Seemings and Moore's Paradox

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Abstract
Phenomenal conservatives claim that seemings are *sui generis* mental states and can thus provide foundational non-doxastic justification for beliefs. Many of their critics deny this, claiming, instead, that seemings can be reductively analyzed in terms of other mental states—either beliefs, inclinations to believe, or beliefs about one's evidence—that cannot provide foundational non-doxastic justification. In this paper, I argue that no tenable semantic reduction of 'seems' can be formulated in terms of the three reductive analyses that have been proposed by critics of phenomenal conservatism. This is because Moore-paradoxical statements are generated when each of the reductive analyses is substituted for 'seems' in statements like 'The stick is straight, but it does not seem to me that it's straight.' Since the latter statement is not Moore-paradoxical, the three proposed reductive analyses of 'seems' are unsuccessful. Absent a successful semantic reduction, however, there is no good reason to think a successful metaphysical reduction of seemings is forthcoming. Thus, there is an additional reason, unnoticed in the existing literature, to think that seemings are *sui generis* mental states.

1 Introduction

Phenomenal conservatism (hereafter PC) is an increasingly prominent theory of epistemic justification.[1] Its canonical formulation says: If it *seems* to S that *p*, then, in the absence of defeaters, S thereby has at least some degree of justification for

[1] Advocates of phenomenal conservatism include its progenitor, Michael Huemer (2001, 2007a), Chris Tucker (2011), Matthew Skene (2013), Julien Beillard (2016), Robert Farley (2017), Logan Gage (2018), and Blake McAllister (2018). Advocates of restricted versions of PC (or principles that strongly resemble PC) include John Pollock and Joseph Cruz (1999), Jim Pryor (2000), Elijah Chudnoff (2013), and Luca Moretti (2015).

believing that *p*.[2] PC's advocates hold that when it seems to S that *p*, S manifests an internally accessible mental state that can provide regress-halting non-inferential justification.[3] There is strong demand for an internalist foundationalist theory of epistemic justification that, like PC, does not restrict justified belief to philosophers and other especially reflective individuals.[4] Thus, PC's growing market share should come as no surprise. Like any ascendent theory, however, PC has provoked a great deal of philosophical debate, a significant portion of which concerns the nature of seeming states.

Phenomenal Conservatives claim that seemings are *sui generis* mental states. Many critics of PC deny this, claiming instead that seemings can be reductively analyzed in terms of other kinds of mental states. The current literature contains three proposed reductive analyses:

Belief: It seems to S that *p iff* S believes that *p*.[5]
Inclination: It seems to S that *p iff* S is inclined to believe that *p*.[6]

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[2] Huemer (2007a, p. 30).

[3] I use 'non-inferential justification' to refer to justification that does not depend or supervene upon doxastic states. I use 'doxastic states' to pick out all and only those mental states that arise when a subject adopts a verific attitude toward a proposition, i.e., belief, disbelief, or suspension of judgment.

[4] Unlike other internalist foundationalist theories, PC says that one can be justified in believing something even if one lacks a metajustification for believing it (Huemer 2001, p. 10–11). A metajustification is an argument for the conclusion that the belief in question is the result of a reliable belief-forming process. Not very many people have ever thought about metajustificatory arguments or requirements. Thus, if metajustification were required for people to have justified beliefs, then, assuming there is a sound metajustificatory argument, the group of people who have justified beliefs would be limited to a handful of philosophers and other intellectuals. Many philosophers think this result concedes far too much to the skeptic, which is why there is a market for internalist foundationalist theories that, like PC, purport to explain how unsophisticated people can enjoy justified beliefs.

[5] Lycan (1988) endorsed something like the belief analysis, although he abandoned it by the time he wrote the paper–Lycan (2013)—included in Tucker's anthology on phenomenal conservatism. Hanna (2011) also defends something like the belief analysis, although his primary aim is to make trouble for PC rather than to develop an analysis of seemings.

[6] If it is to be at all plausible, the inclination analysis must restrict the inclinations in its analysans to what Cullison (2010, p. 267) calls *truth-directed* inclinations; these are inclinations to believe that are based upon or result from truth-directed practices (e.g., gathering evidence), faculties (e.g., perceptual faculties), or mental states (e.g., other beliefs). This is because there are many propositions we are inclined to believe—due to wishful-thinking, desire, or imaginative exercises—that clearly and obviously do not seem true. For instance, Tolhurst notes (1998, p. 297) that a man may be inclined to believe, as the result of a strong desire, that his son is innocent of a heinous crime, even though he is aware that there is overwhelming evidence of his son's guilt. In this case, it probably does not seem to the man that his son is innocent, even though he is inclined to believe it. Indeed, when an inclination to believe that *p* has sources that are irrelevant to *p*'s truth, it is possible that one may have that inclination regardless of whether it seems to one that *p*. Thus, while the inclination analysis must hold that all seemings are inclinations to believe, it need not hold that all inclinations to believe are seemings. The kind of inclinations most likely to be seemings are those that aim to secure true belief.

Evidence: It seems to S that *p iff* S believes/is inclined to believe that S has evidence that *p*.[7]

If one of these analyses is correct, then PC is in trouble.[8]

Suppose the belief analysis is correct. If so, then seemings cannot provide regress-halting non-inferential justification. For seemings-as-beliefs would themselves stand in need of justification, just like any other sort of belief. If, however, seemings are mere inclinations to believe, then they lack propositional content and, as a result, are not a source of epistemic justification.[9] Finally, if, as proposed on the evidence analysis, seemings are beliefs that one has evidence or inclinations to believe that one has evidence, then, once again, they either cannot provide regress halting non-inferential justification (because they are beliefs that stand in need of justification themselves) or cannot provide epistemic justification at all (because they are mere inclinations that lack propositional content). Thus, if one of the proposed reductive analyses is correct, seemings cannot deliver foundational justification. And if that is the case, then it is hard to see why anyone should want to be a phenomenal conservative.

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[7] Tucker (2013) calls the evidence analysis the "evidence-taking view" and identifies Conee (2013) and Tooley (2013) as its initial advocates. I have borrowed and simplified its name. McAllister (2018) provides a useful taxonomy of the four ways in which the evidence analysis can be formulated:

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*.

Notice that the first two options are ambiguous. Neither specifies the *kind* of truth-displaying mental state the speaker takes as the object of his belief. Since seemings are, *ex hypothesi*, truth-displaying mental states, these options leave open the possibility that the mental state in question is a seeming state.

Of course, an analysis of seemings given in terms of seemings will not do. Other than seemings and beliefs, however, it is not clear that there are any other truth-displaying mental states (I assume that truth-displaying mental states have assertively presented propositional content). Thus, the best interpretation of these two options is that they identify seemings with second-order beliefs. I find the proposal that seemings are second-order beliefs incredible. As McAllister points out, on this analysis it would be appropriate to assert 'it seems that *p*' only when one believes that one has a second-order belief that *p*; i.e., when one has a third-order belief that *p*. This is not at all consistent with the ordinary use of 'seems.' Thus, in what follows, I table options one and two and focus my critical remarks on options three and four.

[8] Recent advocates of ethical intuitionism (Stratton-Lake, 2014) and epistemological rationalism (Bealer, 2000) have also assigned significant epistemic value to seeming states. They have done so on the presumption that they are *sui generis* mental states. Thus, if it turns out that seemings are not *sui generis*, then their theories may also be imperiled.

[9] McAllister (2018, p. 15) argues that inclinations lack propositional content because they lack accuracy conditions. On his view, an inclination to believe can guide one well or poorly in the process of belief formation—it can illuminate or mislead—but since it does not present the world as being a certain way, it cannot be evaluated in terms of its accuracy/inaccuracy. Thus, to paraphrase, Davidson (1986, p. 311) the relation between an inclination and a belief cannot be *justificatory*, since inclinations are not propositional attitudes. Note, too, that even if one holds that inclinations have propositional content, it is hard to see how their content could be assertively presented; i.e., presented as being true of the world. Indeed, desires have content, but, since they do not present their contents assertively, they lack justificatory power. Thus, whether contentful or not, it is hard to see how inclinations could have justificatory power.

In what follows, I argue that no tenable *semantic* reduction of 'seems' can be formulated in terms of the three proposed reductive analyses. If my argument is sound, then there is an additional piece of support, as yet unnoticed in the literature, for the view that seemings are *sui generis* mental states. And the more reasons there are to think that seemings are *sui generis*, the stronger the basis for rejecting the claim that they cannot provide foundational justification.[10]

I proceed by four steps. First, I present the standard view of seemings (as understood by phenomenal conservatives). Second, I introduce Moore's paradox and the concomitant notion of a Moore-paradoxical statement.[11] Third, I argue that Moore-paradoxical statements are generated when each of the three reductive analyses is substituted for 'seems' in:

(1) The stick is straight, but it does not seem to me that it is straight.

Since (1) is not a Moore-paradoxical statement, this exercise shows that ''seems' is not synonymous with any of the three proposed analysans. By contrast, the standard account, according to which seemings are *sui generis* mental states, predicts that 'seems' is semantically irreducible. This explains why it is not paradoxical to assert (1). It also explains the additional linguistic data about 'seems' that emerges, in section three, when the evidence analysis is substituted into (1). Fourth and finally, I argue that absent a successful semantic reduction of 'seems,' there is no good reason to think a successful metaphysical reduction of seemings is forthcoming.

2 Seemings: The Standard View

Ordinary discourse is rife with statements about how things seem.[12] Sometimes 'seems' (or a cognate term) is used to generate pragmatic effects.[13] In other cases, however, it is clear that 'seems' is used to express a certain kind of mental state. Here is an example:

(2) From here, the moon seems smaller than my house.

Since it is common knowledge that the moon is larger than any house, it is implausible that in (most) token utterances of (2), 'seems' is used merely to put a concessive or deflective pragmatic spin on a speaker's expression of a genuine belief. Rather, in (most) token utterances of (2), the primary function of 'seems' is

[10] Additional arguments that seemings are *sui generis* can be found in Huemer (2013), Cullison (2010), and McAllister (2018). These arguments, insofar as they are successful, also weaken the objection in question.

[11] This terminology derives from Shoemaker (1996).

[12] Advocates of phenomenal conservatism use 'seem' and 'appear' as synonyms. For an example of this usage, see Huemer (2013). Note, too, that 'looks' is also sometimes treated as a synonym of 'seems.'.

[13] For instance, in cases where a speaker intends to express a belief that she knows to be controversial, she may use 'seems' to convey an attitude of diplomacy (in cases where she is happy to debate the merits of her belief) or to deflect argument (in cases where she would prefer to avoid debate).

to express a mental state.[14] But what kind of mental state? In what follows, I briefly describe the account of seeming states that has become standard in the literature on phenomenal conservatism.

The first attribute standardly assigned to seemings is possession of propositional content. This distinguishes them from mere sensations (such as tickles or itches), which do not have propositional content.[15] The standard account also says that seemings present their propositional content *assertively*, i.e., they present it (to the subject who has the seeming) as a representation of how things are. This distinguishes seemings from many other kinds of contentful mental states; e.g., wonderings, wishings, and worryings. These kinds of mental states do not aim to present the world as it is, but, instead, as it could or should be.[16] Furthermore, it is the assertiveness of their content that, at least potentially, gives seemings the power to provide epistemic justification.

Seeming states are also said to possess a distinctive phenomenology. William Tolhurst characterizes it as "felt veridicality," writing that "seemings have the feel of truth, the feel of a state whose content reveals how things really are."[17] Similarly, Chris Tucker claims that "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."[18]

Putting together the points made above, proponents of the standard account say that 'seems' and its cognates (often) express (or attribute) mental states with assertively presented propositional content and felt veridicality. Within the literature on seemings, this view is held by both phenomenal conservatives and (most of) their opponents.[19] But can 'seems' be given a reductive analysis, as some opponents of PC claim? I think not. As I argue below, considerations stemming from Moore's paradox support the view that seemings are *sui generis*.

Some philosophers who endorse the standard view, such as Tucker (2010, 2011) and Cullison (2013), nevertheless maintain that *perceptual* seemings are distinct from

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[14] Consider, also, that 'seems' can be used to *attribute* mental states to others, as in a statement like 'Jill called the police because it seemed to her that an intruder had entered her home'. It is difficult to square the attributive usage with the proposal that 'seems' is used exclusively to generate concessive or deflective pragmatic effects.

[15] I acknowledge that some philosophers may disagree. For instance, Klein (2007), argues that pain states have imperatival content, which, on some views, may count as a kind of (non-assertively represented) propositional content. Although I cannot engage the issue here, I should register my skepticism about the proposal that genuine sensations have propositional content. See also my discussion of the seeming/sensation distinction in the main text.

[16] The notion of *assertive* propositional content comes from Laurence BonJour (1978, 1985), who uses it to distinguish between contentful states that present their content as though it were true and those, like desires, that do not. I follow BonJour's usage.

[17] 1998, p. 298–299.

[18] 2011, p. 4.

[19] Hanna (2011), for instance, agrees that seemings have these features, but thinks that they are nevertheless beliefs. Furthermore, although inclinations to believe appear to lack content, they *recommend* states with assertively presented propositional content. One cannot claim that one is inclined to believe that *p* without saying something about a (potentially) assertively represented proposition. Thus, it is not wholly implausible to propose that 'it seems to me that *p*' can be reduced to 'I am inclined to believe that *p*.' Indeed, in both instances, there is a that-clause followed by an assertively presented proposition.

sensations. On their view, perceptual experiences are composites of seemings and sensations (with the latter perhaps standing in some sort of causal relation to the former). One reason Tucker (2011, p. 7) thinks we should distinguish perceptual seemings from sensations is that doing so helps explain the difference between expert and novice perception. For instance, suppose Tucker (an expert) and a stranger (a novice) both look at his wife's face. We should like to say that both experiences have something in common. But only Tucker's perceptual experience has the content *that is my wife*. The stranger's experience does not have the content *that is Tucker's wife*, which raises the question of what these two perceptual experiences have in common. The answer, says Tucker, is that they both have the same qualitative content, which he characterizes in terms of sensations and describes as a mental image or picture. Thus, expertise influences perception by expanding the range of seemings that can be packaged with particular (sets of) sensations in a given perceptual experience. The expert and the novice have the same mental image, but different seemings.

With the seeming/sensation distinction in the background, a reviewer has raised a concern about the interpretation of perceptual-seeming-statements that have the logical form of (1). Following Chisholm (1977, p. 59), the reviewer claims that sometimes 'seems' is used comparatively. For instance, when Matilda says: "The egg seems brown," she may be reporting that her current sensations are similar to those that she typically has when she looks at brown objects, rather than reporting a mental state with the content *the egg is brown*. Given the comparative use of 'seems,' the reviewer asks, couldn't it be the case that in perceptual-seeming-statements like (1), speakers use 'seems' to compare their present sensations to their past sensations? If so, then (1) would not provide a suitable basis around which to build the arguments of this essay. For (1) would mean: "The stick is straight but the sensations I have are unlike those I usually have when I look at straight sticks." And if statements like (1) are about sensations, rather than seemings, then they are not an appropriate vehicle for investigating the meaning of 'seems' in cases where it is used to express a seeming state.

The reviewer's concern rests on two contentious claims. First, that there is a unique comparative use of 'seems.' Second, that there is a genuine distinction between perceptual seemings and sensations. The former claim has been forcefully challenged by Michael Huemer (2001, 330–331). He notes that the primary motivation for positing a comparative use of 'seems' is that it can explain why we would say, for instance, "the blood seems real" in situations where, because we are not at all inclined to believe the blood is real, we might *also* say "the blood does not seem real." Huemer argues that since seemings, like desires, can conflict, we should expect there to be situations where it is appropriate to make apparently contradictory seeming-statements. Indeed, since desires can push us in opposite directions, there is nothing problematic about saying "I want more of this cake" and "I don't want more of this cake" in a single set of circumstances. The same is true of seemings. In the situation in question, one might have a visual seeming as of the blood being real and an inferential seeming, based on one's belief that one is viewing an art exhibition, as of the blood not being real. Thus, since the ordinary reporting-a-mental-state use of 'seems' can explain what is going on when we make apparently contradictory seeming-statements, Huemer concludes that there is no good reason to posit an additional comparative use of 'seems.'

The sensations/seemings distinction has been forcefully challenged by Elijah Chudnoff and David DiDomenico (2015). They contend that that the main arguments for drawing the distinction rest on false or dubious premises. Although I lack the space to recapitulate all of Chudnoff and DiDomenico's charges, there is one that is, in my view, especially damning; namely, the charge that there is no good reason to think that experts and novices have the same perceptual content. For even if, in some sense, experts and novices "see the same thing," expert experiences have high-level content—e.g., thick content like *being Tucker's wife* or *being a 1991 Plymouth Voyager*, as opposed to low-level content like *being red* or *being straight*—that novice experiences lack. The urge to say that they have shared content appears to be the result of the fact that their experiences are caused by the same object. But it remains unclear why we should indulge this urge. The philosohers who draw the seeming/sensation distinction assume that we can cleanly disambiguate an experience's the low-level merely phenomenal content (which is indexed to sensations) from its high-level content (which is indexed to seemings). This assumption is dubious. Consider, for instance, Tucker's claim that the mental imagine of a woman's face is a sensation. Compared to a raw feel, this mental image is both highly unified and highly descriptive. It represents ears, nose, mouth, eyes, hair, and secondary sex characteristics associated with facial shape. Absent a prior commitment to the view that some aspect of expert perceptual experience must be identical to some aspect of novice perceptual experience, which seems question begging, I don't see why we should call a mental image like this a sensation, rather than a seeming. Chudnoff and DiDomenico suggest a simpler and more straight forward alternative: the expert and the novice have different perceptual experiences, even though their contents significantly overlap. Of course, some philosophers deny that perceptual experiences have high-level content. But, if that is right, then we should deny that there is really anything different about how things seem to the expert and the novice, even if their seemings ultimately yield different beliefs or inclinations to believe (note, too, that, as far as I can tell, everyone who endorses the seeming/sensation distinction accepts that there is high-level perceptual content).

Suppose we grant, despite the above-mentioned challenges, that 'seems' is sometimes used to compare sensations, which really are distinct from seemings. Even so, the reviewer's concern appears to rest on the assumption that, possibly, 'seems' is *always* used to compare sensations when it occurs in a perceptual-seeming-statement with the logical form of (1). But this kind of absolutism about the comparative use of 'seems' is implausible.

To see this, consider the following case. A detective investigating a death states: "Jones was murdered, although it does not seem that way." The detective's statement is about a perceptual experience with high-level content. Unlike roundness or brownness, however, there does not appear to be a privileged class of sensations that are *usually* associated with looking at a murder victim. Indeed, murder is a heterogenous phenomenon the appears very different from case to case. Thus, it is unlikely that our detective is using 'seems' to compare his present sensations to those he usually has when he looks at a murder victim. Rather, it is more likely that he is reporting the absence of an experiential state with a certain high-level content.

It is instructive to consider similar examples with high-level content. For instance, "Steve is a Republican, although he does not seem like one," "Mary is depressed,

even though she does not seem depressed," and "Those shoes are bootleg, even though they do not seem to be." In each of these examples, it is hard to see how 'seems' could be used to compare sensations, given that there is not a typical set of sensations, construed as low-level contents of experience, associated with being a Republican, being depressed, or being bootleg. Indeed, even if 'seems' is sometimes used comparatively in statements with high-level content, it is hard to see how the relevant comparison class could be sensations rather than *other seemings*.[20]

Suppose we grant, despite the considerations raised above, that 'seems' is *always* used to compare sensations in perceptual-seeming-statements with the logical form of (1). Still, there remain other kinds of seeming statements, such as those reporting rational insights, that cannot be given such an interpretation. For instance, a student who endorses dialetheism on the authority of his logic tutor might say: "There are true contradictions, even though it doesn't seem that way to me." Since there are no sensations plausibly associated with *being a true contradiction*, it is clear that 'seems' is not used, in this statement, to compare sensations. A natural interpretation is that it is used to report that the speaker lacks a rational insight with the content in question. Since I should prefer not to get caught in the thorny brambles of the a priori, in what follows I will not discuss statements reporting rational insights. Instead, I will focus on perceptual-seeming-statements. Still, even if we accept that 'seems' is ambiguous when used in perceptual-seeming-statements, there are other kinds of seeming statements that lack any such ambiguity. If necessary, they could be substituted, *mutatis mutandis*, for the perceptual-seeming-statements employed throughout this essay.

3 Moore's Paradox

Moore's paradox originates with G.E. Moore's remark that it is absurd to say:

(3) I went to the pictures last Tuesday but I don't believe that I did.[21]

Despite its absurdity, (3) is not self-contradictory or inconsistent. It does not assert 'p and $\sim p$.' And both of its conjuncts can be true simultaneously.

Indeed, the logical form of (3) is:

(4) p, but I do not believe that p.

It is obvious that many substituends for p will yield true statements. For instance, if we substitute 'It is raining' for p this yields:

(5) It is raining, but I do not believe that it is raining.

No doubt there are many occasions when both conjuncts of (5) are true.

Now consider:

(6) It is raining, but I believe that it is not raining.

[20] When discussing the comparative use of 'seems,' Michael Bergmann (2013, 155–156) explicitly formulates it as a comparison of one seeming to another.

[21] 1942, p. 543.

As with (5), there are no doubt many occasions when both conjuncts in (6) are true. Its logical form is:

(7) *p*, but I believe that ~*p*.

There's something puzzling about our cognitive situation with respect to statements that exemplify the logical form of (4) or (7). Green and Williams (2007, p. 5) label the former omissive Moore-paradoxical statements and the latter commissive Moore-paradoxical statements.[22] Since such statements can be true, they are not self-contradictory, logically inconsistent, or instances of liar-like semantic paradoxes. Even so, among philosophers who have thought about (4) and (7), there is a strong consensus that it's *absurd* to assert (or believe) statements with their logical form. Moore's paradox is the puzzle concerning *why* it's absurd to assert (or believe) statements with the logical form of (4) and (7).[23]

It is widely held that asserting (or believing) Moore-paradoxical statements involves violating important norms (of some kind) governing speech, thought, or both. If that is correct, a satisfactory solution to Moore's paradox will need to identify the norms violated by Moore-paradoxical statements and explain why their violation yields absurdity, self-defeat, or some other linguistically and/or epistemically inapposite result. This is an exceedingly difficult task; thankfully, for present purposes, a *solution* to Moore's paradox is not required.[24]

My aim is not to solve (or otherwise diagnose or dissolve) the paradox; rather it is to use the phenomenon of Moorean absurdity to demonstrate that statements about how things seem cannot be reduced to statements about what a speaker believes, is inclined to believe, or believes to be evidence. I focus only upon *omissive* Moore-paradoxical statements. This should be sufficient to drive home the point that statements about how things seem cannot be systematically reinterpreted in terms of the reductive analyses proposed above.

In what follows, I assume, with Moore, that *one* absurdity-yielding feature of omissive Moore-paradoxical statements is that when one asserts that *p* one *implies* (pragmatically, not logically) that one believes that *p*.[25] For instance, when Madeline

[22] Statements that have the logical form of (4) are *omissive* Moore-paradoxical statements because they "report the omission of true belief." Moore-paradoxical statements that have the logical form of (7) are *commissive* Moore-paradoxical statements because they "report the commission of a mistake in belief.".

[23] Huemer (2007b, p. 142).

[24] Green and Williams (2007, p. 12–28) review *eighteen* competing attempts to do this!

[25] The idea here is that in asserting that *p*, one represents oneself as believing that *p*. This notion of representing oneself as believing demands further explanation. Baldwin (1990, p. 228), following Burnyeat (1967–68), claims that it is constitutive of the speech act of assertion that one intends to provide listeners with information "through their recognition that this is one's intention." This is because "one cannot be understood as intending to inform someone that *p* unless one is believed by them to believe that *p*" and so "the intention to be thus understood includes the intention to be taken to believe what one asserts." The idea here is that since (a) informing your audience is an aim that is constitutive of assertion and (b) this aim can only be achieved when your audience believes that you believe what you assert it follows that (c) when making an assertion, you intend for your audience to believe that you believe what you assert. In this way, then, you represent yourself as believing that *p* whenever you assert that *p*. Although I find this account quite plausible, it is hardly the final word on the matter. I nevertheless take it for granted that one implies one believes what one asserts; I leave open the question of what explains this phenomenon.

asserts ‘It is raining’ she implies ‘I believe it is raining.’ Moore concludes that (omissive) Moore-paradoxical statements are absurd because when they are asserted, the speaker implies something that contradicts what she asserts. When Madeline asserts ‘It is raining, but I don’t believe it’ the first conjunct of her statement implies that she *does* believe what she explicitly asserts that she *does not* believe. Thus, she implies that *p* and asserts that ~ *p*. As a result, she violates a linguistic norm that forbids pragmatically contradictory utterances and, perhaps, an epistemic norm that forbids believing propositions expressed by such utterances.

Moore claims that there is also something absurd about statements with the logical form:

(8) *p*, but I do not know that *p*.[26]

He explains the putative absurdity of (8) by claiming that when one asserts that *p*, one implies that one knows that *p*. If that is correct, then, as with (4) and (7), statements exemplifying the logical form of (8) are pragmatically contradictory. It also seems likely that the propositions they express cannot be rationally believed. Here Moore anticipates Williamson’s much discussed knowledge norm of assertion, which says: assert that *p* only if you know that p.[27]

Although the knowledge norm of assertion offers a potentially fruitful way of addressing Moorean absurdity, I will not assume it in what follows. I will however assume the Moorean proposal that anticipates and justifies it; namely, that when one asserts that *p*, one implies that one knows that *p* (and thereby represents oneself as knowing that *p*).[28] Thus, at a minimum, statements that exemplify the form of (8) violate a linguistic norm that forbids pragmatically contradictory utterances and, perhaps, an epistemic norm that forbids believing propositions expressed by such utterances. I don’t propose to offer an *account* of these norms, as doing so is beyond the scope of this essay. I note only that our assertions are subject to them and that Moore-paradoxical assertions violate them.

4 Reductive Analyses Yield Moorean Absurdity

4.1 Belief

I am now prepared to review and defend the central claim of this essay; namely, that Moore-paradoxical statements are generated when any of the proposed reductive analyses are substituted for ‘seems’ in:

(1) The stick is straight, but it does not seem to me that it is straight.

To see this, begin by considering the belief analysis of seemings, which says: It seems to S that *p iff* S believes that *p*. This analysis predicts that we should be able

[26] Moore (1993).
[27] Williamson (2000).
[28] The discussion here is informed by Benton (2014).

to substitute ‘I do not believe’ for ‘it does not seem to me’ in (1) without altering the conditions under which it is permissibly asserted or believed. The substitution yields:

(9) The stick is straight, but I do not believe that it is straight.

Note that statement (9) is Moore-paradoxical. It would be absurd to assert (9), even though the proposition it expresses could very well be true: i.e., it could be true that (a) *the stick is straight* and (b) *I do not believe the stick is straight*. This is because the speaker implies that he believes ‘the stick is straight’ while simultaneously asserting a claim that contradicts it.

4.2 Inclination

The inclination analysis of seemings says: it seems to S that *p iff* S is inclined to believe that *p*. The inclination analysis predicts that we should be able to successfully substitute ‘I am not inclined to believe’ for ‘it does not seem to me’ in (1) without altering the conditions under which it is permissibly asserted or believed. The substitution yields:

(10) The stick is straight, but I am not inclined to believe that it is straight.

I think (10) is Moore-paradoxical. There is something absurd about *implying* that one believes the stick is straight and *asserting* that one is not inclined to believe it. Indeed, it is difficult to envision circumstances in which it would be appropriate for someone to imply that they believe a proposition while asserting that they lack any inclination to believe it.

I suspect that this is because being inclined to believe that *p* is a necessary condition on believing that *p*. Assuming that beliefs are caused (in part) by inclinations to believe, one cannot believe what one is not inclined to believe. If that is correct, the individual who asserts (10) implies that she believes *p* while asserting that a necessary condition on believing that *p* is unmet. No doubt there is something absurd about such an assertion. Perhaps the norm violated here is: Don’t imply that *p* while asserting that a necessary condition on *p* is unmet.

Assertion of (10) appears to violate the latter norm a second time over. This is because asserting that *p* implies the speaker knows that *p*. But knowing that *p* entails believing that *p*. And the assertion that one has not met a necessary condition on believing that *p* entails, by *modus tollens*, that one does not know that *p*. Thus, the individual who asserts (10) implies that he knows that *p* while asserting a proposition that entails that he does not know that *p*.

I should note, too, that there is precedent, among defenders of the inclination analysis of seemings, for holding that inclinations cause beliefs. For instance, according to Earlenbaugh and Molyneux (2009):

> “It is a psychological fact…that S’s inclination to X leads, typically, given opportunity, ability, and no opposing inclinations, to S’s X-ing, whether it be drinking, skiing or whatever you like. Hence, it’s no mystery that S’s inclina-

tion to believe that *p* leads, typically, given opportunity, ability and no opposing inclinations, to S's believing that *p*."

As Earlenbaugh and Molyneux implicitly acknowledge, the inclination to believe that *p* is not sufficient for the belief that *p*. Some inclinations to believe just never give rise to outright belief. However, it appears that the reverse does not hold; i.e., all outright beliefs result from inclinations to believe. Why think this? Perhaps because, as Samuel Taylor (2015, 4) argues, inclinations-to-believe are basic psychological dispositions, such 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." In any case, if inclinations to believe are categorical psychological dispositions of this sort, then it is plausible to think that they are necessary conditions on belief. And if indeed they are, then (10) is Moore-paradoxical.[29]

But this judgment may be too quick. Some defenders of the inclination analysis have characterized inclinations to believe in terms of how they feel; e.g., they "pull" the individual towards an endorsement of a certain proposition (Sosa 2007, 47–48) or carry an "impulse…to accept this proposition as opposed to others" (Plantinga 1996, 359–60). Call this view of inclinations to believe the phenomenological account (PA).

According to PA, 'inclination' is roughly equivalent to 'felt attraction.' If the latter is substituted for the former in (10), we get:

(11): The stick is straight, but I feel no attraction to believe that it is straight.

Is (11) Moore-paradoxical? At first glance, I find it hard to tell. This is because the semantic content of 'felt attraction' is obscure. Indeed, in a description of the "impulsional evidence" provided by felt attractions, Plantinga (2000, 264) characterizes them as having: "…a certain kind of phenomenology that distinguishes entertaining a proposition you believe from one you do not: the former simply seems right, correct, natural, approved—the experience isn't easy to describe." As Andrew Moon (2012, 317) notes, when felt attractions are discussed in the Platinginian corpus, they are introduced by ostentation. And the same is true when they are introduced by other philosophers who endorse PA, such as Sosa and Rogers and Matheson (2011, 61–62 n. 22).

Nevertheless, despite the obscurity of 'felt attraction,' it is clear, given the above-quoted statement, that the meaning Plantinga assigns to the term renders (11) Moore-paradoxical. For, according to Plantinga, a felt attraction that *p* is present whenever one has an occurrent belief that *p*. Ergo, the occurrent belief that *p* entails the felt attraction that *p*. And, as Williamson (2000, 255–256) notes, assertion is a conscious activity in which the inward manifestation of occurrent belief is outwardly expressed. When one asserts that *p*, one does not imply that one holds an implicit or dispositional belief that *p*, but an occurrent belief that *p*. Thus, when one asserts

[29] The view that inclinations to believe cause beliefs is also explicitly endorsed in Bergman (2013, 168, n. 12), although he does not defend a reductive analysis of seemings.

(11), one implies that one occurrently believes that *p* while asserting a proposition that entails that one does not occurrently believe that *p*.

Is there some alternative sense of 'felt attraction' that does not render (11) Moore-paradoxical? Perhaps. But at this point, the burden lies on the defender of PA to identify a phenomenal state that (a) can plausibly supply a meaning for 'felt attraction' and (b) accompanies some but not all occurrent beliefs. Here I ask the reader to engage in a bit of introspective reflection: try to come up with a phenomenal state that satisfies (a) and (b). The only examples I can think of that satisfy (b) are phenomenal states that are stronger than those associated with the ordinary language use of 'attraction;' e.g., irresistibility or certainty.

Since many belief contents are not *so attractive* as to feel certain or irresistible to us, the stronger characterization of 'felt attraction' would not render (11) Moore-paradoxical. But even if there is (an as-yet-unsupplied) good reason to think of felt attractions as having this kind of robust phenomenal character, such a view would undermine the inclination analysis of seemings. For it is false that 'seems' is used to express feelings of certainty about *p* or the feeling that one cannot help but believe that *p*. Indeed, there is nothing infelicitous about saying "It seems that *p*, but I don't feel certain that things are how they seem." Nor is there any infelicitous about saying "It seems that *p*, but I don't feel compelled to believe it."[30]

Suppose, however, that the "recommending" phenomenology of felt attractions is given a weaker characterization, according to which it just involves some minimal positive feeling as if *p*. Then, as per Plantinga, it appears that felt attractions will accompany all occurrent beliefs. And this leads right back to Moorean absurdity. Thus, the inclination analysis of seemings, when paired with PA, is a dead end.

4.3 Evidence

The evidence analysis of seemings says: if it seems to S that *p*, then S believes (or is inclined to believe) that S has evidence that *p*. The evidence analysis predicts that we should be able to successfully substitute 'I do not believe that I have evidence' or 'I am not inclined to believe that I have evidence' for 'it does not seem to me' in (1) without altering the conditions under which it is permissibly asserted or believed. The substitution yields:

(11) The stick is straight, but I do not believe that I have evidence that it is straight.
(12) The stick is straight, but I am not inclined to believe that I have evidence that it is straight.

It is clear that (11) and (12) are not synonymous with (1). In both (11) and (12), the second conjunct expresses a claim indicating that the speaker is in a very weak epistemic position. He believes (or is inclined to believe) that he lacks any evidence

[30] As Huemer (2007a, 30n1) points out, some seemings are "weak and wavering". It would be hard to make sense of the phenomenon of weak seemings if seemings were just feelings of certainty or irresistibility.

that the stick is straight. By contrast, the second conjunct in (1) expresses a claim that the speaker lacks only *a specific kind* of evidence; namely, a seeming that *p*. This does not indicate that he is in a similarly weak epistemic position. Instead, it is compatible with the speaker believing that he has other kinds of evidence that *p*, such as testimonial evidence.

For instance, it would be perfectly acceptable to say:

(13) Since everyone on my team says that the stick is straight, it is straight, even though it does not seem that way to me.

If, however, 'I do not believe I have evidence that the stick is straight' or 'I am not inclined to believe I have evidence that the stick is straight' is substituted for 'it does not seem that way to me' in (13), the resulting statement is incoherent. In either case, the substitution yields a statement in which the speaker asserts that he has one kind of evidence (testimonial) but also asserts that he does not believe/is not inclined to believe he has *any* evidence.[31] This shows that the evidence analysis of 'seems' does not work.

We can strengthen the case against the evidence analysis by observing, in addition, that (11) and (12) are Moore-paradoxical. It is absurd to assert '*p* and I don't believe that I have evidence that *p*,' even though both conjuncts can be true simultaneously. And there is something similarly absurd about asserting '*p* and I'm not inclined to believe that I have evidence that *p*.'[32]

Now, it is often claimed that a statement is Moore-paradoxical when it implicates those who utter it in a logical contradiction, despite failing to express a logically contradictory proposition.[33] I do not think (11) and (12) satisfy *that* criterion for Moore-paradoxicality. However, the implicates-a-speaker-in-a-logical-contradiction criterion is too restrictive to fully capture the phenomenon of Moorean absurdity, which is manifest whenever a statement is such that it (a) could be true but (b) would be irrational to assert (or believe) in virtue of (c) its logical form. Of course, one especially striking way in which a potentially true statement can be irrational to assert (or believe) in virtue of its logical form is for it to implicate those who utter it in a contradiction, as is the case with (9). But that is not the only way. To see this, consider the following example:

(14) The stick is straight, but my best evidence suggests that it is not straight.

Although (14) does not implicate those who utter it in a contradiction, its second conjunct makes it such that it would be *irrational* to assert (or believe) its first conjunct. Any statement with the logical form of (14)— '*p* but my best evidence

[31] Thanks to an anonymous referee for suggesting this example.

[32] Readers who do not find the above discussion of the inclination analysis plausible should note that both of my attempts to explain the absurdity of (12) and (13) also apply, *mutatis mutandis*, to statement (11).

[33] For instance, according to Sorensen (2022) "The common explanation of Moore's absurdity is that the speaker has managed to contradict himself without uttering a contradiction. So [a Moore-paradoxical] sentence is odd because it is a counterexample to the generalization that anyone who contradicts himself utters a contradiction.".

suggests that ~ *p*'—would do the same, even though there are cases when both conjuncts are true. And there is certainly *something* absurd about statements that (a) can express true propositions but (b) *cannot* be rationally asserted (or believed) in virtue of (c) their logical form (rather than their propositional content). I submit, further, that (11) and (12) are absurd in just this way (although they suffer from being less perspicuously formulated than (14)).

Is the absurdity in question really Moorean absurdity? Here we could perhaps have an interminable debate about how to name philosophically interesting phenomena. For my part, however, when I look at (14) and (9) I see a strong family resemblance. And, since both statements satisfy (a)-(c), I think the absurdity is more than just skin deep. Moreover, I am not the only one who sees things this way. Jonathan Adler and Bradley Amor-Garb (2007, 161) have also suggested that statements like (14) are Moore-paradoxical, as has Michael Huemer (2007b, 146–147).[34]

At any rate, my aim here is not to provide a sustained defense of my preferred criterion for Moore-paradoxicality. For regardless of whether they are ultimately counted as Moore-paradoxical, both (11) and (12), like (14), implicate those who utter or believe them in a strong form of irrationality. But why?

One reason it is irritational (and thus absurd) to assert (11) or (12) is that doing so is self-defeating. A central goal of assertion is being believed by your audience (Green and Williams, p. 28). Indeed, in asserting that *p*, one intends that one's audience come to believe that *p*, even if one does not intend to communicate the truth, but rather to bullshit (Frankfurt, 2005) or deceive them. As in Moore's original examples, however, a speaker who asserts (11) or (12) will not be believed. An audience to whom one asserts (11) or (12) will not be moved to believe the stick is straight. This is because speakers who assert that they do not believe they have evidence that *p* (or are not inclined to believe they have such evidence) undercut their testimonial authority. If I come to believe 'S believes that S does not have any evidence that *p*,' then I am not going to believe that *p* on S's authority. This is because S has asserted, in effect, that his belief that *p* is not held for any good reason. Even if S in fact *has* good reasons to believe that *p*, he has asserted that he does not believe/is inclined not to believe that he has good reasons to believe that *p* while implying that he believes that *p* anyway; this is sufficient to discredit S's testimony. By discrediting his testimonial authority, S undermines his goal of being believed. And, of course, it is irrational to undermine your own goals.

One might object, however, that since there are many familiar situations in which we make assertions that we do not expect our audience to believe, being believed is not a central goal of assertion. For instance, suppose that, at a secular conference

[34] The criterion for Moore-paradoxicality that I propose is strongly influenced by my reading of Huemer (2007b). There, he lists several sentences like (13) and claims that they are Moore-paradoxical. However, this is done as part of his attempt to *solve* Moore's paradox, rather than an attempt to diagnose the problem. Thus, Huemer goes on to develop a more specific criterion for Moore-paradoxicality—according to which Moore-paradoxical statements are such that their second conjunct entails that a speaker does not know their first conjunct—than is necessary for my merely diagnostic purposes. I should also register a concern: one might need to accept some of Huemer's views about the nature of knowledge, which are controversial, to endorse his criterion for Moore-paradoxicality. Although I cannot argue the point here, explaining Moorean-absurdity in terms of irrationality, as I do, may require fewer controversial assumptions.

meeting, a Christian philosopher asserts that on the third day Christ was resurrected from the dead. He reasonably expects that most of his confreres will not believe his assertion. Or suppose that, during a consultation with a patient whom she knows to be a resolute vaccine skeptic, a physician asserts that vaccines do not cause autism. She reasonably expects that this patient will not believe her. Do these kinds of cases undermine the claim that being believed by one's audience is a primary goal of assertion? I do not think so.[35]

Although one may reasonably expect that one's assertion that *p* will not be believed, it does not follow that one does not intend for *p* to be believed when one asserts it (although one may, of course, have additional aims when asserting *p*). If you ask the Christian philosopher why he bothered making an assertion about the resurrection to an audience of implacable atheists, he might say "well, even though I don't really expect them to change their minds, I still have a duty to spread the good news….and perhaps hearing it from a professional colleague will make some of them more receptive to it." The physician might say something similar concerning her moral obligation to provide patients with accurate medical information. Although she does not *expect* to be believed in this instance, she still *intends* to be believed. After all, she wants to promote her patient's health. And that larger goal would be furthered if the patient ended up believing her assertions about vaccine safety.

These examples suffice to show that even in situations where speakers reasonably expect that their assertions will not be believed by their audience, they can still intend for them to be believed. Even so, I think there is a more significant problem with the unreceptive audience objection; namely, it rests upon the false principle that if *S* does not expect to φ by Ψ-ing, then S does not intend to φ by Ψ-ing. Counterexamples to this principle abound. For instance, suppose that I find myself standing in the batter's box facing Justin Verlander, the 2022 American League Cy Young Award winner. I am not good at baseball. He is the best pitcher in the world. Thus, I do not expect to hit the ball by swinging the bat. But I still *intend* to hit the ball when, invariably, I swing the bat. Would it not be incredible if I did?![36] At any rate, it would be irrational, given my goal of getting a hit, if I were to just toss the bat on the ground. And that, it seems, is akin to what one would do, given the goal of being believed, if one were to one make an assertion with the logical form '*p*, but I don't believe that I have evidence that *p*.'

There is a second respect in which (11) and (12) implicate speakers in irrationality (and are thereby, on my view, Moore-paradoxical). As with (10), when a speaker

[35] Thanks to an anonymous reviewer for raising this objection.

[36] It should be noted that in cases where people are addressing unreceptive audiences, being believed may not be the *only* or even the most salient goal of assertion. For instance, in asserting the doctrine of the resurrection, the Christian philosopher may have the additional aim of *contributing to a philosophical conversation.* This is an activity which is partly constituted by making assertions within a dialectical community. In this instance, the goal of being believed may be complimented by (or perhaps even subordinated to) the goal of realizing a good that is internal to the practice of philosophy. But unless the philosopher retains his testimonial authority—unless his interlocuters take him to meet the basic criteria, whatever they are, for competent philosophical discourse, then he cannot practice philosophy in the first place. And, of course, one way to undermine one's testimonial authority is by making absurd or irrational assertions. Thus, asserting (11), (12), or (13) may not only undermine the goal of being believed but also any other goal the achievement of which rests on the subject's retaining testimonial authority; i.e., her being perceived by her audience to be, at a minimum, a reasonable and trustworthy interlocuter who believes what she asserts.

utters (11) or (12) he implies that *p* while asserting something that entails ~ *p*. This is because asserting that *p* implies that the speaker knows that *p*. But knowledge is the gold standard for propositional belief. As a way of articulating this idea, Michael Huemer suggests, in my view correctly, that knowledge is the *most comprehensive epistemic endorsement*. Here is how Huemer explains this point: "…to say that a person knows that *p* is to endorse his belief that *p* on all criteria, or along all dimensions, of epistemic evaluation; it is to say that there is no sufficient (epistemic, as opposed to prudential, moral, etc.) reason why that person should not believe that *p*."[37]

A person who asserts that she does not believe (or is not inclined to believe) that she has evidence that *p* is such that her belief that *p* cannot enjoy the most comprehensive epistemic endorsement. For the assertion in question expresses a negative evaluation of her epistemic situation with respect to the belief that *p*.[38] Indeed, the reflective judgment expressed by 'I don't believe (or am not inclined to believe) that I have evidence that p' is a sufficient reason not to believe that *p*. Thus, utterances of (11) or (12) simultaneously imply that the speaker knows that *p* and, in their second conjunct, assert a claim that entails that the speaker does not know that p.[39]

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[37] (2007b, p. 149).

[38] One need not be committed to an evidentialist theory of epistemic justification to conclude that the reflective judgement expressed by 'I don't believe that I have evidence that *p*' counts against a subject's knowing that *p*. Such a judgment is an under-cutting defeater even given a non-evidentialist theory of justification. For it is one thing to lack evidence that *p*; it may be that some people in some situations are justified in believing that *p* absent any evidence that *p*. It is quite another thing, however, to state (presumably, thereby, expressing a reflective judgment) that you believe (or are inclined to believe) that you lack evidence that *p*. If the belief that *p* is based on an inference, then the reflective judgment that that you believe (or are inclined to believe) that you lack evidence that *p* is itself evidence that you did not properly form your belief. If the belief that *p* is *not* based on an inference, then the judgment in question is evidence that you do not regard your basic belief-forming mechanisms as evidentiary. In either case, you yourself would seem to regard your belief as having a dubious origin, which ought to be enough to downgrade its positive epistemic status.

[39] Consider a theist who asserts: "God exists, but I don't believe I have any evidence that God exists." Is this person's statement absurd? Theists do sometimes say things like this, perhaps with the aim of expressing the position that their beliefs are based on faith. What should we make of this phenomenon? If we take the statement in question to be a token of (11), it sounds just as absurd as it would if we substituted 'elephants' for 'God.' Thus, in my view, if the theist *really* makes an assertion with the logical form of (11), then his assertion is Moore-paradoxical. Even so, I suspect most theists who assert something like (11)—or to otherwise deny that they have evidence that God exists—are simply working with a restricted or atypical conception of evidence.

Perhaps they mean to deny that they possess *scientific* evidence, *physical* evidence, or *perceptual* evidence for theism. Perhaps they wish to express the view that they lack communicable intersubjective evidence. With that in mind, I should note that even Alvin Plantinga, no doubt the most prominent recent advocate of an "anti-evidentialist" religious epistemology, claims that "beliefs of faith" concerning "the great things of the gospel" are accompanied by "impulsional evidence." He characterizes this evidence phenomenologically, suggesting that it involves a conscious feeling of doxastic-rightness-of-fit that is analogous to the feelings we experience when we grasp the epistemic *bona fides* of basic a priori and memory beliefs (2000, 217). By my lights, then, even the putatively anti-evidentialist Plantinga would not really want to say "God exists but I don't believe I have any evidence that God exists." It is worth noting, too, that in recent work, Chris Tucker (2011) and Blake McAllister and Trent Dougherty (2019), have argued that Calvin's *sensus divinitatus*—long associated with a Plantingian anti-evidentialism—is best understood as a source of evidence, insofar as it causes seemings that provide non-inferential evidence for theism.

At any rate, it is not absurd to assert that *p* while also asserting that you believe you lack some specific kind of evidence for *p*. That is quite different than asserting that *p* while denying that you have *any* evi-

This shows that they are, on my criterion, Moore-paradoxical; i.e., by virtue of their logical form, it is irrational to assert or believe (11) or (12), even though they may express true propositions.

4.4 Seemings as Sui Generis

By contrast with (9) – (12), there is nothing absurd about asserting (1). Indeed, given the stock example of the stick, one can easily imagine asserting (1) while teaching a class on Descartes' First Meditation. The logical form of (1) is:

(15) *p*, but it does not seem to me that *p*.

Statements that exemplify the logical form of (15) are not Moore-paradoxical (or otherwise irrational). As I will show below, this judgment is supported by widely shared linguistic intuitions. And if seemings are *sui generis*, these intuitions can be explained in a straightforward manner.

Suppose that, in preparation for a Halloween party, Steve has painted his white cat black. As the cat crisscrosses his house, Steve informs his party guests of this salient detail. A guest remarks: "Ah, so your cat *is* white, even though it doesn't seem white!" The statement made by Steve's guest does not appear to violate any norms governing assertion (or belief). And it is, of course, a token of the type exemplified by (15). This suggests there is nothing inapposite about statements that exemplify (15).

Note, too, that it must be reasonable for one to make token assertions of type (15) if it is ever to be reasonable for one to assert that the truth about *p* does not conform to one's experiences of *p*. Such assertions may be uncommon, but they are not wholly unfamiliar. Sometimes we believe things even though they do not *seem* to be true. For instance suppose, I believe, on the basis of testimony alone, that the two lines depicted in the classic Müller-Lyer figure are the same length. Nevertheless, whenever I look at the figure, the line with the fins pointing outward always seems to me to be longer than the other line. So, the lines do not seem to be the same length. To report this conjunction of attitudes, I need to be able to assert a token of (15).

Furthermore, the ability to sensibly assert that things are not how they seem is what undergirds our capacity to discuss the differences between appearance and reality. And that is perhaps the seminal topic of philosophical discourse. Indeed,

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Footnote 39 (continued)

dence or reasons for *p* at all. In view of the above, I am doubtful there are many theists who would want to assert an unqualified token of (11). One exception might be a Kierkegaardian fideist. Still, I should think the Kierkegaardian would agree that token assertions of (11) are absurd. Of course, he would also argue, against the mainstream philosophical tradition, that some absurd assertions/beliefs have a positive role to play in our cognitive economy, since they function as a kind of propaedeutic for an authentic life of faith. I will leave it to the reader to puzzle out whether *conversion* is the appropriate reaction to Moorean absurdity. Thanks to Walter Edelberg for bringing this concern to my attention and to an anonymous referee for pushing me to further clarify my position.

suppose you find yourself engaged in conversation with Zeno of Elea. As he proselytizes for the Parmenidean worldview, Zeno claims: "Motion is impossible, even though it does not seem impossible." Suppose Parmenides joins the conversation. He claims: "The only thing that exists is an indivisible sphere, even though, of course, it does not seem like that's the only thing that exists." Although Zeno and Parmenides challenge common sense, their assertions, both of which exemplify the logical form of (15), are not Moore-paradoxical. And they do not appear to otherwise violate the norms of assertion (or belief).

If seemings are *sui generis*, as the standard acount holds, then there is a rather straight forward way to explain the intuitions generated by these cases, along with our general sense that it is permissible to make (and believe) token statements of type (15) but not (9) – (12). For there is nothing paradoxical, contradictory, or otherwise irrational about implying that you believe *p* while asserting that you fail to manifest an independent and irreducible attitude about *p* that is not a necessary condition on (or entailed by) your belief. It is no different than implying you believe *p* while asserting that you do not want/fear/love/regret *p*, as when, for instance, you say "It is snowing but I wish it weren't." It is only when we try to produce a reductive analysis of 'seems' that we encounter the various semantic difficulties canvassed in the preceding sections. Given the significance of these difficulties, the standard account of seemings looks ever more promising.

5 Conclusion

I have argued that 'It seems to S that *p'* is not synonymous with 'S believes that *p*,' 'S is inclined to believe that *p*,' 'S believes that S has evidence that *p*,' or 'S is inclined to believe that S has evidence that *p*.' When each analysans is substituted into (1), the resulting statement is Moore-paradoxical (or, at least, irrational). Thus, every proposed semantic reduction of 'It seems to S that *p*' fails.

This conclusion is important insofar as it blocks one strategy for arguing against the phenomenal conservative's claim that seemings are *sui generis.* It also casts a dim light on the prospect of producing a successful metaphysical reduction of seemings. Indeed, absent some reason to think meaning and reference diverge in 'It seems to S that *p*,' we should assume that they do not.

There is, arguably, such a divergence in cases where a term/expression is referentially opaque. Thus, it should be noted that 'seems' is not referentially opaque when it occurs in 'It seems to S that *p*.' A term/expression is referentially opaque when, owing to its occurrence in an attitude ascription, it cannot be substituted *salva veritate* for a coextensive term/expression. Now, seeming-ascriptions do create opaque contexts; e.g., 'Cassius Clay' cannot be substituted *salva veritate* for 'Muhammad Ali' in 'It seems to Steve that Muhammad Ali is on the plane,' even though 'Cassius Clay' and 'Muhammad Ali' are extensionally equivalent. Nevertheless, since 'seems' is not part of the content of Steve's seeming, its occurrence here is not referentially opaque. With that in mind, then, observe that none of the

seeming-statements examined above ascribe second-order mental states or otherwise include 'seems' as a constituent of their propositional content.

In any event, if two expressions are not synonymous, those who maintain that they are extensionally equivalent need to produce independent evidence for their position.[40] Ordinarily, when this evidential burden is successfully discharged, it is done by appeal to a *posteriori* evidence. For instance, in Frege's 'Afla' and 'Ateb' case, it is discovered empirically that these terms, which have different intensions, nevertheless refer to the same mountain.[41] Furthermore, in cases of successful metaphysical reduction, the empirical evidence is usually acquired by means of explicit scientific investigation. For instance, it is via scientific investigation that we learn 'salt' is extensionally equivalent to 'sodium chloride.'[42]

Otherwise, attempts at metaphysical reduction tend to be motivated by intuitions—about cases, statements, and broader theoretical pictures—that cannot be cleanly disambiguated from semantic considerations.[43] Indeed, rather than appealing to empirical evidence, the existing debate about the nature of seemings is highly dependent on intuitions about cases. And these cases often turn, at least in part, on intuitions about what it would be appropriate to say in various circumstances.

For example, in order to motivate the view that seemings can be reduced to inclinations, Taylor (2015, p. 373) appeals to linguistic intuitions concerning the statement 'It seems to me that *p* is true but I don't feel at all compelled to actually believe *p*.' On his view, this statement sounds infelicitous, which he takes to be evidence that seemings are inclinations. McAllister (2018, p. 3080) also appeals to linguistic intuitions, writing that we "can gain access to this pre-theoretical understanding by gauging our intuitions about certain cases, or by considering whether certain principles about seemings ring true, or even by examining the conversational propriety of seeming-statements."[44] In any event, since every proposed semantic reduction of 'seems' is unacceptable, I conclude that there is good reason to doubt that a successful metaphysical reduction of seemings is forthcoming.

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[40] Here I echo Jaegwon Kim, who writes, in discussing metaphysical reduction, that "I think that we must try to provide positive reasons for saying that things that appear to be distinct are in fact one and the same". (1998, 98).

[41] This case is presented in Frege's correspondence. See Livingstone (1998) for helpful discussion.

[42] See Armstrong (1999, p. 67–80) for a good discussion of how metaphysical reduction works.

[43] For an argument that semantics and metaphysics are (often) interdependent in this way, see Hansen (2014, 560–562).

[44] Cullison's (2010) seminal investigation of the nature of seemings is also largely focused on arguing from intuitions about cases.

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