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Seemings and Epistemic Justification

How Appearances Justify Beliefs



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ISSN 2211-4548
SpringerBriefs in Philosophy
ISBN 978-3-030-43391-8
<https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-43392-5>

ISSN 2211-4556 (electronic)
ISBN 978-3-030-43392-5 (eBook)

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This Springer imprint is published by the registered company Springer Nature Switzerland AG
The registered company address is: Gewerbestrasse 11, 6330 Cham, Switzerland

Acknowledgements

Portions of this book draw on previous published work of mine. Some parts of Chap. 2 are based on ‘Phenomenal conservatism’, *Analysis* (2015) 75, 296–309. Chapter 3 uses material of ‘Cognitive penetrability of perception and epistemic justification’, *Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (2019), co-authored by Christos Georgakakis. Chapter 4 includes a revised version of ‘In defence of dogmatism’, *Philosophical Studies* (2015) 172, 261–282. Some parts of Chap. 5 draw from ‘Phenomenal conservatism and the problem of reflective awareness’, *American Philosophical Quarterly* (2018) 55, 265–280 and ‘Inferential seemings and the problem of reflective awareness’, *Canadian Journal of philosophy* (2019) 49, 253–271.

Various colleagues have commented on drafts or presentations of parts of this manuscript at various stages of their development. I would like to thank particularly: Michael Bergmann, Francesco Berto, Berit Brogaard, Peter Brössel, Daniel Burnston, Catrin Campbell-Moore, Adam Carter, Lorenzo Casini, Michel Croce, Richard Dawid, Dylan Dodd, Anna-Maria Eder, Filippo Ferrari, Christos Georgakakis, Stephan Hartmann, Christopher Kelp, Federico Luzzi, Alessia Marabini, Anna Mathani, Kevin McCain, Matthew McGrath, Samir Okasha, Orestis Palermos, Jim Pryor, Thomas Raleigh, Martin Smith, Karim Thebault, Chris Tucker, Filippo Vindrola, Crispin Wright, Elia Zardini and anonymous reviewers of *American Philosophical Quarterly*, *Canadian Journal of Philosophy*, *Philosophical Studies*, *Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy* and *SpringerBrief*. A special thanks to Tommaso Piazza for his invaluable feedback over the years about many of the theses defended in this work. Finally, I’m in debt to Christos Georgakakis and Alessia Marabini for proofreading the manuscript.

I’m also grateful to the (no longer operative) *Northern Institute of Philosophy* of the University of Aberdeen, the *Tilburg Center for Logic and Philosophy of Science*, the *Munich Center for Mathematical Philosophy*, the *Eidyn Research Centre* of the University of Edinburgh, and the *Emmy Noether Research Group* ‘From Perception to Belief and Back to Perception’ of the Ruhr University of Bochum for hosting me and providing a stimulating atmosphere to conduct various stages of this investigation.

The research leading to this book was supported by a Visiting Fellowship from the *Tilburg Centre for Logic and Philosophy of Science*, two Visiting Fellowships from the *Munich Center for Mathematical Philosophy*, a Carnegie Grant from the *Carnegie Trust for the Universities of Scotland*, a *Supporting Grant* from the University of Aberdeen, and a Visiting Fellowship from the *Emmy Noether Research Group* ‘From Perception to Belief and Back to Perception’ of the Ruhr University of Bochum.

Contents

1	Introduction	1
1.1	What I do in this Book	1
	References	3
2	Phenomenal Conservatism	5
2.1	The Basics of Phenomenal Conservatism	5
2.2	The Nature of Seemings	8
2.3	Supporting Phenomenal Conservatism	12
2.4	Criticism of Phenomenal Conservatism	16
2.5	Conclusions	18
	References	18
3	Cognitive Penetrability	23
3.1	Characterizing Cognitive Penetrability	23
3.2	The Epistemic Problem of Cognitive Penetrability	27
3.3	The Reliabilist Account	29
3.4	The Inferentialist Account	31
3.5	Taming Cognitive Penetrability	46
3.6	Conclusions	54
	References	54
4	The Bayesian Objection	57
4.1	White's Objection	57
4.2	Responding to White's Objection	60
4.3	Perceptual Appearances and Reflective Justification	65
4.4	Conclusions	68
	References	69

5	Antisepticism and Easy Justification	71
5.1	Antisepticism and Reflective Awareness	71
5.2	Easy Justification Objections	77
5.3	Answering the Easy Justification from Closure Objection	80
5.4	Answering the Easy Justification from Bootstrapping Objection	85
5.5	Conclusions	87
	References	87
6	Concluding Remarks	89
	References	91

Chapter 1

Introduction



Abstract In this introduction I present the topic of the investigation carried out in this book and the central theses defended in it. I also clarify some assumptions of my research, specify the intended audience of this book and summarize its structure.

Keywords Phenomenal conservatism · Phenomenal dogmatism · Seemings · Appearances · Epistemic justification · Epistemic internalism and externalism

1.1 What I do in this Book

This work aims to introduce, dissect and evaluate the important but controversial epistemological position called *phenomenal conservatism*. Variants or special versions of this position have been lingering in the views of various philosophers for the last forty years, until Michael Huemer (2001) introduced phenomenal conservatism officially into epistemology, using this name.¹ Ever since, the popularity of this position has constantly increased.

Phenomenal conservatism maintains that our *appearances* or *seemings*—the ways things appear to us to be—have the inherent power to justify our beliefs. According to the phenomenal conservative, for example, if it appears to you, say, that it is raining outside, that $15 - 7 = 8$, or that Hitler was a wicked man, you thereby have a good reason to believe these things. This reason or justification is nevertheless defeasible—it can be destroyed by further evidence indicating that the appearance is unreliable or the belief false. Appearances are conceived of by the phenomenal conservative as *experiences*—so, not as *beliefs* or other *doxastic* states—provided with propositional content.

Phenomenal conservatism looks very natural and comes with a number of apparent epistemological benefits. For instance, it supplies a clear account of where our justification—perhaps *all* our epistemic justification—basically comes from: it originates from our seemings. It also illuminates the rationality of ordinary epistemic practices in which we take ourselves or others to have reasons to entertain beliefs

¹James Pryor (2000, 2004) has simultaneously introduced a very similar view, though less general, called *dogmatism*.