however, *phenomenally* associate their content with truth by phenomenally presenting that content as true, or casting it in a veridical light. In this way, seemings are felt evaluations carried out through the distinctive phenomenal character of seemings—i.e. their assertiveness.

Like emotions, seemings have a target: some proposition. Also like emotions, seemings have a formal object, or a distinctive characterization of their objects, that sets seemings apart as a distinct kind of felt evaluation: namely, veridicality. It is therefore natural to think of seemings and emotions as sharing a common structure. They are both *felt evaluations*.

I submit that this is a compelling characterization of seemings. By comparing seemings to emotions, we have secured a firmer grasp on the nature of seemings as well as that in which their assertive character consists; and we have created elegant symmetries in the process. I don't expect that our discussion has made things perfectly clear, of course. We are still constructing the language needed to discuss the phenomenology of both seemings and emotions. At the very least, we have a sufficient understanding of seemings to evaluate their evidential value.

CHAPTER FIVE

In Defense of Common Sense

§1 Introduction

In this chapter I bring together the preceding discussions in support of common sense epistemology. Common sense epistemology consists in two main theses:¹

- (A) All seemings are non-derivative good reasons to believe or disbelieve their content.
- (B) All of our non-derivative good reasons to believe or disbelieve are seemings.

I develop arguments for both of these theses in turn. We begin with an argument for (A) partly modeled after the Reidian response to skepticism introduced in Chapter Three. After concluding that seemings are non-derivative good reasons, I examine other prominent candidates for non-derivative good reasons—such as acquaintance states and sensations—and find them lacking. Apart from seemings, these mental states are unable to provide justification.

(For the sake of convenience, I will limit this discussion to seemings-true and reasons to believe. As always, a parallel discussion could be had in terms of seemings-false and reasons for disbelief.)

§2 The Initial Position

A good reason to believe p supports p such that, *ceterius paribus*, coming into possession of this reason increases on balance support for p . Good reasons are also

¹ I am hereby limiting the discussion to purely intellectual reasons to believe or disbelieve.

intimately connected with our intellectual duties to pursue truth and avoid falsehood (per the framework adopted in Chapter Two). In particular, we said that S is permitted to take a stance s towards p only if S has, on balance, good reason for taking s towards p . Thus, we can judge whether a seeming that p is good reason to believe its content by examining how coming into possession of this seeming affects the permissibility of placing some degree of belief or disbelief in p . If (other things remaining equal) its seeming true to S that p permits S to place a higher credence in p than was formerly allowed, then this seeming-true has managed to increase S's on balance support for p and is therefore a good reason to believe p .²

The specific question at issue here is whether seemings are *non-derivative* good reasons. Non-derivative good reasons for S are those whose status as reasons for S is not derived from other reasons in S's possession. For instance, you might think that a seeming-true that p only supports p when one's background information supports that things probably are as they appear to be. Then this seeming-true would at most be a derivative reason to believe its content, for it only increases on balance support for p when the appropriate background evidence is in place. Conversely, if a seeming-true that p is a non-derivative reason for its content, then being a reason for p is an intrinsic feature of that seeming. The relevant support fact is a *local* fact.

There is a common form of epistemic holism that denies the existence of non-derivative reasons. Nothing, they claim, is evidence in a vacuum. e can only be a reason for p by being situated within a larger system of reasons (what I'm calling "background

² Gaining a reason for p can increase support for p while not licensing any degree of belief (a credence over .5) in p . It may allow for a slight lesser degree of disbelief (a credence under .5) or for withholding assent (a credence of .5) when only lesser credences were previously available.

information”) in which e makes p more probable.³ Given different background information, e may not be a reason for p . In fact, e may even be a reason *against* p . For example, say S and S* decide to play a shell game.⁴ S has an extensive track record of success with such games. If it seems to her that the pebble is under a particular shell, this has been true nine out of ten times. S* has a similarly extensive but far poorer track record. If it seems to her that the pebble is under a particular shell, she is wrong nine out of ten times. They play once more and it seems to both that the pebble is under the middle (m). Its seeming that m , the holist claims, is evidence for m for S but evidence against m for S*. The non-holist can appear at a loss to explain such phenomena. The holist concludes that there is no local fact about whether e supports p ; support facts are global—products of the system as a whole. For all e , being a reason for p isn’t an intrinsic feature of e but a status that it must inherit from its place within the larger system.

I want to undercut this motivation for holism right upfront. A system on which all reasons are *defeasible* can accommodate all the necessary intuitions while admitting non-derivative reasons. The key is that adding a defeasible reason for p to one’s total of body of reasons can fail to increase the on balance level of support for p when there are defeaters in one’s total body of reasons that undermine or rebut the support provided by this reason. Adding this defeasible reason for p may even lead to one’s gaining additional reasons *against* p , resulting in a reduction of the on balance support for p . The holist is correct, then, that the *overall* effect that adding e has on one’s *on balance* support for p must always

³ Let “ e ” be a variable satisfied by either a proposition or a mental state. Holists of this sort typically limit reasons to propositions, but this won’t come into play here.

⁴ Thanks to Nevin Climenhaga for inspiring this example.

be assessed in light of one's total body of reasons. But this gives us no reason to doubt that there can be local, intrinsic support facts.

Consider a helpful analogy. Someone might argue (poorly) that pain cannot be intrinsically bad for you in the following way. The pain of passing a kidney stone cannot be assessed in isolation from the entire system of goods and bads with which it's connected. If the pain serves no greater purpose it is bad for you, but if the pain keeps you from boarding an airplane that crashes then it is actually good for you. Hence, the goodness and badness of pain (for you) cannot be an intrinsic, local fact about the pain itself. This argument is flawed. The fact that undergoing a pain may result in no on balance diminishment or even an on balance increase in your overall wellbeing doesn't entail that pain is not, in itself, intrinsically bad for you. It may be that the intrinsic badness of pain is simply countered by other states of affairs.

The argument for holism displays the same flaws. Given S^* 's poor performance in the shell game, S^* 's on balance support for m will diminish when it seems to S^* that m . But this doesn't imply that this seeming cannot be a non-derivative reason to believe p . In such circumstances, S^* will be particularly attentive to the way things seem. Thus, when it seems to S^* that m , S^* will also learn that it seems to her that m . Call this proposition p . Given S^* 's background information, p is strong evidence against m —considerably stronger than any reason provided by her seeming. Thus, when both the seeming and p are added to S^* 's total body of reasons, the on balance support for m decreases significantly. This story neatly explains the data and is compatible with seemings being non-derivative reasons. The plausibility of this explanation undermines any support holism might gain from these examples.

How might we test whether seemings are non-derivative good reasons? My strategy is to take a generalizable test case in which it seems to one that p and zero in on the local situation. We can mentally isolate ourselves from the subject's larger epistemic situation by bracketing out her background evidence. We can then inquire after the effects of its seeming that p . In particular, does coming into possession of this seeming permit, at this level, a higher credence than previously allowed? If so, that seeming is a non-derivative good reason to believe p .

I propose the following experiment. Let us conceive of a subject S that has no on balance reason to believe p at t_0 . The highest credence towards p permitted for S at t_0 is .5—i.e. S can, at most, withhold assent towards p . For convenience, we can assume that S has no evidence for or against p at t_0 and she places the prior probability of p at .5.⁵ A moment later, at time t_1 , it seems true to S that p . The question then becomes: at t_1 , is S permitted to place some degree of belief in p ? Since we are testing whether seemings are non-derivative good reasons, we must bracket out any evidence the subject might have about this seeming—including any information about its possible origins, its reliability or unreliability, etc. Let's call the scenario at t_1 the "initial position" since we are looking at the deontological effects of this seeming prior to taking any evidence about it into account. If its seeming to S that p permits S to place some degree of belief in p in these circumstances (no matter how slight), then this seeming is a non-derivative good reason to believe its content.

⁵ Nothing hinges on this particular set-up. We could just as easily imagine someone starting with a low credence or high credence. All we're looking for is whether its seeming to S that p permits S to place a *higher* credence in p than previously allowed. It's just especially convenient to set things up as above since *any* permissible degree of belief is a higher credence than previously allowed.

So here's our scenario, expressed less formally. Prior to the present moment, p was a toss-up for S. Now, however, S considers p and finds that it seems to her to be true. This mental state doesn't feel like a mere musing or a passing thought; it feels as though it is revealing to her the way the world actually is—as though it is “testifying” that p in a way roughly analogous to human testimony. Her experience naturally inclines her to place some degree of belief in p . If we bracket out any information S may have about the reliability of this mental state, how is S permitted to respond? Can she follow her natural inclination and place some degree of belief in p —perhaps just a very slight one? Or must she resist this inclination and continue to withhold assent?

There are strong reasons for thinking that S is permitted to place some degree of belief in p and that this is true *whenever* S is in the initial position, regardless of the particular content or origins of the seeming at issue. I will offer both a direct and an indirect argument for this conclusion. The direct argument highlights the intuitive and theoretical plausibility of this position, while the indirect argument (inspired by Reid's argument in Chapter Three) shows that the alternatives to this position are untenable. These lines of reasoning permit us to conclude that all seemings-true are good reasons to believe their content.

§3 *The Direct Argument*

It's plausible on its face that S is permitted to place at least some slight degree of belief in p . Think about it: p seems true to S and she has absolutely no reason whatsoever to think otherwise; nor does she have any reason to think that her experience is misleading her. *Everything* S has to go on points to p 's truth and nothing indicates that p is false or

that she is being misled. It is at the very least plausible that S doesn't violate any duty to pursue truth or avoid falsehood by placing some degree of belief in *p*.

The above line of reasoning does not depend in any way on the particularities of the seeming at issue. In particular, there was no mention the origin of the seeming or the specifics of its propositional content. This indicates that our conclusion stands *whenever* S finds herself in the initial position and, in turn, that all seemings-true are good reasons to believe their content.

One might cringe at the idea that *all* seemings are good reasons. After all, some seemings result from bias or have content that isn't within our ability to reliably discern (e.g. whether the number of stars is even or odd).⁶ We must remember, however, that in the initial position we bracket out *all* of S's evidence about her seeming. She does not, for instance, have any information about why it seems to her that *p* or whether seemings of that particular sort are reliable. Nor does she have any information about whether *p* can be discerned by normal human faculties. Once again, S has absolutely no reason whatsoever to doubt the reliability of her experience. Everything she has to go on points to *p*'s truth. It can be tough to imagine S being in such a scenario, but when we do it seems hard to deny that S is rationally permitted to place some degree of belief in *p*.

While this brief response will be sufficient for some, others may need more convincing. Rest assured, I will consider the position that some but not all seemings are non-derivative good reasons at length, but to do so now will distract us from the main point. I offer a more focused critique of this position in §4.2 of this chapter, followed by an even more thorough examination (including a survey of some of the key examples that have arisen

⁶ A growing number of philosophers—such as Markie 2005, 2013, McGrath 2013, Siegel 2012—are appealing to such cases as counterexamples to (A).

in the literature) in Chapter Six, §2. This will allow us to keep sight of the big picture while giving due attention to the details.

For now, allow me to dig a little deeper into why one might think that seemings permit belief in their content. What we're trying to discern in all this is whether seemings are good *motivating* reasons—whether they're the sorts of mental states that can appropriately move one to believe. Some mental states obviously don't appropriately motivate belief. Looking at what goes wrong with these bad motivating reasons can, by contrast, instruct us as to what goes right with good motivating reasons. Take desires. Clearly, desiring that *p* is not a good motivating reason for believing *p*. Phenomenalism says that good motivating reasons are those with the right sorts of phenomenal properties, so the problem with desires must have something to do with their phenomenology. A natural explanation is that desires, at most, indicate the *value* or *desirability* of a proposition; they do not, on the other hand, indicate the *truth* of any proposition. Thus, when we base belief on a desire, what actually inclines us to believe isn't related at all to the truth of that proposition. This explanation also accounts for why hopes, fears, and the like are not good motivating reasons: what inclines us to believe in these instances is unrelated to the truth of the proposition believed. This suggests that when we base beliefs on good motivating reasons, we are inclined by the truth of the proposition believed, or by something indicative of its truth.

We can have good motivating reasons to believe things that are false, so we don't need to be motivated by the truth of a proposition or by its truthmaker. Instead it seems that when basing belief on good motivating reasons we are motivated by the *apparent* truth of the propositions. Thus, if some mental state indicates that *p* is true and inclines one to

believe p precisely because p is so indicated, then that mental state is a good reason to believe p .

Given phenomenalism, whether a mental state indicates the truth of p or not depends on the phenomenology of that mental state. Those mental states with the right sort of phenomenal properties are those that indicate the truth of their content and, thus, are good motivating reasons to believe that content. Let's return to seemings. The content of seemings *feels true* and they incline us to believe their content precisely because of how they present their content as true. If seemings don't indicate the truth of their content then I have no clue what sort of mental state does. Seemings, furthermore, share none of the faults of bad motivating reasons like desires. The problem with bad motivating reasons is that, when basing belief on them, we are not being moved by the apparent truth of a proposition but by its desirability or something of that sort; and this violates our duty to avoid falsehood. With seemings, on the other hand, we are being moved by the apparent truth of a proposition. In that case there doesn't seem to be any violation of our duty to avoid falsehood. If anything, *failing* to be moved by the apparent truth of a proposition would constitute a violation of our duty to pursue truth.

Take a step back and consider this. Good motivating reasons to believe are those that appropriately motivate belief. What could be a more appropriate motivator than the feeling of truth? On the face of it, this is precisely how things ought to work: truth is driving the belief-forming process. There's a good case, then, that a seemings are good motivating reasons to believe.

§4 *The Indirect Argument*

Let's return to the initial position. My thesis is that whenever S is in the initial position with respect to p , she is permitted to place some degree of belief in p . In §3 we saw that this makes sense on both an intuitive and theoretical level. In this section, I provide further support for this conclusion by showing the implausibility of the alternatives.

There are three jointly exhaustive positions we might take regarding whether S is permitted to believe in the initial position:

Credulity Whenever S is in the initial position with respect to p , she is permitted to place some degree of belief in p .

Incredulity Whenever S is in the initial position with respect to p , she is not permitted to place any degree of belief in p .

Semi-Credulity Sometimes when S is in the initial position with respect to p , she is permitted to place some degree of belief in p ; all other times, S is not permitted to place any degree of belief in p .

I argue that Incredulity and Semi-Credulity cannot be right. So by simple process of elimination, Credulity must be true.

Notice that this is very similar to the indirect argument we saw Reid employ in Chapter Three. Reid said that there are three logically exhaustive positions we can take regarding our natural beliefs (basic beliefs that are produced in accordance with our natural constitutions).

Common Sense Do not resist any of our natural beliefs until one has a reason to doubt their truth.

Complete Skepticism Resist all our natural beliefs until one has a reason to support their truth.

Semi-Skepticism Do not resist some natural beliefs until one has reason to doubt their truth; resist all other natural beliefs until one has reason to support their truth.

These mirror the three options S has in the initial position. Reid then argues that both Complete Skepticism and Semi-Skepticism are impermissible, leaving Common Sense as the only tenable option. While my strategy is slightly different—e.g. I’m arguing for the falsity of Incredulity and Semi-Credulity rather than their impermissibility—the similarities are substantial. I thus consider myself to be running a Reidian (or Reidian-style) argument for common sense epistemology.

The general strategy underlying my argument is mentioned in the literature. Huemer (2001, 104-5) seems to briefly run a Reidian argument of this sort.⁷ Likewise, McGrath suggests the following line of reasoning on behalf of the phenomenal conservative:

Suppose it seems to you that P and you have no defeater (i.e., no good evidence for not-P and no good evidence that this seeming is unreliable as to whether P). Which doxastic attitude would it be reasonable for you to have toward P? Disbelieve P, without good evidence for not-P? Withhold judgment on P? It *does* seem to you that P, and you lack evidence for not-P and for the unreliability of the seeming with respect to P? (*sic*) The only reasonable attitude to take is belief. ... Its seeming to one that P seems to be at least some evidence weighing in favor of one’s believing P. (2013, 226)

While these arguments share a general strategy with my own, my particular formulation of the argument and, especially, my defense of each step is different from anything on offer.

4.1 Incredulity about Seemings

Incredulity dictates that no seeming be given the benefit of the doubt. Despite the fact that *p* seems true to S and S has no reason to doubt *p* or the reliability of her experience, Incredulity insists that S withhold assent, at least until it can be independently confirmed

⁷ Key principles that could be used to support this argument are defended in Huemer 2006 and 2007, though Huemer never explicitly draws this connection.

that the seeming is a reliable indicator of p 's truth. This position entails that no seemings are non-derivative good reasons to believe their content.

Incredulity is not the predominant position. Many are willing to admit that *some* seemings provide us with immediate reason to believe their content—at least among those minimally favorable to my starting assumptions. But there are reasons why you might find Incredulity attractive (say, if you're attracted to the kind of epistemic holism described above). I will argue that Incredulity has problems explaining the justification of certain beliefs, and so should be rejected.

We should start by introducing some key terms and concepts. For a belief to be justified, that belief must be properly based on that which propositionally justifies its content. Those bases of a belief by virtue of which the belief is properly based will be called the “epistemic bases” of that belief. The causes of a belief will be called the “psychological bases” of that belief.⁸ We can assume for our purposes that the basing relation is causal. (This assumption simplifies our discussion considerably but is ultimately unnecessary. The problems I raise for Incredulity remain on most or all main theories of the basing relation.) Given this assumption, all doxastically justified beliefs have some epistemic basis or bases among their psychological bases.

If there could be at least one doxastically justified belief that p with a seeming that p as its sole epistemic basis, then some seemings are non-derivative good reasons to believe their content. Thus, to establish the falsity of Incredulity I need only show that there could be a doxastically justified belief that p epistemically based (solely) on a seeming that p . This is easy enough. The epistemic bases of a belief must also be psychological bases.

⁸ The current argument is indifferent to any controversial causal theses.

With many obviously doxastically justified beliefs, seemings are the only plausible candidates from among the psychological bases to serve as epistemic bases. Consider the following cases:

Hallucination S feels exactly as though she is pressing her hand against a hard surface. It strongly seems to S that this object is hard. Her seeming immediately leads her to believe that this object is hard. Unfortunately, S isn't touching anything. S is hallucinating.

False Intuition It strongly seems to S that the Naïve Comprehension Axiom is true. This immediately leads her to believe it.

Faulty Memory It strongly seems to S that she paid her rent this month. This immediately leads her to believe that she paid her rent. S did not pay her rent.

Introspective Mistake S wakes up feeling hopeless. When S introspects, however, it seems to her that she is sad. This immediately leads her to believe that she is sad.

(For convenience, “*p*” will be ambiguous between the different contents S believes.) In each of these cases, S's belief is uncontroversially justified—at least in the sense of justification at play here. This means that one or more of the psychological bases of these beliefs need to be epistemic bases. Seemings, I will argue, are the only plausible candidates. Keep in mind, I only need one of these examples to work.

First of all, we can bracket out any psychological bases other than mental states. We can also immediately rule out any factive mental states such as knowledge of *p* since all of S's beliefs are false. In particular, acquaintance with *p* cannot be an epistemic base of S's belief that *p* since one can only be acquainted with what is true. Fumerton (sometimes) allows that acquaintance with a fact *very similar* to *p* can play the role of acquaintance with *p* in justifying *p*,⁹ but in Hallucination, False Intuition, and False

⁹ See Fumerton 1995, 77. Poston 2010 uses this to advance a dilemma for the acquaintance theory of non-inferential justification; Fumerton 2010 responds.

Memory there doesn't seem to be any fact sufficiently similar to *p* for that to be the case here.

We can also rule out acquaintance with the fact that it seems to S that *p* (or knowledge of this fact) as the epistemic basis of S's belief, for this acquaintance (or knowledge) state isn't even among the *psychological* bases of the belief. S does not reflect on the fact that *p* seems true before forming the belief that *p*. The seeming itself directly causes belief formation. This line of argument conceives of acquaintance as a kind of higher-order, reflective state. You might think instead that acquaintance with a conscious mental state is something that automatically comes with being conscious of that mental state.¹⁰ This view faces the same problem, however, since it's not the *consciousness* of the seeming that causes S to believe but the *seeming* of which S is conscious. Even if acquaintance with the fact that it seems to S that *p* were among the psychological bases of the belief that *p*, it still may not be a plausible *epistemic* base. Acquaintance theorists have traditionally thought that only acquaintance *with p itself* can non-inferentially justify belief in *p*; and most classic foundationalists today also require acquaintance with the correspondence between one's thought and the fact that *p*.¹¹

One alternative worth considering is that the sensations are the epistemic bases of belief. For instance, in Hallucination, you might think that the tactile sensations are the epistemic base rather than the seeming that they prompt. There are serious problems with this view. For one, the tactile sensations only seem capable of justifying that this object is hard when accompanied by background information about the circumstances in which such

¹⁰ See Bonjour in Bonjour and Sosa 2003, chapter 4.

¹¹ Fumerton 1995 and Bonjour in Bonjour and Sosa 2003.

sensations usually arise. While such background information is plausibly among the psychological causes of belief in a standard hallucination case, we can easily change the example such that S has no such background information. Say that S is comes into existence as a fully formed adult, like Adam and Eve. As she awakens, she feels tactile sensations and it seems to her that there exists some hard object. Alas, S is hallucinating and there is no hard object present. Not knowing this, S's seeming moves her to believe (perhaps only slightly) that there exists some hard object. It strikes me that this belief is justified, though this is more controversial than in the standard hallucination case.¹² The tactile sensations, however, are not plausible candidates for the epistemic base of S's belief. Apart from background information, these sensations cannot justify the proposition that there exists a hard object. The fact that such sensations are usually caused by a hard object isn't something known *a priori* but must be learned.¹³ This is why we can imagine, as Bergmann would have us, "cognizers like us in outward appearance who experience, upon grabbing a billiard ball, a sensation that is qualitatively of the same type as one of our actual world sensations of smell."¹⁴ Hence, S's sensations won't provide any reason to believe that there's a hard object until S learns of the connection between hard objects and her sensations.

¹² On a foundationalist picture, there must be *some* justification apart from background information in order to *get* background information in the first place; and the justification of basic perceptual beliefs is arguably as good a candidate for this as anything else.

¹³ This is one of Reid's key perceptual insights. See Reid 1997, particularly chapter 5.

¹⁴ Bergmann 2006, 119. See also the Grand Interworld Station in Lyons 2013, 14-15.

Moreover, some of the above examples—namely, False Intuition and Faulty Memory—do not even have sensations among their psychological causes. Sensations obviously don't provide an alternative epistemic base to seemings in those cases.

The only remaining candidates are seemings. It follows that some seemings propositionally justify their content. You might be tempted to think that seemings, like sensations, only provide justification when accompanied by the right sort of background information, in which case seemings are not *non-derivative* reasons for belief. But we can amend the above examples such that S's background information isn't among the psychological bases of belief or, as we did in the revised hallucination case, stipulate that S has no background information about her seemings. Some moderate degree of belief still seems justified in these circumstances.¹⁵ Thus, at least *some* seemings must provide non-derivative good reasons to believe their contents. Incredulity is false.

4.2 *Semi-Credulity about Seemings*

Credulity says that S is *always* permitted to believe *p* in the initial position. Incredulity says that S is *never* permitted to believe *p* in the initial position. Semi-Credulity takes the middle ground: sometimes S is permitted to believe and sometime S is not—depends on the seeming. This is, in effect, to say that some but not all seemings are non-derivative good reasons to believe their content. For convenience, let's call those seemings that are non-derivative good reasons “good seemings” and those that are not “bad seemings”. The semi-credulous should provide some criteria specifying which seemings

¹⁵ All that's needed, in fact, is for a higher credence to justified than previously allowed—even if that credence falls short of belief.

are good and which are bad.¹⁶ For instance, one form of Semi-Credulity, which we might call “Tainted-Source Semi-Credulity”, says that if S’s seeming is the result of bias, desire, wishful thinking, or some other disreputable source, then S is not permitted to believe *p* in the initial position; otherwise S is permitted to believe.¹⁷

It’s important to distinguish Semi-Credulity from a more moderate position in the vicinity. Assuming that S has some indication of her seeming’s suspect origins, both Semi-Credulity and Credulity agree that, *after leaving the initial position*, S will have no on balance reason to believe *p*. The crucial difference is that Credulity says S’s seeming gives her a reason to believe that is quickly countered by an undermining defeater, whereas Semi-Credulity says that the seeming gives S no reason to believe in the first place.

The most popular forms of Semi-Credulity are ruled out by phenomenalism, which I assumed and briefly defended in Chapter Two, §2-3. Phenomenalism says that all and only non-derivative good reasons share certain phenomenal properties. So if the phenomenology of two mental states is the same, then either both are non-derivative good reasons or neither is—they stand or fall together. Any form of Semi-Credulity that differentiates good and bad seemings based on something that isn’t reflected in the phenomenology of those mental states violates this principle. Consider Tainted-Source Semi-Credulity. The source of a seeming is not reflected in the phenomenology of that seeming: a seeming that *p* produced by desire feels no different from a seeming that *p* produced by the sound functioning of the mind. There may be phenomenology that

¹⁶ “Semi-Credulity” is my term, so you won’t find it in the literature, but there are many who endorse restricted versions of phenomenal conservatism where all and only seemings of a certain specified kind provide good reasons to believe their content (see, e.g., Brogaard 2013, Markie 2013, McGrath 2013, Steup 2013).

¹⁷ Someone convinced by the arguments in Siegel 2012 might favor this form of Semi-Credulity.

uniquely *accompanies* seemings produced by desires, but the seemings themselves share the same phenomenal properties. In short, any form of Semi-Credulity that allows for two phenomenally indistinguishable seemings to differ in their reason-giving status violates phenomenalism and is therefore rejected.

This verdict should be extremely intuitive—at least for someone with internalist inclinations. We can treat Tainted-Source Semi-Credulity as representative of these kinds of Semi-Credulity. Let's assume for a moment that S's seeming that *p* is caused by desire. In the initial position, S has absolutely no indication that this mental state is caused by desire since we've bracketed out all her evidence. From S's perspective, this seeming is no different from a seeming caused by proper mental functioning. Despite this, Tainted-Source Semi-Credulity claims that S is permitted to believe *p* in one case but not the other. This will strike many as false—especially internalists. So long as there is no difference from the first-person perspective between these two cases, there shouldn't be any difference in which stances S is permitted to take.

In fact, the same intuitions active in the evil demon cases should lead the internalist to reject Tainted-Source Semi-Credulity. S, let's say, has a counterpart, S*, who is a phenomenal duplicate of S. At *t_i*, it seems to both that *p*. S's seeming is produced by proper mental functioning but S*'s is produced by desire. For clarity, we can assume that there is no phenomenal difference between S and S*. Of course, even if there were, this information would be bracketed out in the initial position. Tainted-Source Semi-Credulity says that in the initial position, S and S* have different evidence and, accordingly, that S is permitted to believe *p* but not S*. This is no different than someone who claims that an evil demon victim and her phenomenal duplicate differ in their total bodies of evidence or

in what they are permitted to believe. Thus, those with internalist intuitions should be pleased that phenomenalism rules out these versions of Semi-Credulity.

Phenomenalism does not rule out all forms of Semi-Credulity, however. There may be a version of Semi-Credulity that differentiates good and bad seemings based on phenomenal differences between types of seemings. Clearly, though, these must be *epistemically relevant* phenomenal differences. In particular, there must be some difference between types of seemings with respect to the sorts of phenomenal properties belonging to all and only non-derivative good reasons. Otherwise, Semi-Credulity will still violate phenomenalism.

Unfortunately for the semi-credulous, there are no phenomenal differences between types of seemings that can justify treating some types differently from others in the initial position. Seemings are assertive mental states with propositional content. As such, seemings themselves have only two kinds of phenomenology: whatever phenomenology is involved in representing their content and their assertiveness. Neither of these justifies differentiating good and bad seemings as Semi-Credulity requires.

Let's begin with the phenomenology involved in representing a seeming's content. No seeming is, in principle, less suitable to base belief on than any other by virtue of what it represents. The "in principle" qualification is key. One can obviously gain evidence about the unreliability of seemings with certain kinds of content. Experience, for instance, has taught us that seemings with content about our past childhood are less reliable than perceptual seemings about the current position of the sun in the sky. Regardless, this makes no difference to how one acts in the initial position where all such evidence is bracketed out. Apart from such evidence, seemings about early childhood are no less fit to base belief

than seemings about the position of the sun. Neither are seemings about machines or plants or animals any less trustworthy, in principle, than seemings about numbers or goodness or geological formations. The mere fact that one seeming represents p and another q (where p and q are non-identical) does not, in and of itself, make one seeming any more or less appropriate to base belief. The upshot that the phenomenal qualities associated with the content of a seeming cannot justify the discrepancy in treatment recommended by Semi-Credulity.

Now the assertiveness of seemings *does* provide an in principle difference for treating seemings differently. Plausibly, a seeming with strong assertiveness might be fit to base a strong degree of belief in the initial position, while a seeming with weak assertiveness might be fit to base a weak degree of belief in the initial position. Though assertiveness provides a basis for trusting seemings to greater or lesser degrees, it can't serve as justification for *not* trusting some seemings at all. So differences in assertiveness won't justify Semi-Credulity.

This exhausts the phenomenology of seemings proper. Of course, we learn through experience that many seemings are accompanied by other kinds of phenomenology. Perceptual seemings, for instance, are typically paired with sensory phenomenology (though perhaps not always). This phenomenology can provide valuable information about the reliability of a seeming. For instance, if you have a perceptual seeming without any sensory phenomenology, as might happen in cases of blindsight,¹⁸ then you have reason to question the reliability of that seeming. But one cannot use this additional phenomenology justify Semi-Credulity since any evidence about the reliability of the seeming, including

¹⁸ See Tucker 2010.

whatever might be gleaned from this accompanying phenomenology (or lack thereof), is bracketed out in the initial position.

In short, Semi-Credulity requires that seemings differ in their reason-giving status despite their being no relevant phenomenal difference between them. Thus, phenomenalism and the internalist intuitions underlying it rule out all initially plausible forms of Semi-Credulity.

4.3 All Seemings are Non-Derivative Good Reasons

Credulity, Incredulity, or Semi-Credulity are logically exhaustive, so at least one of them true. Since the latter two are false, Credulity must be correct. Credulity says that *whenever* S is in the initial position, she is permitted to place some degree of belief in p . This suggests that all seemings—no matter how sordid their source or controversial their content—are non-derivative good reasons to believe their content. Of course, its seeming that p does not guarantee that you will gain any *on balance* reason to believe p since you might have an undermining defeater in waiting. Moreover, it may be that your on balance support for p prior to the seeming was well below .5, in which case your seeming may simply permit a slightly lesser degree of disbelief.

We saw above the seemings permit some degree of belief in the initial position because of their assertiveness. It makes sense, then, that the degree of belief one is permitted to place in p in the initial position would track the strength of the assertiveness. The stronger the seeming, the higher the degree of belief one is permitted to place in p . This may (or may not) be sufficient to serve as levering evidence in the initial position, where levering evidence “is sufficient enough to shift the rational credibility of a

hypothesis from one square state to another”—e.g. from withholding assent to flat out belief.¹⁹

Thus far I have spoken only of seemings-true, but everything I have said applies *mutatis mutandis* to seemings-false. Whenever S is in the initial position, if it seems to S that *p* is false, then S is permitted to place some degree of disbelief in *p*—the degree of disbelief being correlated with the assertiveness of the seeming. Thus, (A) is true: all seemings-true and seemings-false are non-derivative good reasons to believe or disbelieve their content, respectively.

§5 *All Non-Derivative Good Reasons Are Seemings*

We now turn to the second thesis of common sense epistemology, (B): that all non-derivative good reasons to believe or disbelieve are seemings. Before I defend this claim, we should review what it means.

First off, (B) does not prohibit propositions, beliefs, or other mental states from being good reasons, only *non-derivative* good reasons. A proposition or belief, for instance, can only justify if it is first justified. They cannot serve, therefore, as the justificatory foundations of our noetic structure. (B) claims that these foundational sources of justification are exclusively seemings. Inferences or support relations may pass along the justification originating from seemings to beliefs or propositions that pass it along to other beliefs and propositions in turn, but all non-inferential justification flows from a single fount: seemings.

¹⁹ Wykstra and Perrine 2012, 381–82.

When dealing with such sweeping matters one's arguments can hardly be conclusive, but there is good reason to accept that seemings alone constitute our ultimate reasons for believing or disbelieving anything. To defend this position, I will critique the main candidates for non-derivative reasons other than seemings.

One natural candidate for non-derivative reasons are acquaintance states. You might think along with Russell that being acquainted with the fact that p is a non-derivative good reason for believing p .²⁰ Or you might side with Fumerton in thinking that non-inferential justification for p requires not only acquaintance with p but also acquaintance with the thought that p and acquaintance with the correspondence between the thought and fact.²¹ Call this complex state “triple-acquaintance”.

Sensations are another natural candidate. Conee goes as far as suggesting that sensations can justify all of our perceptual beliefs without the help of seemings.²² There are substantial disputes about the nature of sensations. To remain (mostly) neutral about controversial debates within the philosophy of perception, I will run through the live options. I can then tailor my critiques to the particular understanding of sensations.

Sensations are those mental states with distinctively sensory phenomenology. The tang of a lemon, the scent of fresh coffee, the bite of a cold wind, the ring of a bell, and the flicker of a candle—or, more precisely, the distinct phenomenology associated with all of

²⁰ Russell 1912. At least this seems to be his view.

²¹ Fumerton 1995. Bonjour seems to endorse something equivalent in Bonjour and Sosa 2003, chapter 4.

²² Conee 2013, 66-67.

these things—belong to sensations. There are four main positions concerning the nature of sensations.

The first divide concerns whether sensations are *representational*—i.e. whether sensations are intentional states with content.²³ Within the representationalists, there are two positions:

Conceptualism Sensations represent their content conceptually.²⁴

Non-Conceptual Representationalism Sensations represent their content non-conceptually.²⁵

The disagreement between these camps has been characterized in different ways.²⁶ You might think that conceptualists and non-conceptualists disagree about the type of content belonging to sensations; conceptual content being a fundamentally different kind of content than non-conceptual content. Alternatively, you might think that there is only one kind of content at issue: namely, propositional content. The disagreement is instead over whether sensations represent their propositional content through the deployment of concepts (akin to how content is represented in beliefs) or through some non-conceptual means (akin to how content is represented in a picture). I will divide things in the latter way, as seems fairly standard nowadays.²⁷ “Conceptual content” will just mean propositional content

²³ For a recent defense, see Seigel 2010.

²⁴ See, e.g., McDowell 1994.

²⁵ See, e.g. Crane 1992, Dretske 1995, Evans 1982, Heck 2000, Huemer 2001, Peacocke 1992, Stalnaker 1998, Tye 1995.

²⁶ Heck 2000 brought this issue to the forefront.

²⁷ There are important advantages (that I won’t elaborate here) for preferring this set-up. Bermúdez and Cahen 2015, §3, summarizes some of the reasons.

represented through concepts, and “non-conceptual content” will just mean propositional content represented non-conceptually.

Those who think of sensations as non-representational fall into two camps:

Relationalism Sensations are states of acquaintance between persons, objects (including but not limited to external world objects like tables and chairs), and circumstances.²⁸

Reidianism Sensations are raw feels with no intensional objects distinct from themselves.²⁹

Further aspects of these theories will be clarified as the need arises.

We can group sensations, understood as relationalists would have it, with the acquaintance view leaving us a total of five candidates for non-derivative reasons other than seemings. For some proposition p , potential non-derivative reasons to believe p are:

- i. Reidian sensations.
- ii. Sensations with non-conceptual content p .
- iii. Sensations with conceptual content p .
- iv. Acquaintance with the fact that p .
- v. Triple-acquaintance with the fact that p , which consists in:
 - a. Acquaintance with the fact that p ;
 - b. Acquaintance with the thought that p ; and
 - c. Acquaintance with the correspondence between the thought that p and the fact that p .

I will argue that none of these alternatives can serve as non-derivative good reasons to believe p .

We can begin by dividing all of our options into two camps. My critiques will then coincide with this division: the first group faces one kind of problem; the second faces another. The division I want to make is between those states that involve the deployment

²⁸ See, e.g., Brewer 2011, Campbell 2002b, Fish 2009.

²⁹ Reid 2002a, 36. Though I have grouped the Reidian view in the non-representational camp, it may be more proper to say only that sensations don't represent anything beyond themselves.

of concepts and those that don't. Allow me to clarify what I mean by "concepts" before proceeding, as this will be important for our discussion.

As is most common in debates about conceptual vs. non-conceptual content, I will use "concepts" in what Bryne calls the "Fregean sense (pun intended)" (2005, 231). On this view, concepts are understood to be constituents of Fregean Thoughts (the Fregean senses of well-formed sentences). You can think of these Thoughts as guises (or modes of presentation).³⁰ In propositional attitudes like beliefs, hopes, and thoughts, the subject grasps some propositional content by standing in a certain relation to a guise that expresses that proposition. A mental state whose content is grasped under a guise—i.e. through the deployment of concepts—will be considered a "conceptual mental state" or one that "involves concepts."

Two of our five candidates involve concepts. Sensations with conceptual content is the first and most obvious; the second is triple-acquaintance. While acquaintance is itself a non-conceptual state, triple-acquaintance gets grouped into the conceptual camp because it requires acquaintance with a *thought*, and thoughts are conceptual states. The other options don't involve concepts at any point. I'll begin by critiquing those in the conceptual camp. I then turn to the non-conceptual camp.

5.1 Triple-Acquaintance

We can begin with triple-acquaintance. We should start by envisioning what triple-acquaintance is supposed to feel like—particularly what it is like to be acquainted with the correspondence between the thought and fact. Here's the only sense I can make of it. When

³⁰ Salmon 1986.

I am acquainted with a pain and I think *I am in pain*, this doesn't feel like an idle thought with no connection to my current situation; it feels as though the content of this thought is accurately representing the way things are. In other words, its content feels *true*. This feeling of truth is, in this instance, what it feels like to be acquainted with the correspondence between a fact and the content of a thought. If we take this route, though, then whenever one is triple-acquainted with *p* it also *seems* to one that *p*. For seemings are just thoughts whose content feels true. In these cases, its seemings that *p* will be constituted by the thought and acquaintance with the correspondence between that thought and the fact that *p*.³¹

So take any instance in which S is triple-acquainted with *p* and has non-inferential justification for believing *p*. S's justification is already accounted for by the fact that it seems to S that *p*, since triple-acquaintance includes a seeming and seemings provide justification. It provides no explanatory advantage, then, to posit an additional source of justification in the triple-acquaintance state. If anything, there is reason to think that the only epistemically relevant aspects of triple-acquaintance are those that constitute the seeming. Consider Fumerton's concession that one can have non-inferential justification for believing *p* apart from triple-acquaintance with *p*:

[O]ne can have noninferential justification for believing that P when P is false (and thus when there is no fact that P), but where one is directly acquainted with a fact "very similar" to P and a relation between the thought that P and the fact that P that is "very similar" to correspondence. (2010, 380)

Even Fumerton seems compelled to admit that the active ingredient in justifying *p* isn't that one is triple-acquainted with *p per se* but that someone is in an internal state that *feels*

³¹ As we saw in Chapter Four, §2.1, the fact that a seeming is constituted by another mental state in a particular instance does not mean that the seeming is numerically identical to that state or reducible to it.

like they are triple-acquainted with *p*. This comes awfully close to conceding that what's really providing non-inferential justification is the seeming state. Even if Fumerton resists this last step, we should not.

5.2 *Sensations with Conceptual Content*

Let's move on to sensations according to conceptualists. To be blunt, I think Conceptualism is implausible. There are, I think, fairly conclusive objection already in the literature—though some still resist. I will mention, but not rehearse, some of these arguments here.

First, there is information contained in sensory states that surpasses whatever thoughts with conceptual content we may have.³² For instance, sensations may represent a hen as having exactly forty-eight speckles but one has no conceptual state more precise than that there is a many-speckled hen. Second, the Fineness of Grain objection argues that we do not even possess concepts fine-grained enough to represent all the subtleties of sensation.³³ For example, we do not have a concept for every precise shape represented in sensation. Third, infants and animals are capable of having the same sensations we do though they lack sophisticated conceptual abilities.³⁴ Conceptualists have much to say in response to these and other objections, but there's no need to take a stand here. If conceptualism is true, it poses no obstacle to my position.

Assume Conceptualism. If the above objections are misguided, then my arguments in Chapter Four, §4, for the distinction between seemings and sensations would probably

³² Dretske 1981 and Martin 1992.

³³ Evans 1982, Peacocke 1992, and Tye 1995.

³⁴ Bermúdez 1998, Evans 1982, Peacocke 2001a, 2001b.

be misguided as well. Sensations would be types of thoughts. They wouldn't feel like mere musings, of course, but would feel as though their content is actually representing the way things are. In other words, sensations would be seemings.³⁵

So given Conceptualism, sensations would be non-derivative good reasons to believe their content, but this is no threat to the position that all such reasons are seemings.

5.3 Reidian Sensations

Given the conception of justification at use here, few if any think that sensations (conceived as raw feels with no content) are non-derivative good reasons for belief.³⁶ Given that sensations have no content, there won't be any *a priori* connection between *those* sensations and any particular content (except perhaps the content that those sensations exist, which we'll discuss in a moment). We might learn that certain kinds of sensations are correlated with certain kinds of content, in which case those sensations may become good reasons to believe that content, but this only serves to make sensations *derivative* reasons to believe.

This line of thought shows why Reidian sensations cannot be non-derivative reasons for content about, say, the external world, but why can't a Reidian sensation be a non-derivative reason for believing that you *have* that sensation? In some ways this is a fairly odd position. It is more common to think that *acquaintance* with a sensation, or some other form of awareness of it, provides the subject with non-inferential justification rather than the sensation itself; and for good reason. We can imagine a merely sentient being with no awareness of its own mental states. Perhaps sea cucumbers fit this description. They

³⁵ This may, in fact, be how Huemer 2001 thinks of seemings, though it's not clear.

³⁶ Those who are favorable to this view will generally be externalists.

have primitive nervous systems that are sensitive to physical contact and light but no brain. Let's imagine that the sea cucumber has a feeling a little like being submerged in water but has no reflective awareness that it feels this way. The natural thing to say, it seems, is that the sea cucumber doesn't have any justification for believing that it has this sensation. You might argue that the situation I've described is impossible: you can't have a sensation without also being acquainted with that sensation.³⁷ If that's true, then we should be asking whether the *acquaintance state* is a non-derivative reason for believing that we have this sensation—which we'll do in the next section.

Reidian sensations, then, aren't non-derivative reasons to believe anything.

5.4 *Acquaintance/Non-Conceptual Sensations*

The remaining candidates are acquaintance states and sensations with non-conceptual content. I will treat these together. I offer two main criticisms: one based on counterexamples and the other stemming from more theoretical considerations.

There are many cases where one is acquainted with the fact that p ("acquainted with p ") or has sensations that non-conceptually represent p and has justification for believing p . Most of these are not helpful, however, since it will usually seem the one that p in these same cases. The justification may just be due to the seeming. What we need are cases where one is acquainted with p or non-conceptually represents p but it doesn't seem that p . Then we can isolate the effects of the acquaintance state/sensations.

The classic speckled hen example provides one such case.³⁸ When you look at the hen, you are either non-conceptually representing that there's a hen with forty-eight

³⁷ Bonjour in Bonjour and Sosa 2003, chapter 4, seems to make something like this move.

³⁸ See Chisholm 1942.

speckles or acquainted with the fact that there's a hen with forty-eight speckles (depending on your view of sensations), but it does not seem to you that there is a hen with forty-eight speckles.³⁹ It is widely agreed that the non-savant does not have justification for believing that there is a hen with forty-eight speckles. This shows that non-conceptually representing p or being acquainted with p does not, in itself, provide justification for believing p . Hence, these states are not non-derivative reasons to believe p .

Acquaintance theorists might reject the above example, insisting that we cannot genuinely be acquainted with the fact that there's a hen with forty-eight speckles.⁴⁰ Indeed, acquaintance is traditionally reserved for facts about the contents of one's own mind and perhaps universals. This won't solve the problem, however, since we can slightly change the example with the same results. Your sensation of the hen is a mental state with which you are acquainted. This sensation has a property that we might call "being forty-eight-speckled," meaning that the "mental image" of the hen has forty-eight discrete patches of black separated by shades of white. So you are acquainted with the fact that you possess a forty-eight-speckled sensation. Nonetheless, you do not have justification for believing that you have a forty-eight-speckled sensation.

Most classical foundationalists acknowledge this.⁴¹ This is why they insist that justification requires not only that you be acquainted with a fact but also that you directly apprehend the correspondence between this fact and one of your thoughts. Since you cannot directly see the correspondence between the thought *I have a forty-eight-speckled*

³⁹ Tucker 2010, §3, proposes this analysis of the situation.

⁴⁰ Notice that the same maneuver can't be made for sensations with non-conceptual content. Hens are precisely the sorts of things our sensations are supposed to represent.

⁴¹ E.g. Bonjour and Sosa 2003, 190-92, and Fumerton 1995, 75.

sensation and the fact that you have such a sensation, you do not have justification for believing that content. In other words, acquaintance with *p* isn't enough to justify belief that *p*: you must be *triple*-acquainted with *p*. But as I argued in §5.1, whenever you are triple-acquainted with *p* it will seem to you that *p*, and the best explanation is that the seeming (rather than the triple-acquaintance state *per se*) is doing the justificatory work.

You might think that being acquainted with *p* should at least get you justification for believing that you feel *thusly*, where “thusly” is a demonstrative concept that refers directly to your sensation. I agree that you are in a position to get such justification but it will first require forming the thought *I feel thusly* and fixing the referent of “thusly”. To do this, you will need to direct your attention to your sensation and mentally ostend towards the sensation while deploying the concept “thusly”, or something along those lines. In so doing, you are acquainted with the fact that you feel a certain way, you are acquainted with the thought that you feel thusly, and you are acquainted with the correspondence between your thought and the fact. You are thus *triple*-acquainted with the fact that you feel that way, and as just stated, this will include it's seeming to you that you feel that way. Therefore, there is no threat to my position here.

We need not rest on counterexamples alone. I can also provide a principled explanation for why non-conceptual mental states, like acquaintance states or non-conceptual sensations, cannot be non-derivative reasons. The explanation relies on controversial but well-motivated theses about the metaphysics of belief—one that has already been gestured at above. Fregean puzzles alert us to the fact that the cognitive significance of one's belief content exceeds its propositional content. For instance, on a Russellian view of propositions, the belief that Superman is Superman and the belief that

Clark Kent is Superman have the same propositional content; yet it is tempting to say that Lois Lane believes the former but not the latter. Salmon solves this puzzle by positing that the belief relation has three places: the subject, the proposition believed, and the guise under which the proposition is believed.⁴² Guises are sentence-like mental representations composed of concepts that express propositions. You believe a proposition by standing in the right relation to a guise that expresses that proposition. This explains the infelicity of saying that Lois believes Clark Kent is Superman. While Lois believes that proposition under the guise [Superman is Superman], she does not believe it under the guise [Clark Kent is Superman].

The cognitive significance of belief content tracks the guise rather than the proposition. You can believe the same proposition under different guises without realizing that this is case. Ancient astronomers, for instance, believed that the object identical to the morning and evening star is a star, but they believed this under two guises: [Hesperus is a star] and [Phosphorus is a star]. The cognitive significance of these beliefs was different even though they shared the same propositional content. Flipping things around, two individuals can have beliefs with the same cognitive significance but different propositional content. John of Earth and John of Twin Earth both believe under the guise [the ocean is full of water], and these beliefs have the same cognitive significance for them, despite the fact that they believe distinct propositions.

Once we see that the cognitive significance of a belief is derived from its guise, we should conclude that we do not have justification for believing a (Russellian) proposition

⁴² Salmon 1986.

per se but for believing *under a particular guise*.⁴³ Lois, for instance, is justified in believing under the guise [Superman is Superman] but not under the guise [Clark Kent is Superman]. Were she to learn that these guises express the same proposition, then her justification for believing under [Superman is Superman] could be passed along to the guise [Clark Kent is Superman]. (Instead of saying “believing under the guise [P]” I’ll just say “believing [P].” This will make things a lot less clunky.)

Another key upshot is that we have to discover whether or not two guises express the same proposition. As we just saw, Lois cannot know *a priori* that [Superman is Superman] and [Clark Kent is Superman] express the same proposition. A possible exception would be when there is a relation between the concepts used in various guises (such as one being “contained” within the other) that guarantees the identity of the propositions expressed by those guises. But for the most part, we have to learn which guises express which propositions.

Let’s put these insights to work. Say Lois is acquainted with *p* or non-conceptually represents *p*, where *p* is the structured proposition whose constituents are the person identical to Superman and Clark Kent and the property of flying. In neither case is *p* presented under a particular guise. Acquaintance is a direct relation to the proposition itself,⁴⁴ and non-conceptual representation is, well, non-conceptual. What guise, then, is Lois supposed to get immediate justification for believing under? She certainly doesn’t

⁴³ See Gierson 2002, 48. We face serious problems if we deny this. We would have to say, for instance, that Lois would be justified were she to form a belief under the guise [Clark Kent is Superman]. There are ways you might try to avoid this by tinkering with the proper basing requirement, but not all problems can be handled in this way.

⁴⁴ Fumerton 1995, 74. Fumerton is clear that acquaintance doesn’t involve guises. He explains, “One can be acquainted with a property or fact without even possessing the conceptual resources to *represent* that fact in thought” (74).

have justification for believing [Clark Kent is flying]. She has no clue that the proposition she's acquainted with/non-conceptually representing is expressed by that guise. Lois may get justification for believing [Superman is flying] but only if she is able to *recognize* that this guise expresses the proposition she's acquainted with/non-conceptually representing, and this requires a wealth of background information about what it feels like to be acquainted with/non-conceptually represent *p*. Others with less information might, for example, think that they're acquainted with/non-conceptually representing a bird or a plane. So her acquaintance state/sensation can only be a *derivative* reason for believing [Superman is flying] or [Clark Kent is flying].

Here's the central point to take from the above example. Being acquainted with/non-conceptually representing *p* cannot be a non-derivative reason for believing under a guise except (perhaps) when it is knowable *a priori* that that guise expresses *p*. Otherwise one needs to have evidence that the proposition she's acquainted with/non-conceptually representing is expressed by that guise—making her acquaintance state/sensation a derivative reason. But there are almost no guises that Lois can know will express *p a priori*. The only plausible exception is the guise [*that thing exemplifies that property*], which will be discussed just below. Thus, Lois's acquaintance state/sensation can only be a derivative reason for believing under nearly all guises.⁴⁵

What of the guise [*that thing exemplifies that property*]? It may be *a priori* knowable that, when acquainted with *p*/non-conceptually representing *p*, deploying this guise in the right way will express *p*, but this will be no obstacle to my position. As we saw earlier in this section, fixing the referent of demonstrative concepts requires that she

⁴⁵ Notice that seemings won't run into any such problems since seemings are conceptual states—meaning that their content already comes presented to the subject under a particular guise.

attend to the correspondence between her thought and the fact with which she's acquainted/representing. Her thought will thereby feel as though it is revealing the way things really are—i.e. its content will feel true. Thus, whenever Lois forms a thought under this guise, it will seem to her that p . This seeming will then justify p , leaving no explanatory work for the acquaintance state or sensation. In any case, we don't have an instance of non-inferential justification apart from seemings.

To review, you are justified in believing under particular guises. Before acquaintance with p or sensations non-conceptually representing p can be reasons for believing under some guise, you must be in a position to appreciate that this guise expresses p . In almost all cases, it will not be knowable *a priori* whether some guise expresses p . Thus, the acquaintance state/sensation can only justify belief in p when you have the appropriate background information. In which case the acquaintance state/sensation is at most a derivative reason to believe. The only possible exception is when you use a guise with demonstrative concepts to refer to p , but this involves your thinking p and being acquainted with the correspondence between your thought and p , which is sufficient for it to seem to you that p . Thus, whenever there is a non-derivative reason to believe p , there is a seeming that p . In contrast, when one is acquainted with p or non-conceptually represents p , but it doesn't seem that p , there is no non-derivative reason to believe. This strongly suggests that seemings, rather than acquaintance or sensations, are doing all the non-inferential justificatory work.

5.5 The Upshot

For this entire investigation we've repeatedly seen the same results: whenever it seems that p one has a non-derivative reason to believe p ; when it doesn't seem that p one

has, at most, a derivative reason to believe p . There's a simple explanation here. Seemings are the only non-derivative reasons to believe. To resist this conclusion, one would need to provide some case in which a subject has a non-derivative reason to believe p but it doesn't seem that p . So far we've been unable to find any such case and we've exhausted all of the major candidates. Until a plausible alternative arises, we can conclude that (B) is true: all of our non-derivative reasons to believe (or disbelieve) are seemings.

If you remain unconvinced, consider that I can easily fall back from (B) to something like the following while still making substantial progress in addressing our guiding question:

(B*) For significant domains of belief, seemings are the predominant kind of non-derivative good reason justifying our beliefs and disbeliefs.

Say, for instance, that I am wrong and acquaintance with the fact that you feel a certain way is a non-derivative reason for believing that you feel that way. You might be skeptical, as many are, that we can leverage this into justification for believing in the existence of the external world, or in the existence of other minds, or the regularity of nature, etc. Seemings, then, could still play the predominant role in justifying our beliefs about the external world, other minds, the regularity of nature, etc. There might be a sort of division of labor: acquaintance justifying beliefs about one's own mental states; seemings justifying beliefs about everything else. A retreat to (B*) is not necessary but having the option puts the overall project in a more secure position.

§6 Conclusion

This concludes my argument for common sense epistemology. To recap, I have provided reasons to believe each of the following theses:

- (A) All seemings are non-derivative good reasons to believe or disbelieve their content.
- (B) All of our non-derivative good reasons to believe or disbelieve are seemings.

Before moving on, we should pause to consider the significance of these conclusions. Common sense epistemology provides a partial resolution to our guiding question. You are permitted to believe whatever your total body of seemings supports and nothing else. More generally, any stance you take should be in accordance with what seems to you to be the case. While there is still much work to be done in theoretically reconstructing our noetic structures, we have discovered its foundations.

CHAPTER SIX

The Problem of Cognitive Penetration

§1 Introduction

In the previous chapter I presented an argument for common sense epistemology. A crucial step in that argument was the rejection of Semi-Credulity (Chapter Five, §4.2). Semi-Credulity entails that some but not all seemings are non-derivative good reasons to believe. This is a mainstream position.¹ One of its most prominent motivations is that, intuitively, seemings originating from cognitive penetration by desires, biases, or other “tainted sources” aren’t good reason to believe their content.² If the well is poisoned, so is anything you draw from it. Such intuitions are typically pumped through thought experiments. These intuitions are the basis for what I am calling “the Problem of Cognitive Penetration”, which is an influential objection to phenomenal conservatism and common sense epistemology.³

When this objection first arose in Chapter Five, I noted that it comes into direct conflict with phenomenalism—one of my starting assumptions (see Chapter Two, §2-3). To see the conflict, note that a seeming caused by desires or biases might feel exactly the same from the first person perspective as a seeming caused by expertise—i.e. they can have the same phenomenal properties. Phenomenalism thus dictates that either both or neither

¹ Brogaard 2013, Markie 2013, McGrath 2013, and Steup 2013, for example, all endorse restricted versions of phenomenal conservatism.

² See in particular Markie 2005, 2013, McGrath 2013, Siegel 2012.

³ Tucker 2013 calls this the *Tainted Source Objection*.

can be evidence for their content. Those who push the Problem of Cognitive Penetration want one to be evidence but not the other.

In maintaining that phenomenally indistinguishable mental states can have different evidential values, the objectors place themselves in direct opposition to the most central internalist intuitions. Say *S* has a seeming that *p* produced by expertise while *S** has a phenomenally indistinguishable seeming that *p* produced by desire. The objector contends that *S* and *S** have different evidence even though everything is the same from the first-person perspective. This is a staunchly externalist position. Since this project is undertaken from an internalist framework, it would not be amiss for me to simply dismiss this objection—especially given that aims of the project remain important even if my internalist assumptions are false (see Chapter Two, §4).

I contented myself with this strategy in Chapter Five since a fuller treatment would have been too large of a digression, but I will take the present opportunity to address the objection from a more neutral standpoint. I maintain that when examples are appropriately clarified, many people's natural intuitions will align with phenomenalism and common sense epistemology rather than its objectors. In doing so I waylay a major objection to my starting assumptions and ultimately strengthen my argument for common sense epistemology.

To remain consonant with the literature, I will discuss this in terms of phenomenal conservatism (PC) rather than common sense epistemology.

§2 *The Gold-Digger*

Cognitive penetration occurs when some mental state (usually a propositional attitude like a belief or desire) influences the way in which a subject experiences a situation.

For example, Siegel notes that, “When you know that bananas are yellow, this knowledge affects what color you see bananas to be (an achromatic banana will appear yellowish)” (2012, 201).⁴ Here one’s knowledge about bananas causes or brings about one’s perceptual seeming, and it does so in a particular way. The penetrating state operates in such a way that, were we to remove one’s knowledge of bananas while holding all else constant, then it would no longer seem that the banana is yellowish. This will be true of most cases of cognitive penetration. Were the subject to lack the penetrating mental state, then things would not seem to the subject as they do.⁵

Cognitive penetration, by itself, poses no problem for common sense epistemology. Knowledge about the identifying features of tree species may penetrate an arborist’s experience such that it seems to her that there is a pecan tree when, for someone with less expertise, it would only seem that there is a tree. No red flags yet. The supposed problems arise when we look at cases in which less reputable mental states like desires, hopes, emotions, unjustified beliefs, etc., penetrate one’s experience. It is thought that the seemings originating from these disreputable sources cannot provide evidence for their content—a position motivated by thought experiments.

There are many cases in the literature. The two most prominent are Siegel’s Angry Jack case⁶ and Markie’s gold-digger case.⁷ For convenience, I’ll limit my discussion to the

⁴ Siegel cites Gegenfurtner, et al 2006 and Goldstone 1995 here.

⁵ See Siegel 2012, 206. This can’t serve as the *definition* of a penetrating mental state, of course. There are obvious counterexamples (of the sort that plague all counterfactual definitions). But these counterexamples don’t prevent this counterfactual claim from being helpful in gaining an understanding of how penetrating states operate.

⁶ Siegel 2012, 209.

⁷ Markie 2005, 2013.

gold-digger case and treat this as representative of the problem of cognitive penetration more broadly.

Gold-Digger

Virgil [is a gold prospector.] ... Virgil is a novice. He has a general sense of what gold looks like, but he is not very good at its visual identification. Virgil, though, is consumed by a lust for gold. He wants very, very badly to make a discovery. ... When Virgil looks at his nugget, his strong desire that it be gold comes into play and as a result, it just seems to him that it's gold. He ... believes accordingly. (Markie 2013, 257)

McGrath suggests we understand this as a case of “free enrichment”.⁸ It first seems to Virgil that the nugget is yellowish and then it further seems to him that the nugget is gold—his initial seeming is “enriched” with additional content. The problem is that Virgil’s *desire* brings about this enrichment. Because the seeming originates from desire, many have the strong sense that Virgil lacks justification for believing that the nugget is gold (call this proposition *g*).

There’s a complication here that should be immediately addressed. These examples have typically been directed at formulations of phenomenal conservatism that assign *prima facie* justification to anything that seems true. The most prominent of such formulations is from Huemer (2007, 30):

*PC*** If it seems to S that *p*, then, in the absence of defeaters, S thereby has at least some degree of justification for believing that *p*.

The intuition that Virgil is not justified in believing *g* (even slightly) is supposed to be in tension with such formulations.⁹ The formulation I endorse, however, says only the following:

PC_E If it seems true to S that *p*, then S thereby has some evidence for *p*.

⁸ McGrath 2013, 235.

⁹ The implicit assumption here (which I will soon contest) is that Virgil doesn’t have any defeaters for his seeming.

PC comes apart from formulations like PC** in cases where the prior probability of p is low. For PC** guarantees, absent defeaters, that the seeming permits one to believe p , while PC only commits, absent defeaters, that the subject is permitted to place a higher credence in p than previously allowed—one that still might fall short of being a degree of belief. The complication is that Gold-Digger is just such a case. Given the general rarity of gold, the prior probability of g is very low. So for Gold-Digger to be even a *surface* problem for PC, we need more than that intuition that Virgil lacks justification *for believing* g . We need the intuition that Virgil isn't justified in placing any higher credence in g than he was before.

So instead of saying that Virgil believes he's found gold, let's only say that he raises his credence that he's found gold. This makes a major difference to our intuitive assessments of the case. For it seems far more plausible that Virgil be justified in slightly increasing his confidence in g (say from .01 to .1) than that he be justified in outright believing g . Some, however, may still intuit that Virgil's newfound confidence is unjustified (though, I suspect, noticeably fewer than before).

There are two interrelated problems for PC raised by this example. The first is that, for some, it seems that Virgil doesn't have justification for raising his credence in g , but PC ostensibly predicts otherwise. The second is that, for some, it seems that Virgil's seeming provides no evidence for g at all. The first problem can be addressed using what Markie (2013) calls "the defeasibility approach". The defender of PC could argue that Virgil has defeaters that defeat any prima facie justification Virgil has for a higher credence in g . The net result is that Virgil lacks justification for raising his credence in g on PC. The defeasibility approach does not address the second problem. Noting that Virgil has

defeaters won't answer someone who is convinced that Virgil's seeming can't provide any evidence for *g* even in the absence of those defeaters.

My response to these objections will proceed as follows. I'll use the defeasibility approach to address the first worry. In the current gold-digger case, Virgil has a number of defeaters that would defeat any evidence provided by his seeming. To respond to the second objection—that Virgil's seeming can't provide even *prima facie* justification for a higher credence—we'll need to look at a different situation in which Virgil lacks any defeaters. This will put us in the best position to assess the matter. If it seems that Virgil lacks justification for increasing his credence in this new case, then this is evidence against PC. When the details of the case are appropriately fleshed out, however, it doesn't seem that Virgil lacks such justification (or it won't seem this way to many).

§3 *What about Gus?*

The original gold-digger case, as presented by Markie, also includes a character called Gus. Through considerable experience and training, Gus gains the ability to recognize gold with an extremely high degree of reliability. Gus is in similar circumstances to Virgil, except Gus's expertise brings about his gold-seeming, not his lust for gold. Markie then compares Virgil's belief to Gus's, noting the discrepancy. I have chosen to leave Gus out of the discussion. To show that this is not slight of hand, allow me to justify the subtraction. The discussion will also illustrate more generally how ostensible counterexamples can be misleading.

Bringing Gus into the story creates room for confusion and might even stack the deck against PC. The main problem is that it makes us fixate on the differences between Virgil and Gus more than the justificatory status of *g* for Virgil, which is what's really at

issue. Clearly, Gus is in a superior epistemic position to Virgil, but does this discrepancy consist in Gus having justification for increasing his credence in *g* and Virgil lacking it? It's tough to tell. It may be that Gus has warrant—the quality that, when added to true belief, yields knowledge¹⁰—for *g* while Virgil does not.¹¹ It may be that Virgil is displaying epistemic vice while Gus displays epistemic virtue, or that their doxastic stances are viciously or virtuously formed, respectively. It may be a combination of these things. Why create an opportunity to conflate these epistemic assessments?

Markie (2013, 259-60) suggests that we might try to avoid confusion on these fronts by making radical changes to the scenario. He suggests that we put Gus and Virgil in an evil demon world so both lack knowledge or change the design plan of Virgil's faculties such that desires are supposed to enrich seemings and do so reliably. Making these changes, especially the second one, alters things dramatically. If we put Virgil in a world where desires, by design, reliably produce beliefs, then he would presumably have a strong track record of success supporting desire-based seemings. In which case does it still seem that Virgil lacks justification when there's cognitive penetration by a desire? The point is that making such changes creates far more opportunity for confusion than simply removing Gus from the example.

¹⁰ See Plantinga 1993a, chapter 1.

¹¹ Markie 2013, 259, argues that we can't explain the difference between Gus and Virgil by saying that Gus knows *g* while Virgil does not since we could run the same thought experiment in an evil demon world. Markie is right, but this doesn't undercut the possibility that the difference between Gus and Virgil consists (at least in part) by saying that Gus has *warrant* for *g* while Virgil does not, or that Gus meets some further conditions for having warrant (e.g. Gus's belief is produced through epistemic virtue or proper functioning faculties, or would be reliable or safe in our world) that Virgil does not satisfy.

Whether we include Gus or not, we still have to look at Virgil, all by himself, and assess whether he has any justification for placing a higher credence in *g*. Adding Gus into the mix doesn't help us in this assessment and may very well muddy the waters.

§4 The Defeasibility Approach

With that clarification, let us turn our attention towards Virgil. Many important details are left out of the case as described above. This is true of all thought experiments, of course. We cannot describe every detail that might be relevant to one's assessment. Instead we trust the reader to fill in important details as to what a "normal" situation fitting the details provided would be like. Our intuitions about Virgil are thus based on the assumption that Virgil is a normal human being.

Of course, the entire notion of a "normal human being" is problematic. Does the normal human being have a high school education? Is the normal human an adult or a child? What culture is the normal human raised in? Is he/she male or female? Clearly a statistical survey won't answer these questions. Thankfully these issues can be bypassed. What matters for our purposes is what those reading and writing on these topics naturally *think of* as the normal human being, as evidenced by how they fill in the gaps of thoughts experiments like our Gold-Digger case.

I haven't conducted any surveys, but I suspect that most readers will think of Virgil as being of sane mind, average intelligence, and privilege to the same wealth of experience about how the world operates that we enjoy. So let us dwell for a moment on what defeaters a normal person like Virgil would have in his situation.

First of all, a normal human being like Virgil knows as we do that desires, especially strong ones, are apt to mislead. In oneself and others, the normal adult has seen numerous

situations in which desire clouded one's judgment and skewed one's perspective. Thus, when Virgil feels the desire for gold welling up in himself, inclining him to believe that he has struck gold, he has reason to be wary of his seeming. Note that Virgil need not be consciously entertaining any of the above defeaters; they need only be in his background evidence. The existence of these defeaters should significantly diminish any justification provided by his seeming until he has the opportunity for extended examination.

Second, I, like Virgil, am a novice at identifying gold. I know that I can't reliably spot the difference between gold and fool's gold at a glance. (Let's use "fool's gold" to refer not just to pyrite but to any gold-looking substance other than gold.) Yellow rocks look pretty darn similar to specs of gold in a pan full of river sediment. Even given a careful and considered look at the substance, I may only be fairly reliable at telling the difference. Thus, prior to an extended inspection of the golden substance, I have a strong undercutting defeater for any gold-seeming. Even after careful consideration, I would still have reason to be cautious. Virgil, as a normal human being and fellow gold novice, would have this same defeater. Now in the gold-digger case, there is no mention of any extended consideration. The natural way of reading the case is that Virgil looks down into his gold pan (or whatever he's using), sees a yellow rock, it seems to him that it's gold, and he immediately forms a belief that it's gold. So in the gold-digger case, Virgil has a strong defeater that would prevent him from rationally increasing his credence in *g*.

The presence of these defeaters often goes unacknowledged by those that push the gold-digger case.¹² This is a problem that extends to all of the examples motivating the

¹² McGrath says of Virgil that, apparently, "the subject lacks defeaters, even unconscious ones" (2013, 233). Markie only acknowledges the first defeater (2013, 258).

problem of cognitive penetration that I've encountered. Because of these defeaters, PC does not predict that Virgil is rational in increasing his credence in g ,¹³ at least not if we think of Virgil as a normal human in normal circumstances. With this we can dismiss the first objection to PC.

§5 *The Revised Gold-Digger*

To address the second objection—that, intuitively, Virgil doesn't even get *prima facie* justification for raising his credence in g —we must look at a situation in which Virgil lacks the aforementioned defeaters. This requires significant amendments to the gold-digger case. We can rid Virgil of defeaters in two ways. The first option is to remove from Virgil any indication that desires are misleading or that he can't, at a glance, reliably distinguish gold from fool's gold. The problem is that the resulting situation is nearly impossible for us to imagine. How could one be a functioning adult and genuinely have *no clue* that desires mislead? Has he never encountered desires before? It seems he would have to lack even the most basic understanding what desires are and how they work. Even harder to conceive is that Virgil doesn't have any evidence that he can't reliably discern gold from fool's gold. To lack all evidence for this it seems Virgil would need to lack any evidence that similar looking things are hard to tell apart. Once we start removing evidence for things that basic we've thrust Virgil into a truly extreme and convoluted epistemic situation. It's simply not clear what evidence Virgil would and wouldn't have. I don't think we can trust our intuitions in these sorts of cases. It's too easy to underappreciate just how extreme Virgil's situation must be to genuinely remove *any* indication whatsoever

¹³ It may be that these are only partial defeaters such that Virgil is only permitted to raise his credence by the slightest degree (say from .01 to .05), but the lesser the increase the less counterintuitive it becomes.

that his seeming is unreliable. And if we do underappreciate this fact, then our intuitions will be based on faulty information.

Thankfully there is a second option. The first defeater mentioned was that, *other things being equal*, one is apt to be misled when you strongly desire something to be true. Let us imagine, then, that Virgil recognizes the danger posed by his lust for gold and tries hard to avoid any undue influence on the part of these desires. Let us further add that Virgil has been very successful in remaining objective in the past. Accordingly, Virgil lacks significant reason to think that his desires might be responsible for his seeming. The second defeater mentioned was that, as a novice, Virgil has reason to doubt his ability to distinguish gold from fool's gold *at a glance*. Let us stipulate, then, that Virgil picks up the nugget and gives it a thorough and concentrated examination. He knows he's fairly reliable in discerning gold from fool's gold after a thorough examination of this sort. These changes effectively remove Virgil's defeaters without placing Virgil in an extreme or convoluted epistemic situation. It is fair to say that, in these revised circumstances, PC says that Virgil is permitted to increase his credence in *g*.

So let's look at the revised case from the beginning to refresh our intuitive assessments.

Revised Gold-Digger

Virgil is a gold prospector. Virgil is a novice, but with a thorough and concentrated inspection of a golden substance, he is fairly reliable at discerning gold from fool's gold. Alas, Virgil "is consumed with a lust for gold. He wants very, very badly to make a discovery." Eventually Virgil finds a yellow nugget while panning. He picks up the nugget and gives it a thorough and extended examination. He can feel the desire for gold welling up in him, but he works hard to remain objective—something he has been quite successful at in the past. Despite his considerable efforts, his desire gets the best of him (though Virgil has no indication that this is

the case). “As a result, it just seems to him that it’s gold.” Virgil thereby becomes more confident that he’s found gold.¹⁴

When I reflect on this case, it seems to me that Virgil *is* being perfectly rational in raising his credence in *g*, which is precisely what PC predicts. To say otherwise is to recommend that Virgil arbitrarily disregard his experience since, from Virgil’s perspective, he has no reason to think that this seeming is misleading. Note that Virgil may increase his credence only very slightly—e.g. from .01 to .1. It’s not clear how big of an increase is permitted, but at least *some* small increase seems justified.

Perhaps there is something epistemically deficient about this situation, but it needn’t be that Virgil is *irrational* in raising his credence that *g*. We must be careful not to use “irrationality” as a catch-all term for epistemic deficiency. Kvanvig warns us:

Philosophers often have a predilection for blanket terminology to describe that which is objectionable, to the point where the term becomes so abstract and vapid as to be cognitively uninformative, serving only to express distaste or contempt. Such predilections mirror the behavior we acquired early on in having catch-all terminology when our vocabularies fail us. ... [P]erhaps ‘irrational’ functions in this way in epistemology, and it certainly functions in this way in much of ordinary language. (2014, 159-60)

The point is that there are other statuses besides rationality or justification that Virgil or his belief might lack, and these might explain why one is inclined to make a negative appraisal in the Revised Gold-Digger case. For instance, Virgil’s belief might lack warrant.¹⁵ Some have also suggested that our negative assessments are better aimed at the blameworthiness of Virgil,¹⁶ his vicious epistemic character,¹⁷ or the vicious formation of his belief.¹⁸ It

¹⁴ The quotations are, once again, from Markie 2013, 257.

¹⁵ Tucker 2010, 538-40, and 2011, 69-72, and 2013, 15-16.

¹⁶ Tucker 2010, 541-2, and 2013, 16.

¹⁷ Skene 2013, 550.

seems plausible that a negative appraisal of the case could stem from one of these deficiencies rather than irrationality.¹⁹

If after all this, it *still* seems to one that Virgil acts irrationally in raising his credence, then we reach an impasse. I don't consider this prospect all that troubling. First of all, it's hard to see anyone but committed externalists having strong intuitions in Virgil's irrationality; but staunch externalists were never the target demographic. To draw a political analogy, I'm aiming at my party's nomination and the coveted "independent voter". Those already in the internalist camp will likely intuit as I do: that Virgil is rational in raising his credence. And the independent voter won't have more than a mild intuition in Virgil's irrationality (if that). At worst, this would result in some mild evidence against PC. It certainly wouldn't sound the death knoll. I've given a direct argument for PC in Chapter Five, and there are other arguments for PC in the literature.²⁰ You might think the reasons provided by these arguments are stronger than any evidence against PC provided by this apparently borderline case. This is especially true when we recognize that those pushing the Problem of Cognitive Penetration are committed to the falsity of the most central internalist intuitions (such as those motivating the new evil demon problem). For many, these internalist intuitions will win out. There is also Tucker's strategy of arguing that, if PC has problems with cognitive penetration, then so does everyone else.²¹

¹⁸ McGrath 2013, 235.

¹⁹ See Schroer and Schroer 2013 on "muddled intuitions".

²⁰ See especially the self-defeat argument in Huemer 2001, 2007, 2011 and Skene 2013, Tucker's arguments in Tucker 2010, and the internalist argument in Huemer 2006.

²¹ Tucker 2014.

This case doesn't give us compelling reason to *accept* PC either, even if it seems that Virgil is justified in raising his credence. To remove Virgil's defeaters, we gave him evidence that he was fairly reliable in discerning gold from fool's gold in those circumstances. This is because normal human adults have learned to be wary of seemings that have not been confirmed as reliable. But this enables one to cite Virgil's seeming *and* the evidence of his reliability as justifying his increased credence in *g*. It's not clear that the seeming is doing all the work. Once again, what we really need is a case in which it seems to Virgil that *g*, he has no defeaters for *g*, and no evidence for the reliability of his seeming. In other words, we need to put Virgil in the initial position and see how things play out. I do this very thing in Chapter Five (though I don't refer to Virgil specifically) and argue that, in the initial position, Virgil is permitted to believe *g*.

§6 Does the Response Generalize?

The gold-digger case is representative of the problem of cognitive penetration more generally, as is the strategy I've given in response. Tucker doesn't think it as clear that such a response can be generalized,²² but I am more optimistic. Take all the ostensible counterexamples falling under the blanket of the Problem of Cognitive Penetration. Either the subject has some indication of her seeming's disreputable origins (or other defeaters more generally) or she does not. If she does then the defeasibility approach is available. Of course, this doesn't address the problem of *prima facie* justification, so we must revise the case to remove any defeaters. Either way, then, we end up with a case in which it seems to the subject that *p* and she has absolutely no reason to doubt that things are exactly as

²² Tucker 2013, 16.

they appear to be. After clarifying that we are not assessing whether the subject has warrant, or whether she is a good epistemic agent, or whether the belief was formed virtuously, etc., we can ask whether she is rationally permitted to increase her credence in p , perhaps just ever so slightly. All but the most stalwart externalists should lack strong intuitions that subject behaves irrationally (and staunch externalists aren't the target demographic). After all, our subject is simply doing the best she can with the information available to her. If there is a counterexample not susceptible to this treatment I have yet to see it. Until such a case is brought forth, I don't see the Problem of Cognitive Penetration as posing much of a problem.

CHAPTER SEVEN

Conclusion

The theses of common sense epistemology defended herein are as follows:

- (A) All seemings are non-derivative good reasons to believe or disbelieve their content.
- (B) All of our non-derivative good reasons to believe or disbelieve are seemings.

Since this defense was undertaken within a controversial internalist framework, the goal was only to make probable the conditional *if* my starting assumptions are true, then these theses are true. While the (epistemic) probability of this conditional will see great variance between individual readers, I think one could be rationally convinced by the preceding arguments to place some degree of belief in it. In this sense I consider my goal accomplished.

The purpose of this conclusion is to remind ourselves of what we have seen and why it is significant. From the very start, I framed the project around the question: *What stances am I permitted to take?* This question embodies a universal predicament and a fundamental matter of human concern. Centering our investigation around this questions ensured that its importance was clear from the beginning. We can now return to this guiding question. While common sense epistemology does not give us a complete answer, it certainly makes substantial headway towards one. Our total bodies of ultimate evidence—the foundational sources of justification—consist in all and only our seemings. Thus, you are permitted to believe something only if it receives on-balance support from

your total body of seemings. Put more colloquially, you should believe in accordance with what seems to be the case.

This project also contains theoretical contributions to several debates in the philosophical discipline. In Chapter Three, I offer a novel interpretation of Thomas Reid—one that helps correct an underemphasis of the deontological aspects of Reid's response to the skeptic. I also trace out the connections between Reid's theory and common sense epistemology. While those who favor a system like common sense epistemology have gestured towards a connection with Reid, no one until now has done the historical work to make them explicit and sufficiently detailed.

Chapter Four also contains several contributions to the literature on seemings. The defense of the experience view (using ordinary language considerations) doesn't merely rehash but continues and expands on arguments in the literature. Many of the arguments contained therein are original and add new dimensions to the debate. I also provide one of the most detailed descriptions of seemings currently available. While much of this characterization takes its cue from descriptions already present in the literature, the comparison between seemings and emotions is wholly novel and, I think, suggests an intriguing way forward as we seek to continually deepen our understanding seemings.

Chapter Five offers the most significant epistemological contributions. I develop a new argument for phenomenal conservatism—a principle that is presently seeing considerable attention. I also argue that only seemings constitute good non-derivative reasons. To reach this conclusion I argue that neither acquaintance nor sensations (apart from seemings) can provide good non-derivative reasons to believe. These arguments

constitute serious challenges to the numerous epistemologists who try to base foundational justification in acquaintance states or sensations.

In Chapter Six I respond to one of the most prominent objections to phenomenal conservatism: the Problem of Cognitive Penetration. This objection has been influential in stemming the growing support for phenomenal conservatism. Removing it—or merely lessening its pull—strengthens the position of phenomenal conservatism considerably.

While these contributions are significant, they are, I think, secondary in importance to the aid common sense epistemology provides in resolving the guiding question. For it is in answering this question, or ones like it, that epistemology derives much if not most of its value. Thus, we end where we began—asking what stances we are permitted to take. The answer will come down to what seems to be the case.

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