Abstract
This paper compares and contrasts Michael Huemer’s Principle of Phenomenal Conservatism with Husserl’s well-known Principle of All Principles. Despite some similarities, I argue that the two are quite different. I examine several cases in which the theories provide different assessments of a belief’s epistemic status, and argue that Husserl’s gives the correct answer in each case. I also argue that Husserl’s theory provides an intelligible connection between the content of an experience and its seeming true. Phenomenal conservatism does not. Finally, I argue that Husserl’s theory is not a restricted version of phenomenal conservatism.

According to the Principle of Phenomenal Conservatism (PPC), “If it seems to S as if P, then S thereby has at least prima facie justification for believing that P” (Huemer 2001, 99). This principle, along with its variations, has received a great deal of attention recently, and justly so. If it is true, and if seemings are as prevalent a feature of our psychological landscape as the principle’s defenders take them to be, then virtually all of us have a massive number of epistemically basic or noninferential (“thereby”) beliefs, many of which are true and undefeated.

In what follows, I will compare and contrast the Principle of Phenomenal Conservatism with Husserl’s well-known Principle of All Principles, according to which originary intuition is a source of basic justification. Although the two principles are superficially similar, I will argue that Husserl’s views on knowledge and justification are quite different from those of most contemporary phenomenal conservatives, and attempt to show that Husserl’s account is superior in a number of ways. I will examine several cases of belief formation on the basis of seemings, and argue that in those cases in which the principles give divergent verdicts regarding the justificatory status of an agent’s belief, Husserl’s account gives the correct answer. I will also argue that because Husserl’s Principle rests on a detailed specification of the composition and structure of noninferential knowledge, it renders intelligible why certain intentional contents seem true while others do not. I will argue that the same cannot be said of phenomenal conservatism.¹

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1. The Principles of All Principles
According to Husserl’s Principle of All Principles [PP]:

[E]ach intuition affording [something] in an originary way is a legitimate source of knowledge … whatever presents itself to us in “Intuition” in an originary way (so to speak, in its actuality in person) is to be taken simply as what it affords itself as, but only within the limitations in which it affords itself there (Husserl 1913/2014, §24, 43).

The general thrust of Husserl’s position is made clear earlier in the text, where Husserl praises empiricism for its “radicalism in the practice of knowing” (1913/2014, §19, 34). Empiricism’s radicalism consists in denying all epistemic authority to “powers of tradition, superstition, and raw and refined prejudices of every sort” (ibid.). The positive side of this radicalism consists in the conviction that

Judging rationally or scientifically about matters … means orienting oneself to the things themselves, or, more precisely, it means returning from talk and opinions to the things themselves, questioning them as they are themselves given, and setting aside all prejudices alien to them (Husserl 1913/2014, §19, 34-5).

Rational inquiry, no matter how far beyond what is given it extends, must at some point draw its conclusions from a privileged sort of contact with the objects upon which it bears.

So what do such privileged acts look like? Let’s take an example of a typical sort of intentional experience. Suppose that I think that my office door is open. Here we have, first, the experience itself, the intentional act. Its object is the state of affairs of my door’s being open (Husserl 1900-01/1970, Investigation 5, §17, 579; Smith and McIntyre 1982, 6–9). The act’s content is the proposition <my door is open>.

Finally, we turn to the act’s intentional quality. Husserl characterizes an act’s quality as “the general act-character, which stamps an act as merely presentative, judgemental, emotional, desiderative, etc.” (Husserl 1900-01/1970, Investigation 5, §20, 586) or “the modes of believing, entertaining, wishing, doubting etc.” (Husserl 1900-01/1970, Investigation 6, §27, 743) I can hope, or fear, that my door is open. In this example, let us suppose that I withhold belief with respect to the proposition <my door is open>.

Obviously the mere fact that I carry out an act with the intentional content <my door is open> and a given quality does not entail that I know that my door is open or that I am the least bit justified in believing that it is. What would count as the preferred or preeminent way of coming to know whether my door is open? Well, if I really cared about finding out whether my door is open, and if I had the ability to do so, I would go and check whether it is open. I would look at it. Perhaps I would give it a tug or a push and see if it swings on its hinges. Suppose I do that. I march right off to my office. Before I even get there, I can see the door jutting into the hallway. Arriving at my office, I can peer right through the doorway and into the room beyond, the door offering no resistance
to either my vision or my movement. Assuming my door is in fact open, I now know that it is.

This is a pretty typical sort of occurrence. It is also phenomenologically remarkable. It is a case of fulfillment. In it, we find an object to be as it was thought to be (Willard 1995, 138). When I discover the door to be open, it “is intuited as being precisely the determinate so-and-so that it was at first merely thought or meant to be” (Husserl 1900-01/1970, Investigation 6, §8, 694). Here are a few of notable features of such acts.

**Epistemic Force:** When I perceive and think the door to be open, I thereby have some degree of epistemic justification for believing that my door is open. This is clear from the fact that I have more than I did when I merely entertained the proposition that it is open. Let me push further: I am not just a tad more justified in believing the door is open. I am dramatically more justified in believing that it is open. It would be a worrying sign—a symptom, really—if I were to call my colleague Dan over and ask him, “In your opinion, is this door open?” (Hopp 2013, 345).

**Originary Intuition:** Intuition is a type of act in which an object is not meant merely symbolically or emptily, but is presented to us. Not all intuitive acts posit their objects. Imaginative acts have no pretensions to characterize reality at all; they are non-positing. And not all positing intuitive acts present their objects in person or in the flesh. If I close my eyes and visualize my door as being open, and posit it as being open, I have a positing intuitive experience, but nothing like a perception. What makes perception distinctive is that it is the species of intuition in which factually existing objects and states of affairs are not only intuited and posited as existing, but presented “in an originary way” (Husserl 1913/2014, §4, 13) or “in the flesh” (Husserl 1966/2001, 140). In what follows, I will be exclusively concerned with acts of fulfillment whose intuitive components are originary.

**Degrees of Adequacy:** Originary intuition can be more or less adequate or complete. The highest grade of completeness is immanent or self-posing perception. In the case of such experiences, “the identity of the object and the identity of the perception are one and the same; I mean different perceptions have different objects” (Husserl 1973/1997, §10, 22). The sorts of objects that can be given in this manner include some occurrent experiences and simple universals. In the case of “external” or “transcendent” objects, their originary mode of givenness is essentially one-sided or inadequate. The door I see not only has further parts and features that are presently not given, but it is given as having more sides and features than are presently given (see A.D. Smith 2008, 324).

This is an extremely important point to bear in mind when it comes to interpreting the Principle of All Principles. It does not claim that we are to only take what is given in an adequate way as it gives itself—as though we are only entitled to believe in profiles or appearances when seeing physical objects and states of affairs. Rather, we are to take what is given “in an originary way” as it gives itself, and many physical objects

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2 Phantasy, writes Husserl, “is set in opposition to perceiving and to the intuitive positing of past and future as true; in short, to all acts that posit something individual and concrete as existing” (Husserl 1980/2005, 4).
3 See Husserl 1966/2001, 58: “Inadequate modes of givenness belong essentially to the spatial structure of things; any other way of givenness is simply absurd.” Also see Husserl 1913/2014, §42-44 and §138.
can, according to Husserl be given originarily in perception (see Husserl 1913/2014, §1). Were I to withhold belief that the door is open in favor of something more cautious—merely that it appears that the door is open, say—I would be violating the Principle, not abiding by it.

**Two Acts, Same Object:** Fulfillment involves intuition but is not identical with it; in addition to perceiving something to be a certain way, one must think of it as being that way. Fulfillment, that is, involves at least two intentional experiences: a thought or conceptual act and an intuitive act. I began with an act in which an object is intended emptily, an act in which its object was not given or presented in any way. I then *perceived* the very same thing that the thought was about. The object was now no longer merely thought of, but presented to me. Both of these acts must be directed upon the same object. Perceiving someone tell me that my door is open will not fulfill the thought that it is open. The order of progression here is irrelevant. More often, experience proceeds from perceiving to thinking rather than thinking to perceiving, but in all cases fulfillment must at some point involve simultaneously thinking about and intuiting the intended object—it must, that is, involve recognition (Husserl 1900-01/1970, Investigation 6, §8, 695).

That fulfillment involves two acts is clear from the fact that they can be independently varied (see Husserl 1900-01/1970, Investigation 6, §4). My perceptual experience can change while my thought that the door is open remains constant, and my perceptual experience of the door can persist while I fulfill a number of different thoughts about the door or turn my thoughts to other matters.

**Different Contents:** The fulfilling act performs a function that the conceptual act alone does not. How do the acts differ? Do they differ in their content, quality, or something else? Husserl is quite clear that they need not differ in their quality. According to his account of the “doxic modalities” in *Ideas*, the original or “unmodalized” quality or “thetic character” is that of “certainty of belief.” The objects of acts with this quality have the “character of simply being” (Husserl 1913/2014, §104, 207). This quality can pass over to other modifications—to doubt, say (Husserl 1913/2014, §103, 206). These thetic characters can belong to both empty and intuitive acts. I can be quite certain that my door is open, even if I do not presently perceive it. And the thetic character of unmodified perceptual experience is also that of “naïve perceptual belief” (Husserl 1966/2001, 78). The difference between empty and intuitive acts, then, is not one of quality, since acts of either type can intend their objects as “simply being” in the mode of the “certainty of belief.”

So how do the acts differ then? On one account, the fulfilling act possesses an additional moment of intuitive fullness but the same intentional content (matter) as the fulfilled act (see Husserl 1900-01/1970, Investigation 6, §§25, 28). On another, which I prefer, they have a fundamentally different kind of intentional content. The important point here is that the two acts differ insofar as one *presents* us with the object itself, and

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5 “In all cases an intention comes into coincidence with the act which offers it fullness, i.e. the object which is meant in it is the same as the object meant in the fulfilling act” (Husserl 1900-01/1970, Investigation 6, §14b, 715). Also see Willard 1984, 225.
6 I have argued for this in Hopp 2008 and 2011. Also see Mulligan 1995.
that it does so in virtue of having a different total content (whether intentional or non-intentional) from that of the conceptual or cognitive act.

Degrees of Evidence: The degree of adequacy of an intuition to its object affects, in a readily intelligible way, the “adequacy” of acts of fulfillment or “rational posittings” of which they are parts (see Husserl 1913/2014, §138, 276). When I see the door from an unfavorable angle in dim light from some distance, for instance, my grounds for believing that the door is open are shaky. If I turn up the lights, walk across the hall, and view the door and doorway from various angles, I have increasingly stronger evidence that it is indeed open.

I never, however, have adequate evidence. My evidence for any propositions about the door—including propositions about its identity (“my door”) or even existence—is always in principle defeasible by other evidence. Adequate evidence is “intrinsically incapable of being ‘strengthened’ or ‘weakened’,‘” (Husserl 1913/2014, §138, 276), while the evidence I possess can be. According to Husserl, this is grounded in the very nature of the objects themselves, and to demand a greater degree of evidence for propositions about empirical objects is as absurd as demanding that they be perceptually presented adequately (Husserl 1973/1997, §39, 114–15; Husserl 1929/1969, §60, 161).

There are further interesting features of fulfillment that could be discussed. For instance, it is essential that the intuitive and conceptual act enter into an appropriate synthesis with one another, and it is possible that they do not do so (Husserl 1900-01/1970, Investigation 6, §7, 690-1). I might, for instance, hear a B-flat and think about a B-flat without recognizing what I hear as a B-flat. Still, I think we have a sufficiently clear conception of how fulfillment works. Fulfillment is “[t]he actual union of the conceptualizing act with the object, on the basis of a corresponding intuition of that object together with a recognition of the identity of the object of the concept and of the perception” (Willard 1995, 152).

Now we turn back to the Principle of All Principles. The first formulation of the Principle reads: “each intuition affording [something] in an originary way is a legitimate source of knowledge” (Husserl 1913/2014, §24, 43). I will not focus on this formulation. One reason is that it appears to be false. Since some intuitions are nonveridical, not all intuitions are a legitimate source of knowledge, at least not of their full objects. (Perhaps, though, one could acquire knowledge of something in any intuitive act. For instance, one can arguably become acquainted with properties and learn about various relations among them even in hallucination (see Johnston 2006 and Husserl 1913/2014, §7).)

The second formulation will be my focus. It reads: “whatever presents itself to us in ‘Intuition’ in an originary way (so to speak, in its actuality in person) is to be taken simply as what it affords itself as, but only within the limitations in which it affords itself there” (Husserl 1913/2014, §24, 43). I take this to be a claim about what we are rationally justified in believing. It may be tempting to render the second formulation more precisely as follows:

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7 Husserl often uses “evidence” (Evidenz) to designate the givenness of an object, and sometimes to designate a feature of judgments. See Husserl 1980/2005, 305: “I often used ‘evidence’ in a sense equivalent to the givenness of something itself. But surely we must distinguish: evidence as insight that belongs to judgment, <to the> judgment that <something> is there itself that exists and that is given again <as> that—and, on the other hand, the being-given itself.” “Evidenz,” then, is used to designate both fulfillment and intuition.
If an object \( a \) is presented as being \( F \) in an originary intuition to \( S \), \( S \) is thereby prima facie rationally justified in believing that \( a \) is \( F \).

Following Pryor (2000, 534), I understand a belief or judgment to be \textit{prima facie} justified when its content is defeasible by other evidence, but which enjoys all things considered justification in the absence of such evidence.

If the foregoing claims about perception and fulfillment are correct, this claim is false. I can perceive a B-flat, and perceive it veridically, but in hearing one I am not thereby justified in believing that it is a B-flat. I am conscious of it intuitively without conceptualizing it, in most cases. I generally don’t think about the notes I hear when I listen to music, but I nevertheless hear them. And even if I do conceptualize it, I do not recognize it. The required synthesis between the acts does not take place because I lack perfect pitch. Similarly, I can perceive a patch to be burgundy without being justified in believing that it is so. That is, I can perceive the patch, and I can perceive its burgundy color, and perceive that color to belong to the patch—as opposed to belonging to something else or nothing at all. But I cannot \textit{recognize} the patch as burgundy. Given my very limited command of color concepts, I would be \textit{guessing} if I judged it to be burgundy as opposed to some related shade of red. If presented with a maroon patch, I would be able to perceptually discriminate between their colors without trouble—they would look to be different colors. But if I managed to correctly classify the burgundy patch as burgundy rather than maroon, that would be a matter of luck rather than fulfillment. In this case, the patch would appear to be burgundy, and my experience is the type that could fulfill a thought that it is burgundy, but I would not be justified in believing it to be burgundy.

I do not take this to be an argument against Husserl’s considered view, but an argument against one possible interpretation of the Principle. Husserl’s considered view, in light of his extensive discussions of knowledge and fulfillment, seems to be this:

\[ \text{PP: If } S \text{’s thought (or meaning intention) that } P \text{ is fulfilled by an originary intuition, then } S \text{ is thereby prima facie rationally justified in believing that } P. \]

I take this interpretation to be closer to Husserl’s intentions. Husserl’s remark that what is intuited “is to be taken” as it affords itself is, I believe, directed towards those capable of “taking”—that is, thinking and judging about—what is given \textit{as} it is given. The important point is that it is fulfillment, not mere intuition, that justifies.

\[ \text{2. Phenomenal Conservatism} \]

According to the Principle of Phenomenal Conservatism,

\[ ^8 \text{See Wiltsche (forthcoming) for a good discussion of the Principle. His formulation reads: “If object } P \text{ is exhibited to a subject } S \text{ in intuitive givenness, then } S \text{ has at least prima facie justification for believing that } P \text{ exists and that } P \text{ has those properties which are exhibited intuitively” (8). Wiltsche makes it clear (n. 12) that what is required is not just intuition, but fulfillment—a “congruence between the signitive and the intuitive intention.”} \]
PC1: If it seems to $S$ as if $P$, then $S$ thereby has at least prima facie justification for believing that $P$ (Huemer 2001, 99).

A more recent formulation of the view is as follows:

PC2: 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).

Regarding defeaters, Huemer writes: “to have a defeater for P is to have either direct grounds for doubting P (a rebutting defeater) or grounds for doubting the reliability of the appearances supporting P (an undercutting defeater)” (Huemer 2013b, 747). The differences between these two versions of the principle are substantial, but the arguments which follow apply to both.

Before evaluating PC, we need to get a bit clearer on the nature of seemings. The first feature of seemings that virtually everyone seems to endorse is that they have propositional content. Seemings are a type of propositional attitude. According to Huemer, they are a genus of propositional attitude.

I take statements of the form “it seems to S that P” or “it appears to S that P” to describe a kind of propositional attitude, different from belief, of which sensory experience, apparent memory, intuition, and apparent introspective awareness are species. This type of mental state may be termed an "appearance" (Huemer 2007, 30).

Of course, the propositional content of a seeming need not specify anything about the seeming itself. If it seems to me that my door is open, the content of the seeming is not “It seems to me that my door is open” but rather “My door is open.” That is the proposition that I am justified in believing on the basis of its seeming to me to be open.

A second widely held view, already mentioned in the Huemer quotation above, is that seemings are distinct from beliefs (Tolhurst 1998, 293). Its seeming to one that P is neither sufficient nor necessary for one to believe that P. It seems to me that the two central circles differ in size when I observe the Ebbinghaus illusion, but I do not thereby believe that they do. And I believe plenty of propositions that do not seem true to me at all. The proposition “quarks have charm,” for instance, is one that I believe, but neither it nor its negation seems to me true. Nor are seemings inclinations to believe. Many things besides seemings can incline us to believe (Tolhurst 1998, Huemer 2013a). Furthermore, as Huemer explains, it might seem to me that P even when I have no inclination to believe it (Huemer 2007, 31). Finally, Huemer argues that seemings are what explain our inclinations to believe (ibid.).

Third, seemings can vary in intensity. As Huemer writes, using the term “appearance,” “There is a type of mental state, which I call an ‘appearance’, that we

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9 I follow Tucker (2013, 5) on the first two of these platitudes regarding seemings. I return to Tucker’s third platitude—that seemings have a “distinctive phenomenal character”—below.


11 Tucker 2010, 530. Huemer (2007, 36,) writes that “carelessly formed beliefs are typically ill-justified, even if they strongly seem to the subject to be true.” Also see his 2005, 105.
avow when we say such things as ‘It seems to me that p’, ‘It appears that p’, or ‘p is obvious’” (Huemer 2005, 99).

Despite this list of features, I am not entirely confident that I know what seemings are. Seemings are not distinguished from other sorts of mental states by their intentional content. The reason is clear: seemings can have precisely the same content as beliefs, which in turn can have the same contents as doubts, both of which are distinct from seemings.

Perhaps seemings are united by their intentional quality or attitude-type, as Huemer’s claim that they are a type of propositional attitude suggests. But there are some difficulties with this proposal as well. Unlike fears, hopes, and desires, seemings are a type of act in which something is posited as being a certain way. If, therefore, they were distinguished by their intentional quality, they would be distinguished by their doxic or positing quality. This, however, is not the case. Seemings cannot be distinguished from other intentional states in virtue of positing their objects as existing, or even doing so in the mode of certainty. Plenty of beliefs do that too (Tooley 2013, 310), as do straightforward perceptual experiences. It does not seem to me that there are more reals than naturals or that light travels at c, but I believe both and believe them unreservedly.

Perhaps, then, seemings are acts in which the object is not merely emptily intended, but intuitively present or given or even given in person. Using the terms “appears” and “seems” interchangeably, as Huemer does, invites such a view, since there is a use of “appears” which implies that the thing which appears is present in the flesh. But this is not the sense of “appears” or “seems” that Huemer, for one, has in mind. First, Huemer classifies memories as seemings, but memories can either be intuitive—re-livings of past experience, for instance—or empty, and in no case are they presentations of their objects in person.

Secondly, Huemer argues that he is not under any obligation to provide a philosophical analysis of the concept of seemings or the meaning of the term “seems,” because his readers, who know how the term is used, will have no trouble understanding him (Huemer 2013a, 328). So now we know that we are not dealing with some newfangled philosophical term of art. And we certainly aren’t dealing with a type of act which is confined to cases in which an object is present in the flesh. For within the “vast range of cases” (Huemer 2013a, 330) in which it seems or appears to S that P, there is a vast range of cases in which the state of affairs which P represents is in no way perceived or otherwise presented to S. If I come home and see my children’s shoes at the door, it would be perfectly natural for me to say “It appears/seems that my children are home.” Other propositions that seem true to me include: that the sun is larger than Earth; that I have a spleen; and that the Principle of Phenomenal Conservatism is false. None of these, however, has as its full intentional object something that I have ever perceived or otherwise intuited. These seemings or appearances are signitive, not intuitive or intuitively fulfilled. It should be clear, incidentally, from these examples that perceptual experiences, memories, intuitions, and introspection are not the sole species of seemings.¹²

What seems to set seemings apart lies along some other dimension of their phenomenological character (see Tucker 2013, 5). This phenomenological character is best captured by Tolhurst’s phrase “felt veridicality” (Tolhurst 1998, 298). Seeings

¹² Skene (2013, 540) leaves it open that there are others.
have “the feel of truth, the feel of a state whose content reveals how things really are” (Tolhurst 1998, 298-9). They possess a distinctive “forcefulness” (Huemer 2001, 77) or “assertiveness” (Tucker 2010, 530). Pryor holds that experiences give us immediate justification in virtue of their “peculiar ‘phenomenal force’.” “Our experience,” he continues, “represents propositions in such a way that it ‘feels as if’ we could tell that those propositions are true—and that we’re perceiving them to be true—just by virtue of having them so represented . . . I think this “feeling” is part of what distinguishes the attitude of experiencing that p from other propositional attitudes” (Pryor 2000, 547, n. 37). Tooley, who rejects phenomenal conservatism, writes, “It is natural to conclude … that Huemer’s concept of seemings is such that seemings are assertive mental representations, and this is in fact the case (Huemer, personal communication)” (Tooley 2013, 309).

Despite some rather significant differences in the details, I think we can detect a consensus here. One point on which all parties appear to agree is that seemings are conscious intentional states which, like beliefs and desires, have propositional content and which, like beliefs, have a positing quality, but which are distinguished from all other states by a distinctive feeling of something’s being true: forcefulness or assertiveness. If these points are right, then being a conscious, intentional state with propositional content and a distinctive sort of forcefulness is a sufficient condition for being a seeming. If PC is correct, then experiencing such a state is, in the absence of defeaters, sufficient for one to be propositionally justified in believing its content. (Tolhurst also speaks, more clearly than anyone else, of seemings as revelatory of the truth. I discuss his view further in §4).

Finally it is clear that the phenomenal conservative wants to say more than that seemings are merely sufficient for justification. The forcefulness of seemings is what explains why beliefs are justified. Seemings do not, according to phenomenal conservatism, merely tag along for the ride with other factors that do all of the epistemic work (see Audi 2013). Rather, they are themselves performing that work—it is in virtue of its seeming to S that P that S is justified in believing that P.

3. Some Cases
How does this account compare with the Principle of All Principles and the phenomenological account of fulfillment and perception that underlies it? There are several notable similarities between the views that I will simply mention.

First, both are principles of noninferential justification. Second, each specifies a sufficient condition for noninferential justification, and knowing or believing the respective principles themselves is not among those conditions. Third, both are broadly internalist principles, at least on one of the many understandings of internalism. In particular, one’s justification (though perhaps not one’s knowledge) supervenes on one’s mental states, and perhaps on one’s conscious or potentially conscious mental states. Finally, both make justification easy to come by. Seemings and acts of fulfillment occur with astonishing frequency, and they occur not only to epistemologists but to virtually every person. I take all of these to be virtues.

Nevertheless, the views are really quite different. We can begin to appreciate how different they are by considering a few cases. Afterward, I will try to diagnose why phenomenal conservatism goes wrong and Husserl’s theory gets matters right.13

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13 For other alleged counterexamples, see Markie 2005. See Tucker 2010 and Berghofer 2014 for responses.
Case 1: Me
Suppose that I consider whether my door is open. It does not seem to me that it is. I then go check whether it is open and under an experience of fulfillment, as described above. Upon doing so, it seems to me that the door is open.

Husserl and the phenomenal conservative give identical verdicts in this case: before seeing it I have no justification for believing that it is open, and after seeing it I have strong, albeit defeasible, justification for believing it. But they give very different explanations. For the phenomenal conservative, the act of fulfillment involves a stronger or more intense or forceful feeling of truth than does merely entertaining the proposition that the door is open. It has more assertiveness. And that is what explains its greater epistemic force.

Husserl provides a completely different answer: what explains the epistemic superiority of fulfillment over emptily thinking is that, owing to their different contents and structure, in one case I am confronted with the truth-maker for the propositional content of my thought, while in the other all I’ve got is the thought.

Case 2: Seemless
Now consider Conee’s case of Seemless (Conee 2013, 66), who has been convinced by some very weak arguments that external world skepticism is true. When she emptily considers whether the door is open, it does not seem to her that it is. Subsequently this thought is fulfilled on the basis of perception. Still it does not seem to Seemless that the door is open.

Since she has no belief that the door is open, the question of whether her belief is doxastically justified does not arise. But is the proposition that the door is open equally propositionally justified for her in both cases? Surely not. In fact, Husserl’s theory predicts that the level of propositional justification when Seemless has a fulfilled intention towards the door’s being open is exactly what it would be for us: extremely high. Her failure to respond to that evidence with a seeming, and in turn a belief, is indicative of a problem.

Case 3: Seemful
Upon considering whether my door is open, it seems to Seemful that it is. It seems quite strongly to be open, in fact. Suppose that Seemful then goes to my office and finds the door to be open. The strength of Seemful’s initial seeming does not increase; he was already very confident that the door is open.

Does Seemful’s justification for believing that the door is open also remain constant in this case? Very obviously not. After finding it to be open, Seemful is more justified than before. And—to push further—he is not a tad more justified. He is massively more justified. But he is not more justified in virtue of the level of assertiveness of his seeming, which remained constant.

Consider also whether Seemful was more justified when emptily entertaining the proposition that my door is open than I was. If assertiveness is what justifies, then my justification ought to have been very different from Seemful’s. But that, it seems to me, is exactly the wrong answer. Merely thinking of something does not, by itself, give one any evidence whatsoever for a proposition. That Seemful’s entertaining of the proposition is attended by a feeling of truth is an indication that something is amiss with Seemful.
Case 4: Wishy-Washy
Consider another case. Wishy-Washy considers whether the door is open, and it seems quite strongly to him that it is not. He then undergoes an experience of fulfillment: the door, it turns out, is open. Furthermore, it seems to Wishy-Washy to be open. But then he is reminded of his previous seeming that it was not open, which asserts itself with renewed energy, and his present, perceptually-based seeming diminishes in strength. The strength of each conflicting seeming waxes and wanes as Wishy-Washy abandons and returns to his senses. Does Wishy-Washy gain and lose justification for believing that the door is open in this scenario? Again, pretty clearly not. At the very least, this is not what it is like to acquire and lose evidence for anything. But the phenomenal conservative should regard this as a process of gaining and losing justification for the belief that the door is open.

On Husserl’s view, the degree of justification that each of these individuals has for believing that the door is open is identical at each point in time. When emptily entertaining the proposition that the door is open, each person has exactly no evidence that it is open, and no justification whatsoever for believing that it is open. When the empty intention is fulfilled on the basis of an appropriate perceptual experience, each party has extremely good justification for believing that the door is open, based on the consciousness of extremely good evidence that it is open. Husserl, then, could not agree more with Conee’s claim that “the state of affairs of a proposition seeming to us to be true, if there is such a state of affairs, is not evidence on its own for the proposition” (Conee 2013, 53).

The phenomenal conservative, by contrast, appears committed to the view that each of these individuals has very different degrees of justification for believing the proposition that the door is open, determined by the presence or absence and strength of forcefulness that accompanies the content of the act. Furthermore, the phenomenal conservative appears committed to the claim that some of these individuals have good justification for believing propositions for which they have not one iota of evidence. I submit that Husserl’s account delivers the correct answer.

4. Seemings and Rationality
The phenomenal conservative can dig in at this point and simply accept the consequence that in these scenarios, these individuals each are justified in adopting what we take to be preposterous attitudes vis-à-vis the propositions in question.

A vastly more promising reply is to dispute the possibility of anyone being in the sorts of mental states that Seemless, Seemful and Wishy-Washy find themselves in. Huemer has already challenged Conee’s Seemless, declaring that “Surely, various things would still seem to the subject to be happening in the external world.”14 Elsewhere, he writes:

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14 Huemer 2013a, 336. He also writes: “Even the most committed skeptics do not deny that there seem to be external objects around us” (2013a, 335). Skene (2013, 551), responding to John DePoe’s (2011) example of someone who feels pain but does not experience a seeming that he is in pain, writes: “it’s unclear exactly what an instance of direct acquaintance without a seeming would be like.” In the footnote to that remark, he even questions its coherence.
Intuitions, perceptual experiences, memories, and states of self-awareness are all mental states of a kind that naturally incline one to believe something (namely, the content of that very mental state, or, the thing that appears to one to be the case) (Huemer, “Phenomenal Conservatism”).

Huemer would likely agree that merely thinking of things emptily does not naturally incline one to believe something in the absence of other evidence—it is not a natural source of seemings.

Plainly there is something deeply unnatural about Seemless, Seemful, and Wishy-Washy. But what is it that’s so unnatural about them? Is it that, as things stand, they are statistical outliers? That their behavior violates some contingent psychological laws? Surely not just that. What makes them unnatural, maybe even impossible, creatures is the sheer magnitude of their imperviousness to reasons and evidence. There is a plain mismatch between their seemings, on the one hand, and what they are conscious of and the manner in which they are conscious of it, on the other. Their seemings don’t match their evidence.

If there is a reason to think that Seemless et al. are impossible, this is the best one. It is not, however, clear whether that could be the phenomenal conservative’s reason. If rationality were a matter of believing in accordance with one’s most robust seemings, these subjects would all be eminently rational or, at the very least, not manifestly irrational. And if one’s seemings are one’s evidence or the consciousness of it, then there could not be a gap between one’s seemings and one’s evidence. But in these cases there quite obviously is.

This brings us to what I regard as the central flaw, from a phenomenological perspective, of phenomenal conservatism. The phenomenal conservative can readily explain why seemings naturally incline us to believe propositions. But what the phenomenal conservative seems unable to explain is why certain contents “naturally” seem true and others do not, much less why they would necessarily seem true to anyone rational. For the phenomenal conservative, there are many propositions P such that some types of states with the content P are seemings, while others are not. But there doesn’t seem to be any intelligible relation between P and its seeming true except the fact that, in certain cases, P just does seem true. But why should the content P sometimes seem true and sometimes not? Why, for instance, should it seem that I am in pain when, and only when, I am conscious of being in pain?

It is no answer to this question to point out that some mental states with P as their content are perceptions or sensations or intuitions, since such acts are partly defined by the phenomenal conservative as seemings. That would be like explaining why some animals eat meat by pointing out that some are carnivores. It is not even an answer to say that “seeming to be in pain may well be partially constitutive of the phenomenology of experiencing pain” (Skene 2013, p. 551, n. 10). Is that a brute fact? Or is there some intelligible reason why? Every answer of this sort just pushes the issue back: given a perceptual or intuitive or memorial experience’s other properties—its content(s), its presentational character, its quality, its qualitative feel, or whatever—why should it also be a perception or a sensation or experience of pain or whatever other state one wants to define as a seeming? Why should it, given these other features, be forceful too?
As far as I can tell, the phenomenal conservative has no answer. According to the view, the content of an act alone does nothing to reveal the truth to us. As Skene puts it, we can only epistemically evaluate propositions if we can “discriminate between propositions with respect to truth and falsity” (Skene 2013, 543). He continues:

Since the content of a proposition cannot, by itself, permit us to make this discrimination, the only way such judgments could occur is if there is something in addition to the content that provides us with an indication of the content’s accuracy, and thereby gives us epistemic guidance (that is, instructions or at least indications about what we should believe) (Skene 2013, 543-4).

If we wish to explain why the content of a given mental state seems true, we must appeal to something besides its content—a feeling of forcefulness or assertiveness. The problem, however, is that while this explains why we would be inclined to believe it, it doesn’t explain why forcefulness ever accompanies or fails to accompany a given content in the first place.

The metaphors that some phenomenal conservatives use shed very little light on the matter. Tucker, for instance, makes a genuine attempt to get beyond the vague talk of feelings of truth when he writes: “The phenomenology of a seeming makes it feel as though the seeming is ‘recommending’ its propositional content as true or ‘assuring’ us of the content’s truth” (2010, 530). If, however, we take this metaphor at all seriously, we must ask just how my seeming has special access to the content (or object!) so as to “assure” me of anything. We are also owed an account of just how I am supposed to know anything about my seeming itself. Why doesn’t my seeming need assurance from another seeming? And why don’t I need another seeming to tell me what the original seeming “recommends”? Here is Husserl’s presentation of just those objections:

Epistemologists of the empiricist persuasion … would have us believe that the entire distinction between evident and non-evident judgments consists in a certain feeling by which the former make themselves known. But how can feeling contribute to the intelligibility of anything here? What can it accomplish? Is it, perchance, to call out to us: ‘Stop! Here is the truth!’? And why should we believe this feeling? Must this belief also be supplied with an index of feeling? And why does the judgment ‘2 times 2 is 5’ never have this index of feeling, and why can’t it have it?)

15 Husserl 1973/1999, 44. Also see Husserl 1913/2014, §145; Husserl 1900-01/1970, Prolegomena, §51; and Husserl 1900-01/1970, Investigation 6, §39. For an unsurpassable treatment of Husserl’s assessment of the feeling-theory of evidence, see Heffernan 1997. Husserl does not, incidentally, think that empiricists are the only guilty parties here. As Heffernan makes clear, Descartes is among the principal targets of Husserl’s criticism. See also Husserl 1913/2014, §21, where it is the “idealistic side” which is accused of conflating “seeing” with a “feeling of evidence” (ibid., 39). For a critique of this theory as applied to a priori knowledge and justification, see Kasmier 2003, especially §2.5.1. In addition to articulating Husserl’s objection that feelings alone have no evidential weight, Kasmier argues that all such theories are guilty of psychologism. Another philosopher suspicious of appeals to such feelings is Aaron Preston (forthcoming).
Not only is such a feeling insufficient to explain why some propositions are evident, it is not necessary. Comparing a “vivid intuition of red” with an “empty symbolic intention” of red, Husserl writes: “One need only consider the phenomena to realize they are entirely different” (Husserl 1973/1999, 44-5). The same, obviously, is true of a fulfilled intention and an empty intention. He continues: “if the difference exists in the phenomena themselves, do we still need something like a feeling to distinguish them?” (ibid., 45) Elsewhere he writes: “If we compare the forms of these non-evident and evident judgments, we see how ridiculous the view is which sees Evidenz as a merely appended index, a feeling attaching to otherwise identical experiences of judging” (1996, Hua XXX, 326).

One advocate of the epistemic role of seemings who does much better is Tolhurst.16 As we have seen, on his view seemings have “the feel of truth, the feel of a state whose content reveals how things really are” (Tolhurst 1998, 298-9). Moreover, Tolhurst seems, quite rightly, to place the epistemic weight on the revelatory nature of seemings. Seemings, he writes, “have the feel of being grounded in and revelatory of their objects” (Tolhurst 1998, 299). There are several worries, however, about this account. The first, to repeat a previous point, is that seemings are not all grounded in and revelatory of their objects, nor are all of them phenomenologically indistinguishable from experiences which are. Some are quite manifestly empty.

A second worry is the status of the “feel” that characterizes seemings on Tolhurst’s view. If it is a feeling of forcefulness that accompanies revelatory acts, then this account is at least partly susceptible to the arguments above. Such a feeling is neither necessary (Seemless) nor sufficient (Seemful) for epistemic justification, nor does its presence or absence explain why a belief is justified or not. If it is a feeling whose presence or absence, when united with a given content, is supposed to explain why an act is revelatory, then the account is as badly off as Huemer’s.

Now perhaps, on Tolhurst’s view, the feeling in question is not an accompanying feeling of confidence or forcefulness, but is in fact identical with the distinctive phenomenon of having something given as opposed to merely meant. In that case the problem with Tolhurst’s position is not that it is false but that it is incomplete. There is a great deal to be said about the structure and content of such acts, but Tolhurst says virtually nothing. He writes: “The notion of felt veridicality resists analysis. But we all are acquainted with it; reflection on suitable examples should be sufficient to call it to mind” (Tolhurst 1998, 299). But as we have seen, such acts do not resist analysis at all. They are acts of fulfillment, and Husserl describes them in considerable detail.

Let us return to the relationship between forcefulness and the content of an act. I have argued that most versions of phenomenal conservatism simply cannot make that relationship intelligible. I believe Husserl’s account can. If we compare two experiences, one which “naturally” generates seemings and another which does not, we will always find that they differ in their content or positing character or, when complex, in the relations among their contents. Fulfillment, as we’ve already seen, is not a matter of having a proposition in one’s head with some forcefulness tacked on, but is different in both content and structure from any other type of act. There is an act which presents what the other represents, and the two are unified in such a way that the object is given as it is meant. The reason-giving force of this act flows, in an intelligible way, from its contents

16 Thanks to a referee for pointing this out.
and the relation between them. A “natural” subject is, for epistemological purposes at least, a rational subject, one who is appropriately responsive to reasons and evidence. That such a subject undergoes an experience of fulfillment—that the object is given in the manner in which it is meant—explains why the fulfilled proposition P seems true to her.

Husserl’s account also explains why forcefulness would not naturally attach itself to an act with the bare, unfulfilled content P. When S merely thinks that P, the object is merely intended and not given. It itself does not show up, and it is impossible to check whether the content is true by measuring it against “the things themselves.” The emptiness of the intention is a positive phenomenological feature of the act. The absence of the object, and the corresponding lack of any real relation to it, is an experienced lack or shortcoming (see Willard 1984, 227 and Bernet 2003). This explains why P will not seem true to a rational person when it is merely entertained in the absence of any other supporting considerations.

One might point out that seemings may, of course, be sufficient conditions for justification among the rational, or even among those with a certain minimal level of rationality. That may be true. They are not, however, explanatory conditions or “basic ground[s] of rationality.” They are neither one’s evidence nor the consciousness of it. They are, rather, rational responses to one’s evidence and the consciousness of it. But they can also be irrational responses to one’s lack of evidence or the lack of any consciousness of it, and their absence may be an irrational response to one’s evidence and the consciousness of it. That seemings are sufficient for justification among the rational is explained by the fact that the rational respond to evidence with seemings, not by the fact that seemings are, just as such, sources of justification.

5. Self-Defeat?

No discussion of phenomenal conservatism would be complete without a discussion of the self-defeat argument offered on its behalf by Huemer. Here is Huemer’s statement of the argument:

   (1) All beliefs (that are plausible candidates for being justified) are based on appearances.
   (2) A belief is doxastically justified only if what it is based on is a source of propositional justification.
   Therefore,
   (C) For any beliefs to be doxastically justified, appearances must be the source of propositional justification (Huemer 2013a, 341).

What makes this a self-defeat argument is that if you deny that appearances or seemings do justify, you must do so on the basis of premises that you believe, and which you, in communication, intend your audience to believe. Those beliefs will either be justified or not. If not, there is no reason for anyone, including you, to heed the argument. And if they are justified, then they are based on appearances, on seemings. But then if appearances don’t justify, then the premises of any argument against PC would be unjustified.

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17 Audi 2013, 194. Also see Conee 2013.
This seems like a promising argument against someone who claims that no seemings provide justification. But why couldn’t we adopt a restricted version of phenomenal conservatism and treat Husserl’s theory as such a view? Is it self-defeating to argue, on the basis of how things seem, that not all seemings provide justification, as PC alleges? Why couldn’t one argue that not all seemings justify on the basis of seemings which do (by the opponent’s lights) justify? As promising as that approach might appear, I think it is mistaken. Rather, we should reject Huemer’s contention that all justified beliefs are based on seemings.

Compare phenomenal conservatism with a position I will call “testimonial conservatism,” according to which hearing assertive speech acts is a prima facie source of justification. Here is its version of the self-defeat argument:

(3) All testimonial beliefs are based on hearing the contents of assertive speech acts.
(4) A belief is doxastically justified only if what it is based on is a source of propositional justification. Therefore,
(C2) If hearing the contents of assertive speech acts were not a source of justification, then none of our testimonial beliefs would be justified.

Now suppose that we argue against testimonial conservatism, and communicate that argument to others. Would we thereby undermine our own position by expressing it in speech acts? Or would we not at least undermine our own position each time we provided testimony about anything—the weather, what we ate for lunch, and so on? Of course not. Arguing against the view that assertive speech acts provide justification does not commit us to the view that no speech acts justify, but only that some do not. We should, it seems plausible to suppose, adopt restricted testimonial conservatism.

But can we really adopt such a view? To support restricted testimonial conservatism, we would point out some epistemically relevant differences among speech acts. Some speak acts are made by informed and unbiased parties, while some are made by lunatics and demagogues. Some constitute gossip, some unadorned descriptions of observed events. But in doing so, we would show that assertive speech acts do not justify merely in virtue of being assertive speech acts, but (at least in part) in virtue of other features of them—their content, their sources, their etiology, or whatever. In this case, in fact, their being assertive speech acts really doesn’t explain anything at all about their epistemic properties. While some of our justified beliefs are based on hearing things which just happen to be the content of speech acts, they are not based on them in virtue of their being the contents of speech acts, but in virtue of completely different features. And that, really, is to give up testimonial conservatism altogether, at least as an explanation of what makes certain beliefs justified, rather than a way of adopting a restricted version of it. Being the content of an assertive speech act is no more epistemically relevant than being expressed by means of a sentence in a certain font or uttered at a certain volume.

The situation, I suggest, is very similar in the case of restricted phenomenal conservatism. If we were to reject PC on the basis of propositions which seem true to us without self-defeat, we would, as Huemer points out (2007), incur the obligation of showing that there are epistemically relevant differences among seemings. Huemer thinks
that challenge cannot be met. On his view, “all appearances [are] equally valid sources of justification” (Huemer 2007, 32).

Contrary to Huemer, I think the task can be met, and that we have indeed met it.\(^{18}\) Some seemings are based on the consciousness of evidence. Other seemings are not. But this doesn’t constitute a restricted version of phenomenal conservatism, and so doesn’t constitute a limited victory for that position. In distinguishing seemings along these lines, we effectively deny that seemings, as such, justify. Rather, what is doing all of the explanatory work in showing why a belief is epistemically justified is the fact that it is based on the consciousness of evidence. Justified beliefs are not based on seemings. Rather, they are based on acts in which we become conscious of evidence. Such acts may give rise to seemings. They may even happen to be seemings. But even if they are, the features in virtue of which they justify are not the features in virtue of which they are seemings (Audi 2013; Conee 2013).

Conee points out that even if there is a use of “seems” on which it can only seem that P to S when S has evidence for P,

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\text{PC would be acceptable, though potentially misleading. These ‘seemings’ would always entail possessing prima facie justifying evidence for the proposition. The evidence would not be any whole state of affairs of p’s seeming to S to be true. It would be the mental event that occasions the inclination” (Conee 2013, 57).}
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I am not confident there is such a use of “seems,” but I agree with Conee’s point. Its seeming to S that P is not what explains the fact that S is noninferentially justified in believing that P. Rather, what explains that is S’s being conscious of a distinctive kind of evidence in a distinctive sort of way—the kind of evidence and way specified by the account of fulfillment, for instance.

Let me point out one virtue of this way of understanding the matter, and that is that we can reject Huemer’s unnerving claim that “the function of arguments is to change the way things seem to one’s audience” (Huemer 2005, 101). I think this coheres with phenomenal conservatism: if phenomenal conservatism were true, then producing seemings would be the function of arguments. That, however, sounds like the primary function of propaganda. If producing seemings really were my principal end right now, then I would adopt more expeditious means of achieving it if they were available. Perhaps I would resort to propaganda. Or, to take it further, suppose Big Pharma comes out with a new drug—Seematrex!\(^{19}\) Any assertion uttered within the first sixty seconds of its inhalation will strongly seem true, and considerations against it would strongly seem false. If all I wanted was to change your seemings, I would give you a dose of Seematrex, loudly and promptly declare my view, and get on with other business. And you, far from complaining, ought to regard this as a way of acquiring evidence for my position. But that would be a clear circumvention of your reason. What I want—at least what I hope I want—isn’t to produce seemings in you as such. What I want, rather, is to present you

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\(^{18}\) For a good discussion of Huemer’s position, and a response to his argument that we cannot discriminate among seemings, see DePaul 2009.

\(^{19}\) Littlejohn (2011, 36) entertains the possibility of seemings being generated in this way.
with evidence and reasons. I would, of course, also like my position to seem true to you, but only on the condition that your seemings are responsive to reasons.

6. Conclusion
I have argued that Husserl’s Principle of All Principles, along with the account of fulfillment underlying it, provides a more promising account of noninferential epistemic justification than does phenomenal conservatism. For one thing, it gets the cases right. For another, by providing a rather detailed and phenomenologically accurate account of the parts and pieces that compose acts of noninferential justification and the manner in which they related to one another and to their object, it provides an intelligible explanation of why a propositional content would or would not be accompanied by a seeming. There is, I am sure, much more that could be said in defense of phenomenal conservatism. And, of course, I have not even touched upon the many challenges that confront Husserl’s own theory. I am open to being persuaded that my assessments of these positions are mistaken. But please—hold the Seematrex.

References


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