Not So Phenomenal!

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I Phenomenal conservatism

"If it seems to S that *p*, then, in the absence of defeaters, S thereby has at least some degree of justification for believing that *p*." (Huemer 2007: 30)

Seemings: a *sui generis* class of conscious mental states with propositional contents and a distinct phenomenal character that comes in degrees (force and vivacity). Perceptual seemings, memory seemings, intellectual seemings…

The most plausible foundationalist epistemology available? "…simple and unified account of the justification of our beliefs about the external world, about the past, about the future, about values, and so on" (Huemer).

Basic tenets of the view:

The core theses: Its seeming to S that *p* provides S with

…at least some *prima facie* justification to believe that *p* **(Minimal Phenomenal Conservatism)**

…enough justification for a belief in *p* to be *prima facie* justified (**Standard Phenomenal Conservatism)**

The ontological thesis: There are seemings, a class of sui generis mental states with a distinct phenomenology.

The semantic thesis: At least some ordinary uses of the 'it seems that' -construction are used to report such mental, psychological states.

The seemings foundationalist thesis: Each non-inferentially justified belief that *p* is based on a seeming that *p*.

Seemings as **epistemologically special**/unique:

- *First*, they have a special kind of epistemic **import**: its coming to seem to you that *p* (always) provides some *prima facie* justification to believe that *p*.
- *Second*, they act as the **foundations** of all justified belief (and knowledge).

II Probabilistic takes on the core theses

(a) The Bayesian view

PC1 $\forall p$ P (p | Seems p) > P(p)

PC2 $\forall p$ P (p | Seems p) > .5

- A **luminosity** worry: if it seems that p, a rational being is certain that it seems that p? It seems that an object is Red_{27} vs. it seems that it is Red_{28}

  ⇒ Make heavy use of the distinction between propositional and doxastic justification?

  ⇒ Make a more radical departure from common formulations of phenomenal conservatism.

  (a) "…When one has suitable epistemic access to them"

  Consider: $\forall p$ P (p | x) > P(p)

  (i) x = I am inclined to believe p; (ii) I believe p; (iii) x = An intelligent being believes p, etc.

  (b) Appeal to extra-epistemic facts about causation... *How can brute causation confer epistemic status*?

- **Counterexamples**: P (there are no seemings | it seems that there are no seemings) = 0.

- Experiencing a **rich seeming-state**: which proposition is conditionalized on? *Strongest* proposition? Trouble for (PC2); massive prior conditional probabilities.

- **Poorly discriminating seemings, *Dartboard case***

  ? P (The dart landed in the middle | It seems that the dart landed in the middle) = 0

Summing up:

- ***Content neutrality:*** a particularly natural basis for defending especially (PC2) is the idea that at least as far as the ur-priors go, the epistemic import of a seeming is exhausted by its force and vivacity: it's content doesn't matter.
- Worries having to do with ***discrimination***:
  (a) one's seeming-states themselves might, by the rational priors, be imperfectly discriminating (e.g. *dartboard case*), and (b) one might have an imperfect ability to discriminate between different seeming-states (luminosity worry).

  ⇒ Interpret (PC1) and (PC2) as merely generally true? Problem: what's special about seemings?

(b)The Jeffrey View

Jeffrey conditionalization: a partition of propositions becomes salient, there is a re-distribution of probability amongst the members of the partition, and a re-normalization within each partition.

PC3 $\forall p\ P_{+\text{SEEMS}p}(p) > P(p)$

PC4 $\forall p\ P_{+\text{SEEMS}p}(p) > .5$

What are the relevant input partitions? Three somewhat natural options:

1. Partition by seeming-states, e.g. {Seems red, ¬Seems red}.
2. Partition by contents of seeming states, e.g. {Red, ¬Red}
3. Partition by both, e.g. {Seems red & Red, Seems red & ¬Red, ¬Seems red & Red, ¬Seems red & ¬Red}.

Partitioning by seeming-states

When it comes to seem to one that *p*, the relevant partition is {Seems *p*, ¬Seems *p*}.

How to make good on (PC3)?

(1) $P(p \mid \text{Seems } p) > P(p \mid \neg \text{ Seems } p) > 0$ Equivalently: $P(p \mid \text{Seems } p) > P(p)$

(2) $P_{+\text{SEEMS}p}(\text{Seems } p) > P(\text{Seems } p)$.

- P (there are no seemings | it seems that there are no seemings) = 0.
- P (The dart landed in the middle | It seems that the dart landed in the middle) = 0
- (PC4) does not follow: the relevant conditional probabilities must be high enough

Partitioning by contents of seeming-states

A way to try to avoid the above problem: an ***oomphy*** update:

- $P_{+\text{SEEMS}Center}$ (The dart hit the center) > P (The dart hit the very center | It seems that the dart hit the very center) = 0
- $P_{+\text{SEEMS}NoSeemings}$ (There are no seemings) > P (there are no seemings | it seems that there are no seemings) = 0.
  Note: requires one to be fairly ignorant of one's own seemings?

General problems:

Rich seemings and (PC4)… it comes to seem that *q*, where *q* entails $p_1 \ldots p_n$, all of which also seem to be the case.

Discriminability worry: two kinds of discrimination of one's seeming-states:

> ***Propositional discrimination***: If it seems to one that *p*, then one knows/is rationally certain/ is reasonably rationally confident that it seems to one that *p*.
>
> ***Doxastic sensitivity***: If it seems to one that *p*, one's doxastic states regarding whether *p* are sensitive to one's seemings: one is rationally certain/ is reasonably rationally confident that *p*.
>
> Must appeal to *powers of discrimination*, or *reliable, good cognitive habits*. But on such a story, the bulk of the epistemic work is done by such powers of discrimination, and not seemings alone.

III An alternative to probabilism: reasons

A belief in *p* is justified just in case it is based on a sufficiently strong, undefeated reason to believe *p*; its seeming to one that *p* provides a reason to believe that *p*.

Many of the problems discussed above resurface: *content neutrality*, rich seemings, dartboard case…

Luminosity/discriminability worries

(a) All reasons propositional: when it comes to seem to one that *p*, one acquires the reason that *it seems to me that p* (or, perhaps the reason that *p*).

(b) Mentalism: a state of its seeming to one that *p* is itself a reason

- Compare: an experience as of a hen with 48 speckles vs. as of a hen with 47 speckles; seeming hat an object is Red_{27} vs. seeming that it is Red_{28}.
- Appeal to propositional vs doxastic distinction?

Substantial epistemic work to be done by mechanisms that are not manifested in one's seeming states.

- At the very least, whether a belief based on a seeming is justified is partly a function of one's epistemic competences (e.g. discriminative abilities)
- Why allow competences to underwrite reasonable belief in case of transitions from seemings to beliefs, but not allow such competences underwrite non-inferential beliefs that are not the result of such transitions?

IV Conclusions

Dilemma: (a) seemings immune to discriminability worries (b) not immune

What is so special about seemings? How do they outperform other mental states?

Whether a belief based on a state S is justified essentially depends one one's cognitive capacities (e.g. discriminatory capacities).