Inferential seemings and the problem of reflective awareness

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ABSTRACT

Phenomenal conservatism (PC) is the internalist view according to which the non-inferential justification of our beliefs rests on our seemings or appearances. Advocates of PC have recently argued that seemings of a special type are also required to explain the inferential justification of our beliefs. The most developed view to this effect is Huemer (2016)'s theory of inferential seemings (ToIS). Moretti (2017) has shown that PC is affected by the so-called problem of reflective awareness, which makes PC open to sceptical challenges. In this paper I argue that ToIS is afflicted by a variant of this problem, which makes it vulnerable to inferential scepticism. I conclude that the prospects for a satisfactory internalist account of inferential justification that appeals to seemings are quite dim.

Keywords: inferential justification, inferential seemings, phenomenal conservatism, reflective awareness, Michael Huemer.

1. Introduction

Huemer (2001, 2007) has defended an internalist theory of *non-inferential* justification, nowadays very popular, called *phenomenal conservatism* (PC). Other epistemologists—prominently, Pryor (2000, 2004)—have put forward similar views. According to PC, a subject *S*'s *seeming* or *appearance* that *P* gives *S* defeasible, *non-inferential* justification for believing *P*. Some advocates of PC or cousin views—for instance, Tucker (2012), Chudnoff (2014), and Huemer (2016)—have recently countenanced or openly argued that appearances of a certain type are required to explain *inferential* justification. The most systematic of these views is Huemer (2016)'s *theory of inferential seemings* (ToIS). According to ToIS, *S*'s having inferential justification for *Q* from *P* requires *S* to entertain an *inferential* appearance that represents *Q* as being true or probably true in light of *P*. Moretti (2017) has argued that PC is affected by *the problem of reflective awareness*,

which renders seeming-based non-inferential justification in a sense elusive and opens the door to sceptical challenges. In the following I show that, despite some merits, ToIS is afflicted by a variant of the problem of reflective awareness that makes inferential justification vulnerable to a pernicious form of inferential scepticism. My conclusion is that the prospects for a satisfactory internalist account of inferential justification that resorts to seemings are quite poor.

In more detail, §2 outlines PC and the problem of reflective awareness. §3 introduces ToIS. §4 argues that ToIS is affected by the problem of reflective awareness. §5 argues that because of this, ToIS is open to a sceptical challenge. §6 concludes the paper by generalizing this finding.

2. PC, reflective awareness and scepticism

The claim that we have epistemic justification for believing many things just because of the ways things *appear* to us to be looks plausible. For instance, it looks plausible that I can have justification for believing that a tiger is in the enclosure just because it *seems* visually so to me. It looks plausible that I have a reason for believing that $1 + 1 = 2$ just because this *seems* a priori true to me. It looks plausible that I can have justification for believing that I had avocado for breakfast just because I *seem* to remember eating avocado. PC accounts for the justifying force of seemings through this principle:[1]

> (P1) If it seems to S that P, then, in the absence of defeaters S thereby has some degree of justification for believing that P. (Huemer 2007, p. 30)

Huemer (2001) endorsed the stronger principle that if it seems to S that P, in the absence of defeaters S has justification *sufficient* to believe P. He has later rejected it because it is implausible that a *weak* and *wavering* seeming that P could give S enough justification to believe P (cf. Huemer 2007: 30n1). Huemer appears to presuppose nevertheless that:

> (P2) If S has a clear and firm seeming that P, then, in the absence of defeaters S thereby has justification sufficient to believe P.

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[1] For more detailed introductions to PC, see Tucker (2013), Moretti (2015) and Huemer (2017).

Hereafter, when I speak of PC, I will mainly refer to P2, as this is the principle actually at stake in most conversation about PC. Note that if P2 is true, P1 becomes very plausible. Furthermore, when I speak of seemings or appearances, I will always mean *clear* and *firm* seemings. P2 concerns *propositional* rather than *doxastic* justification.[2] P2 has a variant for doxastic justification:

> (P3)   In absence of defeaters, *S*'s belief that *P* is justified if it is based on *S*'s seeming that *P*. (Cf. Huemer 2017, §1c)

P1-P3 are *internalist* because seeming-based justification is determined only by states reflectively accessible to *S*—namely, *S*'s seeming that *P* and lack of defeating evidence.

Huemer and most phenomenal conservatives hold that seemings are *experiences* provided with propositional content but *unanalysable in terms of belief*. Seemings are characterized by a phenomenology that makes them represent their contents *assertively*, describable as the feeling of ascertaining that a given proposition is true (cf. Pryor 2004, Huemer 2001, §4 and Tolhurst 1998). The 'thereby' in P1 and P2 indicates that *S*'s justification for *P* is solely *based* on the seeming that *P*. Since it is not based on any *belief* of *S* (e.g., the belief that her faculties are working properly or the reflective belief that she has a seeming that *P*), this justification is *non-inferential* (cf. Huemer 2017). *S*'s seeming-based justification for *P* is *defeasible*. It can be defeated, for instance, by *S*'s evidence for ~*P*,[3] evidence that *S*'s relevant faculty is malfunctioning, and so on, where evidence is another belief or a seeming of *S*. Moretti (2017) shows that *S*'s reflective belief that she has a seeming that *P* together with *S*'s conceiving of possible explanations of the same seeming that entail ~*P* can also defeat *S*'s non-inferential, seeming-based justification for *P*.

Huemer thinks that if we adopt an internalist viewpoint in epistemology—one that sees a tight connection between what is epistemically justified and what looks reasonable to do for the

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[2] *E* gives *S propositional* justification for *P* just in case *E* gives *S* rational support for believing *P* whether or not *S* believes *P* on the basis of *E,* or believes *P* at all. *E* gives *S doxastic* justification for *P* just in case *E* gives *S* propositional justification for *P* and *S* bases her actual belief that *P* on *E*.
[3] Where '~' is logical negation.

subject—PC will emerge as self-evident (cf. 2001, pp. 104-105). McGrath explains Huemer's

conviction as follows:

> Suppose it seems to you that *P* and you have no defeaters (i.e., no good
> evidence for ~*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 ~*P*? Withhold judgment on
> *P*? It *does* seem to you that *P*, and you lack evidence for ~*P* and for the
> unreliability of the seeming with respect to *P*. The only reasonable attitude to
> take is belief. (2013, p. 226)

I find this case in support of PC—specifically, of P2—quite convincing.[4] Consequently, I take PC

to be prima facie plausible.[5]

According to its supporters, PC has several merits. PC vindicates everyday epistemic

practices. Indeed, we ordinarily seem to take ourselves to have justification for believing many

things just because of how those things appear to us to be (cf. Tucker 2013). PC is philosophically

alluring also because it applies to seemings of any type and thus offers a unified account of non-

inferential justification for beliefs of all sorts—for instance, perceptual, a priori, moral, and

mnemonic (cf. Tucker 2013 and Moretti 2017). In consequence, PC also plays a key role in

grounding fallible foundationalism (cf. Huemer 2001, p. 102).[6]

Another celebrated virtue of PC is its antisceptical bite. PC would allow us to reject those

arguments that assert that we need independent justification for ruling out all error conjectures in

order to possess (defeasible) non-inferential justification for believing ordinary things. Suppose *S*

has an experience as if (*P*) this cat is on the mat. The sceptic may insist that *S*'s experience gives *S*

justification for believing *P* only if *S* has independent justification for ruling out the conjecture that,

say, (*SH*) *S*'s experience is a mere hallucination caused by the Matrix. The sceptic will then contend

that since *S* cannot have this independent justification, *S* cannot have justification for believing *P*

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[4] Huemer (2001, pp.103-104) also attempts to defend PC by invoking Richard Foley's pragmatic conception of
epistemic rationality. Moretti (2017) criticizes this defence. Huemer (2001, 2007) also delivers a controversial *self-
defeat argument* to the effect that the belief that PC is false cannot be doxastically justified. See Moretti (2015) for a
survey of objections, and Huemer (2017) for some responses.
[5] PC has been targeted by various objections but it is dubious it has been *lethally* struck. For a survey of objections and
responses see Huemer (2017), Moretti (2015) and Tucker (2013)
[6] For further asserted virtues of PC see Tucker (2013).

either. Suppose, nevertheless, that S's experience is a *seeming* that P. If PC is true, S can have justification for believing P even in the absence of independent justification for ruling out *SH* or any other error conjecture (cf. Huemer 2001 and Pryor 2000 and 2004).

This asserted antisceptical virtue of PC is open to criticism. Moretti (2017) suggests that a response to scepticism based on PC would prove forceful and satisfactory only if it enabled us to reject arguments that question our having non-inferential justification *once we had engaged with them*. Moretti contends that, due to the problem of reflective awareness, PC *doesn't* enable us do this.

Let's tell apart 'S's having a seeming that P' and 'S's being reflectively aware of a seeming that P'. The first expression refers to a mental state of S—a seeming that P—which could exist even if S didn't reflect on her experiences. The second refers to a more complex state of S that encompasses at least three items: (i) S's seeming that P, (ii) S's reflective acquaintance with her seeming that P, and (iii) S's reflective belief that she has that seeming (i.e., S's belief that she has a seeming that P based on her acquaintance with that seeming). Suppose S has non-inferential justification for believing P on the basis of her seeming that P. The problem of reflective awareness is this: if S becomes reflectively aware of her seeming and realizes that its existence can potentially be explained by hypotheses entailing $\sim P$, S's non-inferential justification for P based on her seeming that P will be either *destroyed* or replaced with *inferential* justification.

Let me clarify this with an example. Suppose at time t_0 S has a seeming that (P) the cat on the mat, and no defeater.[7] S will thereby have non-inferential justification for P, as the only rational attitude for S to take towards P is belief. Suppose at t_1 S becomes reflectively aware of her seeming. At t_0 S didn't entertain a belief that she had that seeming; S was thus incapable of wondering whether the seeming was veridical or not. At t_1 S can pose this question to herself. Suppose S does so. She will find alternative explanations of why she has that seeming: it might be the result of her actually perceiving that P, or it might be an illusion or hallucination produced by, say, a clever

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[7] This is a *perceptual* seeming but variants of this example apply to appearances of other types.

camouflage, a hallucinogenic inadvertently consumed, the Matrix, and so on. At t_1 S will thus realize that her seeming that P can possibly be produced by states of affairs that *falsify P*.

Suppose that at this point S lacks justification for ruling out as false or improbable some of the error conjectures entailing $\sim P$ she has conceived of. Believing P would no longer be a reasonable attitude for S. Thus, S would no longer have justification for believing P regardless of her seeming that P. Alternatively, suppose S does have justification for ruling out *all* those error conjectures. In this case, S's non-inferential justification for P based on her seeming that P would be supplanted by *inferential* justification for P. Imagine, for instance, that S has statistical evidence to conclude that the hypothesis that she actually perceives that P is much more likely than any error conjecture. Or suppose that S realizes that the hypothesis that she perceives P is much simpler and more natural than any error conjecture, and that this is evidence for S to conclude that the perception hypothesis is much more likely than its rivals. In either case, S could be able to justifiedly conclude that P is true. However, note that in either case S could reach this conclusion only via some type of *inference*. S's justification for believing P would thus be *inferential*.

If PC is true, ordinary people who don't use to reflect on their experiences and subjects incapable of doing so (such as small children and intelligent animals) will often possess non-inferential justification based on their seemings. Nevertheless, regardless of PC's truth, any reflective subject S who *engaged* with a sceptical argument targeting *her own* possession of non-inferential justification in the attempt to reject it would lose her non-inferential justification based on her seemings (cf. Moretti 2017).

Suppose for instance S has an experience as if P and aims to reject an argument questioning her non-inferential justification for P based on that experience. The argument says that since S's experience might result from the truth a conjecture SH entailing $\sim P$, S could have justification for believing P only if she had independent justification for disbelieving SH. The argument concludes that S cannot have justification for P because she cannot have the independent justification. The question is whether S could rebut this reasoning by interpreting 'experience as if P' as 'seeming that

P' and adducing PC to argue that her seeming-based justification for *P* needs no independent justification. The answer is negative. For *S* could engage with this sceptical argument only if she understood the way in which *SH* jeopardizes her seeming-based justification for *P*. But *S* could do this only if she were reflectively aware of her seeming that *P* and appreciated that the error hypothesis *SH* is a possible explanation of it. Once these two conditions were met, *S* would *lose* her non-inferential justification for *P* based on her seeming. Thus, adducing PC would be for *S* ineffective.

3. Huemer's ToIS

Huemer (2016)[8] distinguishes between *fully explicit inference* and *inference against background*.[9] Suppose *S* infers *P* from *E* (where *E* can be a conjunction of propositions). What differentiates these two kinds of inferences is this: in the first case *S* needs no (non-logical) background information to draw the inference and attain justification for *P*; in the second case *S* needs some background information to make the inference and attain justification for *P* (cf. 2016, p. 144).

For example, suppose *S* justifiedly believes that (*E*) it is false that both a tiger and a cow are on the couch, and that from this *S* justifiedly infers that (*P*) there is no tiger or no cow on the couch. *S* will need some background to *understand E* and *P*. But *S*'s *ability to perform the inference* and *S*'s *justification* for *P* seem not to require any (non-logical) background. This counts as a fully explicit inference. Alternatively, imagine *S* returns home and sees that the fabric of the couch is shredded. From her justified belief that (*E*) the cat has been home all the time and the couch's fabric has become shredded, *S* justifiedly infers that (*P*) the cat has shredded the fabric. *S*'s ability to run this inference and her justification for *P* in this case require a host of background beliefs (which need not be occurrent in *S*'s mind). *S* needs to believe, for instance, that the cat has sharp claws and

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[8] ToIS has been presupposed in some of Huemer's earlier work—for instance, Huemer (2001, pp. 112-113 and 2007, p. 30n1).
[9] Huemer (2016) also considers cases of *non-inferential* dependence, which I set aside.

that fabric doesn't spontaneously become shredded. This is an inference against background (cf. 2016, p. 144).

ToIS aims to account for inferential justification resting on, indifferently, fully explicit inferences or inferences against background, where these inferences can be *deductive* or *non-deductive*. Justification is meant to be *doxastic*. This requires S to believe both E and P and actually (and consciously) infer P from E (cf. 2016, pp. 144-145). A key assumption of ToIS is that S's acquiring an inferentially justified belief that P from another justified belief that E requires S to have a particular appearance—called *inferential seeming*[10]—which represents P as being true or probably true *given* or *in light of E*[11] (cf. 2016, p. 153).

Although Huemer doesn't say this explicitly, ToIS would seem to rest on an internalist intuition that parallels the one grounding PC, described in McGrath's above quotation. Suppose S has a justified belief that E, and an appearance that, given E, P is true or probably true.[12] Also suppose that S has no reason for disbelieving P or distrusting her seeming. In these circumstances, the only rational attitude for S to take towards P is belief. Thus it is intuitive that if S believes P, this belief is justified—at least from an internalist perspective. If this intuitive thesis is accepted, a correlated claim will also look plausible: imagine that S's belief that E is justified *to some degree*, and that S has a seeming that, given E, P is true or probably true. Also suppose that S has no reason for disbelieving P or distrusting her seeming. In these circumstances, if S believes P, this belief will be justified *to some degree*.

Let me first outline ToIS's account of inferential justification resting on *fully explicit inference*. It says that S's belief that P is inferentially justified to some degree just in case there is a proposition E such that:

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[10] Standard arguments to conclude that (non-inferential) seemings couldn't be beliefs or tendencies to believe (see Moretti 2015) apply to *inferential* seemings as well.

[11] An inferential seeming doesn't merely represent that E and P stand in a certain logical or epistemic relation to one other. Huemer fears that a seeming of this type would engender a variant of Lewis Carroll's infinite regress problem (cf. 2016, pp. 146-147 and 152-153). For Huemer, an inferential seeming is rather one that represents that P is true or probable *under the assumption that E is true* (cf. 2016: pp. 149-150).

[12] Where 'P is probably true' is to be intended in the sense that P is so probable that can be believed.

(1) *S*'s belief that *E* is justified to some degree;
(2) *S* has an inferential seeming that, in light of *E*, *P* is true or probably true;
(3) *S*'s justification for *E* doesn't depend on *S*'s having justification for *P*;
(4) *S* lacks (robust) defeaters for *P*;
(5) *S*'s belief that *E* causes *S*'s belief that *P* via *S*'s inferential seeming and by a non-deviant causal chain. (Cf. 2016, p. 150)

Although this account concerns *degrees* of justification, I take it to entail the following about *plain* justification: *S*'s belief that *P* is inferentially *justified* if and only if *S*'s belief that *E* is *justified* and (2)-(5) are satisfied.[13]

(1), (3) and (4) are obviously required. (1) looks basic. (3) rules out question-begging inferences. (4) is needed because *S* would lack inferential justification for *P* if *S* had a defeater of that justification.[14]

Conditions (2) and (5) call for elucidation. Huemer endorses the intuition—widespread among internalists—that *S* can acquire an inferentially justified belief that *P* from another belief that *E* of her only if (a) *S sees* (in some relevant sense)[15] that *E* supports *P* (i.e., that *E* makes *P* true or probable) and (b) *S* infers *P* from *E through* seeing that *E* supports *P*. Condition (2) fleshes out the requirement (a) by interpreting '*S* sees that…' as '*S* has an inferential seeming that…' (cf. 2016, pp. 150-151 and 2013, p. 338).

One could criticize Huemer's interpretation of '*S* sees that…' by stressing that *S* might happen to have a seeming that *E* supports *P* even if *E* does *not* support *P*. Huemer dismisses this criticism observing that it rests on the questionable assumption that *S*'s having an inferentially justified belief that *P* from a belief that *E* requires *E* to *actually* support *P*. Huemer claims—not implausibly, in my opinion—that from an internalist viewpoint, *S*'s inferentially justified belief doesn't require actual support. Consider for example a skilled but unfortunate mathematician who has carefully completed an apparent proof that *P* from premise *E* by making an undetected, very

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[13] Huemer stresses that 'when one performs [a deductive] inference, the conclusion typically winds up at least slightly less justified than the premise' (2016, p. 150). I tend to think, nonetheless, that when the relevant inferential seeming is *firm* and *clear*, the conclusion should prove as much justified as the premise.

[14] A robust defeater is, for Huemer, one capable of rendering *P completely* unjustified—one such that *S* couldn't retain *any* degree of justification for *P* (cf. 2016, p. 151). If we focus on plain justification rather than degrees of justification, the qualification 'robust' becomes irrelevant.

[15] I follow Huemer (2016) in taking the verb *to see* not to be necessarily factive in this context.

subtle mistake. Since the mathematician finds no reason to distrust her proof, she is rationally required to believe *P*—it would be irrational for her not to do so in these circumstances. Her belief that *P* looks thus inferentially justified (cf. 2016, pp. 147-148 and 2013, p. 339).

Condition (5) fleshes out the internalist constraint on inferentially justified belief according to which (b) *S* must infers *P* from *E* through her seeing that *E* supports *P*. Accordingly, (5) requires that *S*'s belief that *E* must cause *S*'s belief that *P*—in a non-deviant way[16]—via *S*'s seeming that *E* supports *P* (cf. 2016. pp. 151-152 and 2013, p. 338).

Let's turn to ToIS's account of inferential justification resting on *inference against background*. Suppose that *S* infers *P* from *E* against background information *B*, and that *S* lacks occurrent awareness of *B*, as it normally happens. The internalist will claim that *S*'s performing this inference and getting justification for *P* require *S* to see that *E* supports *P*. Accordingly, on Huemer's account, *S* must entertain a seeming that *E* supports *P*. The question is how *B* comes into this picture. It is implausible that *S*'s seeming could represent *P* as true or probably true given *E and B*. For the (typically complex) information stored in one's background information doesn't normally become occurrent in one's mind either in the form of belief or in the form of appearance (cf. 2016, p. 157). ToIS explains the epistemic relevance of *B* as follows: the truth or probability referred to in *S*'s inferential seeming is *relativized to B* in the same sense in which confirmation theorists often say that the probability of a proposition given evidence is *conditioned on background information* (cf. 2016, pp. 157-158). But how can *S*'s seeming include reference to *B* given that *S* isn't conscious of *B*? To begin with, *S*'s seeming is generated by brain processes shaped by *B*. Furthermore, *S* will be disposed, if the issue arises, to acknowledge the relevance of *B* to her appearance's content (cf. 2016, p. 158).

ToIS's account of inferential justification resting on inference against background comes again in terms of conditions (1)-(5), with the only difference that (2) is supplanted by:

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[16] Huemer provides this example of a deviant causal link: suppose *S* justifiedly believes *E* and sees that *E* supports *P*, but she refuses to believe *P* because this makes her unhappy. Nevertheless, an epistemically benevolent brain scientist detects *S*'s justified belief that *E* and *S*'s inferential appearance, and this detection causes the scientist to use a brain-manipulation tool to induce in *S* a belief that *P*. Clearly, *S*'s belief that *P* isn't in this case *inferential*.

     (2^B) *S* has an inferential seeming that, in light of *E*, *P* is true or probably true
          relative to B.

     For lack of space I cannot go into further details. This summary has hopefully shown that ToIS is interesting, prima facie plausible or at least promising. Now let me contrast ToIS with Fumerton's rival theory. Fumerton (1995, pp. 36, 85-94, 187-224) also adopts an internalist approach to justification and maintains that *S* is inferentially justified in believing *P* on the basis of E^{17} only if: (1*) *S* is justified in believing *E* and (2*) *S* is justified in believing that *E* makes *P* true or probable because, among other things, (3*) *S* is *acquainted* with the *logical probability* of *P* given *E*. Fumerton endorses classical acquaintance theory according to which *S* is acquainted with a fact when it is immediately before *S*'s consciousness. Furthermore, he thinks of logical probability in Keynesian terms, as a sui generis abstract relation between propositions (where entailment is the upper limit of making probable). Fumerton (2015) concedes that (2*) may be dropped. ToIS and Fumerton's thus essentially diverge because of (3*). Whereas Huemer interprets the internalist requirement for inferential justification that *S* must see that *E* supports *P* as stating that *S* must have a seeming that *E* supports *P*, Fumerton interprets it as saying that *S* must be acquainted with the (high) logical probability of *P* given *E*.

     An advantage of ToIS over Fumerton's theory is that it doesn't rest on the controversial thesis that there exist logical probabilities. *S*'s inferential seeming represents *P* as true or *probably true* given *E*, but 'probably true' need not be interpreted as referring just to *logical* probability—any interpretation of it suitable to flesh out the intuition that *S* sees that *E* supports *P* would do (cf. Huemer 2016, pp. 154-155 and 159). In addition to this, note that a crucial difference between appearance and acquaintance is that acquaintance is *factive*—*S* cannot be acquainted with the fact that *P*'s logical probability given *E* is high unless this probability is actually so—whereas appearance can be non-veridical—*S* can have the appearance that *E* supports *P* even if it doesn't.

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[17] Where *E* includes *everything* that *S* takes to be relevant to *P*'s truth.

Accordingly, Fumerton's theory cannot explain the cases in which S has an inferentially justified belief that P from another belief that E, though E doesn't really support P. (Recall the case of the unfortunate mathematician). ToIS doesn't have this problem (cf. 2016, pp. 155-156).[18]

4. Inferential seemings and reflective awareness

Once inferential seemings are called on, a version of the problem of reflective awareness surfaces. Imagine that S has a justified belief that E, an inferential seeming that E supports P (perhaps relative to some background B), and no reason for disbelieving P or distrusting her seeming. If S comes to believe P because of her justified belief that E via her seeming that E supports P, S's belief that P will be inferentially justified. Nevertheless, if S becomes reflectively aware of her seeming that E supports P and speculates about alternative explanations of it, the justification of her belief that P will be either *destroyed* or *supplanted* by new inferential justification depending on *both* S's original belief that E *and* additional justified beliefs of S that attest the trustworthiness of S's seeming.

Let me elucidate this with an example. Suppose at t_0 S justifiedly entertains a belief that (E) it is false that both a tiger and a cow are on the couch. Furthermore, imagine that at t_0 S has an inferential seeming that, given E, it is true that (P) there is no tiger or no cow on the couch, and no evidence for disbelieving P or distrusting her seeming. If S comes to believe P at t_1 because of E and through her seeming that P is true given E, this belief will be inferentially justified. For belief is the only rational attitude for S to take towards P at t_1 given that information. However, suppose that at t_2 S becomes reflectively aware of her inferential seeming. S will entertain a reflective belief that she has a seeming that P is true given E. Before t_2 S didn't have this belief, so S was incapable of wondering whether her seeming was veridical or deceptive. But at t_2, S can ask herself this question.

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[18] An internalist (leaning perhaps towards externalism) might insist that inferential justification intuitively requires *actual* support, to the effect that S cannot entertain an inferentially justified belief that P, if P is not supported by E. Should this intuition prove sound, ToIS's five conditions for inferentially justified belief would have to be supplemented with: (6) E actually supports P. This amended theory would still have an advantage over Fumerton's: it could account for the cases of *apparent* justification—in which it *seems* to S that E supports P but it *doesn't*. It is hard to understand how Fumerton's theory could account for these cases without recurring to inferential appearances. But once inferential appearances are invoked, it becomes unclear why we need Fumerton's theory.

Imagine *S* does so. She will find various possible responses: the appearance might result from her actual ascertaining that *P* is true given *E* through some analytic or intuitive faculty she is endowed with. Alternatively, the seeming might be a deceptive representation produced by, for instance, *S*'s sheer tiredness, a cognitive impairment of *S* caused by an incipient mental disorder, a Cartesian demon,[19] and so on. At t_2 *S* will thus realize that her seeming that *P* is true in light of *E* can possibly be explained by conjectures that entail that it is *false* that *E* makes *P* true.

Suppose, then, that *S* finds no justification for ruling out as false or improbable some of the error conjectures she has conceived of. Believing *P* would no longer be a rational attitude for *S*. So *S*'s belief that *P* would no longer be justified. Alternatively, suppose *S* finds justification for ruling out *any* of these error conjectures and concluding that her seeming is veridical or trustworthy. It is intuitive that in this case *S*'s belief that *P* would still be inferentially justified. However, note that now the inferential justification of *S*'s belief that *P* would depend on *both* *S*'s original justified belief that *E and* new justified beliefs of *S*—for instance, the belief that the error conjectures she has conceived of are all false or improbable or the belief that her seeming is trustworthy.[20]

I have considered a *fully explicit* inference relying on a *deductive* seeming, but my example can be recast using inferences of other types. For instance, take again *S*'s *abductive* inference *against background* going from

(*E*) The cat has been home all the time and the couch's fabric has become shredded

to

(*P*) The cat has shredded the fabric.

Suppose that at t_0 *S* justifiedly believes *E*, has an inferential—abductive—seeming that *P* is probably true given *E* relative to background B,[21] and no reason to disbelieve *P* or doubt the truthfulness of her seeming. Suppose *S* thereby believes *P* at t_1. *S*'s belief will be inferentially

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[19] In his *First Meditation* Descartes introduces the conjecture of a deceiving God, then reformulated as the demon conjecture, which raises the possibility that we might constantly be deceived in our elementary *arithmetical* reasoning. It is easy to extend this conjecture to threaten all our elementary *inferences*.

[20] These additional justified beliefs may be conceived of as either additional *bases* of *P*'s justification or as states that fulfill conditions that *enable* *S*'s seeming to have justifying force.

[21] Hereafter, I'll leave reference to *B* implicit.

justified. Imagine that at t_2 S acquires a reflective belief that she has that inferential seeming. S will be able to wonder whether the seeming is trustworthy or not. If S does so, S will find some possible responses: S might hypothesize that her seeming is trustworthy because it has been produced by a faculty she is endowed with capable of tracking the actual probability of propositions given evidence.[22] Once S has posited explanations of this sort, S will also conceive of sceptical alternatives that imply that her seeming is deceptive. S might conjecture that the faculty she is supposedly endowed with is faulty on that occasion because, say, S is unconsciously biased against cats, S has inadvertently ingested LSD, or a Cartesian demon has interfered. S might also conceive of sceptical conjectures entailing that no faculty like the one imagined actually exists. At t_2 S will thus realize that her seeming that P is probable in light of E can possibly be explained by conjectures that entail that it is *false* that E makes P probable.

Suppose S lacks justification for ruling out some of these error conjectures. Accordingly, S's belief that P would no longer be justified. Alternatively, suppose that S finds justification for ruling out *all* these error conjectures, to conclude that her seeming is trustworthy. It is intuitive that in this case S's belief that P would still be inferentially justified. But now the inferential justification of S's belief that P would depend on both S's original belief that E and other justified beliefs of S that attest that her seeming that E supports P is trustworthy.

5. Inferential scepticism and reflective awareness

The bearing of the problem of reflective awareness on ToIS isn't just devastating. If we actually have inferential seemings, their justifying power is likely to remain unchallenged in most cases. For we don't reflect on our mental states and speculate about their possible causes in normal circumstances; we engage in these activities only when we have reasons to do it. Thus, the

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[22] A controversial hypothesis with which Huemer (2016) nevertheless appears to flirt is that non-deductive inferential appearances depend on a faculty of S that tracks *logical* probabilities. 'Probability' could also be interpreted *subjectively*. In this interpretation, inferential seemings are not requested to track logical relations or objective chances. However, note that subjective probabilities must be *coherent*—they must conform to the probability calculus. In this interpretation, inferential seemings must depend on some cognitive faculty that guarantees this (weak) form of objectivity. This opens the door to error conjectures.

processes described in §4 are bound not to take place, normally, when we draw inferences. I will now show that, nonetheless, because of the problem of reflective awareness, the antisceptical bite of ToIS is importantly limited in the same way in which PC's is.

Huemer (2016) thinks that ToIS can be adduced to defuse two important types of sceptical arguments. The arguments of the first type aim to conclude that we have no inferentially justified belief because any attempt to acquire it would catch us in a vicious infinite regress. A basic argument this type starts from the familiar assumption that S can have a belief that P inferentially justified by a belief that E only if S *sees* that E supports P. This necessary condition is interpreted—in the argument—as one that requires S to have a *belief* that E supports P, *inferentially* justified by some other belief that E_1 of S. Since this necessary condition applies to *any* inferentially justified belief—the argument continues—it must also apply to S's very belief that E supports S, inferentially justified by E_1. Therefore, S can have this inferentially justified belief only if S possesses a further belief that E_1 supports the proposition [E supports P], inferentially justified by another belief that E_2. But then, again, S can have the last inferentially justified belief only if S entertains another belief that E_2 supports the proposition [E_1 supports the proposition [E supports P]], inferentially justified by another belief that E_3. This regress is endless. Since S cannot entertain an endless number of beliefs, S won't satisfy a necessary condition for having an inferentially justified belief. So—the argument concludes—S cannot have any inferentially justified belief (cf. Huemer 2016, p. 148).[23]

ToIS defuses arguments of this sort by rejecting the interpretation of the necessary condition for inferentially justified belief presupposed by the sceptic. On ToIS, all what S needs to have in order to *see* that E supports P is just a seeming that E supports P. This alternative reading stops the regress (2016, p. 153).

The problem of reflective awareness as such doesn't undermine *this* antisceptical consequence of ToIS. As stressed, we seldom reflect on our inferential seemings and speculate

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[23] See also Fumerton (1995: 187-190).

about their causes. Consider nevertheless a subject *S* who infers *P* from *E*, where *E* is justified for *S*. Imagine that *S* happens to be reflectively aware of her seeming that *E* supports *P*, and that *S* does conceive of some possible explanations of it entailing that the seeming is deceptive. If *S* cannot rule out these conjectures, *S* will lose the justification of her belief that *P*. But no infinite regress would necessarily start in this case.

The sceptical arguments of the second type that ToIS is meant to defuse are no less worrying than the former arguments. Suppose *S* justifiedly believes *E*, sees that *E* supports *P*, and thereby believes *P*. These arguments maintain, again, that *S*'s belief that *P* cannot be inferentially justified because *S* cannot meet a crucial condition. Specifically, they say that *S*'s seeing that *E* supports *P* could make the required contribution to the inferential justification of *S*'s belief that *P*— to the effect that this belief is justified—only if *S* had antecedent justification for taking her seeing that *E* supports *P* to be trustworthy. These arguments conclude that since *S* cannot have this antecedent justification, *S* cannot have inferential justification for *P*.[24]

One might think of rebutting reasoning of this sort by insisting that we can possess and generally possess antecedent justification for taking what we "sees" to be trustworthy. But this is admittedly dubious. For it is dubious, for instance, that all the relevant error conjectures could be justifiedly ruled out in many cases. A suspect is, furthermore, that the search for justification of this type could catch us in a vicious circle. Huemer thinks we can refute sceptical reasoning of this type by responding as follows:

> Since we are justified in trusting our appearances unless and until we acquire grounds for *dis*trusting them, we have an easy explanation of why most inferential beliefs are justified… It would then be the skeptic's burden to show the appearance to be untrustworthy. (2016, p. 159)

In short, Huemer interprets 'seeing that…' as 'having a seeming that…', and maintains that it is false that *S*'s seeming that *E* supports *P* can contribute to the inferential justification of *S*'s belief

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[24] Although Huemer (2016) doesn't explicitly state arguments of this type, the final paragraph of his paper indicates that he has them in mind.

that *P* only if *S* has prior justification for taking her seeming to be trustworthy. The truth is—according to Huemer—that *S*'s seeming that *E* supports *P* contributes to *S*'s inferential justification of *P by default*, unless we are given *S* reasons to distrust it.[25]

I find this rejoinder prima facie plausible, or at least promising, when *S* stands for an ordinary, unreflective individual. If ToIS is true, in the face of the inferential sceptic, ordinary subjects who are not accustomed to reflect on their inferential seemings and speculate about their possible causes will often have inferential justification. Despite this important upshot, it appears to me that ToIS cannot help *reflective* subjects—perhaps epistemologists—who *engage* with sceptical arguments of the sort just considered with the purpose to reject them.

Imagine that *S* justifiedly believes *E*, sees that *E* supports *P*, and thereby believes *P*. Furthermore, consider for example the following sceptical reasoning: since *S* cannot find independent justification for ruling out the conjecture that (*SH*) *S*'s seeing that *E* supports *P* is just a deceptive representation induced by a Cartesian demon, *S*'s belief that *P* cannot be inferentially justified. Suppose *S* engages with this argument. The crucial question if whether *S* could rebut it by interpreting 'seeing that…' as 'having a seeming that…' and then adducing ToIS to contend that her belief that *P* is actually justified in these circumstances regardless of her having independent justification for ruling out *SH*. The answer is negative. In fact note that *S* could engage with this sceptical argument only if she grasped the way in which *SH* jeopardizes her inferential justification of *P*. *S* could do this only if she were reflectively aware of her inferential seeming that *E* supports *P* and appreciated that *SH* could potentially explain its occurrence as a case of deceptive representation. Once these two conditions were fulfilled, however, *S*'s belief that *P* could be inferentially justified only if *S* found independent justification for ruling out *SH*. This is why *S*'s adducing ToIS would be ineffective.

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[25] In the above quotation Huemer writes that '*we are justified* in trusting our appearances' unless we acquire grounds to distrust them. Huemer is speaking loosely here. For one of the celebrated strengths of appearances is that their justifying power *doesn't* require justification for trusting them. Huemer must mean that our appearances have some justifying power unless we have reasons to distrust them.

6. Conclusions

I have discussed Huemer's ToIS, according to which *S*'s possessing inferential justification requires *S* to entertain suitable inferential seemings. I have argued that, despite its merits, ToIS is affected by a version of the problem of reflective awareness, which makes *S*'s inferential justification, in salient cases, hostage to sceptical arguments that question *S*'s independent justification for trusting her seemings.

To finish, let me suggest that *S*'s inferential justification is probably bound to be vulnerable, one way or another, to sceptical arguments of this type *on any internalist theory of inferential justification that relies on inferential seemings.* In fact consider the claim that (*C*) *S*'s inferential seemings can contribute to the inferential justification of *S*'s beliefs only if *S* has previous justification for taking her seemings to be trustworthy. Any internalist theory *T* that accounts for inferential justification through inferential seemings must either accept or reject *C*. If *T* accepts *C*, *S*'s inferential justification will *generally* be hostage to sceptical arguments that question *S*'s justification for trusting her seemings. On the other hand, if *T*—like ToIS—rejects *C*, due to the problem of reflective awareness, *S*'s inferential justification will be hostage to sceptical arguments of the same type whenever *S* engages with them. In conclusion, the prospects for a satisfactory internalist account of inferential justification that relies on seemings—one that wouldn't be an easy target for disquieting sceptical objections—appear quite dim.

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