

# Moore's Paradox

*New Essays on Belief, Rationality,  
and the First Person*

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# 1

## Introduction

*Mitchell Green and John N. Williams*

### A. INTRODUCING MOORE'S PARADOX

G. E. Moore observed that to say, 'I went to the pictures last Tuesday but I don't believe that I did' would be 'absurd' (1942: 543). Over half a century later, such sayings continue to perplex philosophers and other students of language, logic, and cognition. On the one hand, such sayings seem distinct from semantically odd Liar-type sayings such as 'What I'm now saying is not true'. Unlike Liar-type sentences, what Moore said might be true: One can readily imagine a situation in which Moore went to the pictures last Tuesday but does not believe that he did so. On the other hand, it does seem absurd to *assert* a proposition while, with no apparent change of mind, or aside to a different audience, going on to deny that one believes it. It seems no less absurd to *judge true* the following proposition: *p* and I do not believe that *p*.

Ludwig Wittgenstein was fascinated by Moore's example, and the absurdity of Moore's saying was intensively discussed in the mid-twentieth century. Yet the source of the absurdity has remained elusive, and its recalcitrance has led researchers in recent decades to address it with greater care. Questions of the relation of Moore's paradox to consciousness, self-knowledge, justification, self-expression, conversation, decision theory, belief, and other topics have accordingly come under increasing scrutiny. In addition, recent research has seen a number of 'arguments from Moore's Paradox', aiming to establish a large philosophical thesis on the basis of this phenomenon. Such arguments have been directed toward functionalism in the philosophy of mind (Heal 1994; Collins 1987; Milgram 1994), self-knowledge (Shoemaker 1988, 1995; Gallois 1996), the existence of 'blindspots' or states that are 'counterprivate'<sup>1</sup> (Sorensen 1988; Gombay 1988), evidentialism in epistemology (Adler 1999,

<sup>1</sup> A person's state is *counterprivate* just in case she alone, when she is in that state, cannot judge that she is.

2002), consciousness (Rosenthal 1995*a*, 1995*b*), skepticism (DeRose 1991, 1996, 2002), fictionalism (Szabo-Gendler 2001), and simulation vs. theory theories of knowledge of other minds (Gordon 2000). These developments have both shown the centrality of the topic and the depth of treatment needed for its elucidation. As one author has put it,

Moore's Paradox can be seen as an emblem for peculiarities in the first-person point of view, specifically how the possibilities for thinking and talking about oneself are systematically different from the possibilities of thinking and talking about other people. (Moran 1997)

In the remainder of this Introduction we shall briefly discuss (B) Moore's views on the subject, (C) Wittgenstein's remarks on the matter in response to Moore, (D) constraints on any adequate account of Moore's brand of absurdity, (E) some available approaches to explaining this brand of absurdity, and, finally (F) the contributions to this volume and their relation to currently open questions on the topic.

## B. MOORE ON PARADOX AND ABSURDITY

Moore's remarks about the cases that interested him were relatively consistent across the occasions in which he wrote about the topic. In an untitled and incomplete manuscript of a paper that he gave to the Moral Sciences Club in Cambridge, Moore observes that the words, 'Though I don't believe it's raining, yet as a matter of fact it really is raining' by themselves are not nonsensical.<sup>2</sup> Moore notes that he could use these words in giving a philosophical example without saying anything nonsensical. He also credits Wittgenstein with the observation that one could sensibly suppose a situation in which those words are true of him. He further observes that no absurdity would arise from a third person or past tense utterance of the sentences in question, such as, 'Moore does not think it is raining, yet as a matter of fact it is,' or 'I thought it was not raining, but as a matter of fact it was.'

Moore elucidates this last thought with a semantic consideration, remarking that the meaning of the sentence 'I don't believe that it is raining' is to be given in terms of the speaker's state of mind:

The words, 'I don't believe it's raining' when said by a particular person have a definite meaning in English: we can say that what they mean is something about his state of mind—what they mean can't be true unless his state of mind is one which can be properly described by saying he doesn't believe that; and so with 'as a matter of fact it is raining'. (Moore 1993: 210)

<sup>2</sup> Moore (1993: 207). Baldwin dates this paper from 1944. This utterance has the same omissive form as Morre's example in his 1942, 'I went to the pictures last Tuesday but I don't believe that I did', namely, 'p & I don't believe that p'.

Moore's point is that what is said in an utterance of 'I believe it's raining' is different from what is said in an utterance of 'It's raining', because only the truth of the former depends upon the state of mind of the speaker. Although this point may sound like a platitude, we shall see that it has been denied.

Moore is also careful to distinguish absurdity from paradox. What is *absurd*, he suggests, is to utter the just-quoted sentence assertively. What is *paradoxical* is that there should be such an absurdity that cannot be fully explained in terms of a semantic contradiction generated by the words themselves: 'It is a paradox that it should be perfectly absurd to utter assertively words of which the meaning is something which may quite well be true—is not a contradiction' (Moore 1993: 209). We shall follow Moore in likewise distinguishing between *Moorean absurdity* and *Moore's paradox*.

Moore doubted that he had a complete explanation of the nature of the absurdity (Moore 1993: 211) but he made some suggestions for arriving at one. He tells us that *I believe that p* follows neither from *p* nor from *I assert that p*. Nevertheless, Moore contends, in 'assertively uttering' an indicative sentence, one implies, in an everyday sense of 'imply', that one believes it. Again in his (1944), Moore remarks that, '[t]here seems to be nothing mysterious about this sense of "imply"' (p. 542). However, if one *goes on* to assert that one does not believe it, what one says contradicts what one implies (Moore 1993: 210). So his account of the Moorean omissive assertion, '*p* & I don't believe that *p*' requires the principle that if I assert that *p* then I imply that I believe that *p* ('Omissive' because the assertion reports the specific omission of true belief). Suppose I assert that *p*. Then I imply that I believe that *p*. But suppose I *then* assert that I don't believe that *p*. What I assert (that I don't believe that *p*) contradicts what I just implied (that I believe that *p*). So one part of my conjunctive assertion contradicts what my assertion of another part implies.

Moore also observes that to say, 'I believe that he has gone out, but he has not' would also be 'absurd' (1944: 204). Unlike his first example, this has the *commissive* form, '*p* & I believe that not-*p*' ('Commissive' because the assertion reports the commission of a specific mistake in belief). Here Moore uses a second principle, that if I assert that *p* then I imply that I don't believe that not-*p*. So by asserting that *p* I imply that I don't believe that not-*p*, which contradicts the content of the second conjunct of my assertion. Since this proposal fails to explain the omissive case, Moore himself may not have recognized that his two examples are different forms. For on the second principle, if I assert that (*p* & I don't believe that *p*) then I imply-and-then-assert that I neither believe that not-*p* nor believe that *p*, which is neither a self-contradiction nor a contradictory set of beliefs.<sup>3</sup>

To repair this problem Moore could either apply his first principle to the commissive case as well or, less economically, apply the first principle to the

<sup>3</sup> We assume here *assertion distribution*: If S asserts that (*p* & *q*), then S asserts that *p*, and S asserts that *q*.

omissive case and the second to the commissive case. On the first option, if I assert that  $p$ , then I imply that I believe that  $p$ . But suppose I then assert that I believe that not- $p$ . This does not contradict what I have just implied. Instead I have implied-and-then-asserted that I have contradictory beliefs about whether or not  $p$ . So the two absurdities are conceptually distinct. On the second option, I have implied-and-then-asserted a contradiction in either case (that I do and don't believe that  $p$ , in the omissive case and that I do and don't believe that not- $p$ , in the commissive case), so now the two absurdities come out as conceptually identical. This means that a reconstruction of Moore's account must now choose between economy of *explanandum* and economy of *explanans*. One consideration in favor of the first option is that since the omissive form, which reports a specific instance of my *ignorance*, is semantically distinct from the commissive, which reports my specific *mistake*, we might expect a resulting structural difference in the contradiction-like phenomena that constitute the resulting absurdity.

Finally, Moore appears to consider only the absurdity of assertoric utterances and so nowhere considers the absurdity as it occurs in thought, despite the fact that omissive or commissive propositions appear absurd if I do not *assert*, but merely *judge* them true. It is only relatively recently (due apparently to Sorensen 1988) that attention in the literature has turned to the absurdity as one in judgment.

### C. WITTGENSTEIN ON MOORE'S PARADOX

Wittgenstein attended Moore's paper discussing this set of problems at the Moral Sciences Club in 1944. His letters to Moore and notebook entries show that he was intensely interested in these problems.<sup>4</sup> Indeed, Malcolm reports Wittgenstein as having 'once remarked that the only work of Moore's that greatly impressed him was his discovery of the peculiar kind of nonsense involved in such a sentence as "It's raining but I don't believe it"' (1984: 66). In section X of the second part of the *Investigations* (which, according to Malcolm, was written in 1949), Wittgenstein coins the term 'Moore's paradox' (p. 190) and devotes the rest of that section to it. He also discusses it in his *Remarks on the Foundations of Psychology* (vol. i, §§478–90; vol. ii, §§280–90).

According to his letter to Moore, Wittgenstein thought that the absurdity is important because it is 'something *similar* to a contradiction, though it isn't one'. He also thought that although the explanation of the absurdity will say

<sup>4</sup> Malcolm (1995) reports counting 130 remarks on the verb 'to believe' in *Remarks on the Philosophy of Psychology* and in the first volume of *Last Writings on the Philosophy of Psychology*. This concentration, Malcolm suggests, was provoked in large part by Wittgenstein's interest in Moore's paradox. Wittgenstein elsewhere writes, 'Moore stirred up a philosophical wasps' nest with his paradox; and the only the wasps did not fly out was that they were too listless' (1980: 76). His letter to Moore is in his reason (1974: 177).

‘something about the *logic* of assertion’ it will also show that ‘logic isn’t as simple as logicians think it is’ (1974: 177). There, Wittgenstein also points out that there is no absurdity in *supposing* that Moore’s saying is true. In the same letter, Wittgenstein comments:

If someone asks me ‘Is there a fire in the next room?’ and he answers, ‘I believe there is,’ I can’t say: ‘Don’t be irrelevant. I asked you about the fire, not about your state of mind!’

thus displaying an interest in the relation of a self-report of belief that *p* to an assertion that *p*. In the *Investigations* Wittgenstein formulates ‘Moore’s paradox’ as the fact that

‘I believe that this is the case’ is used like the assertion ‘this is the case’; and yet the hypothesis that I believe that this is the case is not used like the hypothesis that this is the case.

Consistently with this first claim, Wittgenstein further holds that ‘the statement “I believe it’s going to rain” has a meaning like, that is to say a use like, “It’s going to rain . . .”’ (1997: pt. II, sect. X). He further claims that if there were a verb meaning ‘to believe falsely’, it would not have any significant first person present indicative and adds that because ‘I believe it is so’, ‘throws light’ on my state of mind, so does ‘It is so’.

In the first volume of his *Remarks on the Foundations of Psychology*, Wittgenstein returns to a formulation of the paradox in terms of supposition (§478):

Moore’s paradox may be expressed like *this*: ‘I believe *p*’ says roughly the same as ‘ $\uparrow p$ ’; but ‘Suppose I believe that *p* . . .’ does not say roughly the same as ‘Suppose *p*’.

and goes on to state (§490):

The paradox is this: the *supposition* may be expressed as follows: ‘Suppose *this* went on inside me and *that* outside’—but the *assertion* that *this* is going on *inside* me asserts this is going on outside me. As suppositions the two propositions about the inside and the outside are quite independent, but not as assertions.

One position discernible in the above remarks is that if I assert ‘I believe that *p*’ then I assert that *p*. More generally, both my self-report of belief, ‘I believe that *p*’ and my plain assertion, ‘*p*’ have roughly<sup>5</sup> similar uses and so, for Wittgenstein, roughly similar meanings. So as Wittgenstein adds,

One might also put it like this: ‘I believe *p*’ means roughly the same as ‘*p*’. (§472)

Both tell a hearer something about my own attitude to the world as well as something about the world itself (as I take it to be). On this view, the absurdity of my assertion that (*p* & I believe that not-*p*) lies in the fact that my assertion of

<sup>5</sup> Roughly: See section E.I.3 below for a view according to which, in asserting *p* I represent myself as knowing that *p*, while this does not hold for cases in which I assert that I believe that *p*. (We thank an anonymous referee for drawing our attention to this point.)



the latter conjunct is also an assertion of not-*p*. Thus in asserting (*p* & I believe that not-*p*), I have contradicted myself on the matter of whether *p*.<sup>6</sup> Wittgenstein seems to hint at a difficulty in this approach in *Remarks*, vol. ii, §420, where he observes that ‘if A says “I believe it’s raining” and B says “I don’t believe so”, they are not contradicting each other.’ Presumably Wittgenstein would make the same point in a case in which B says, ‘I believe not’.

Moreover, Wittgenstein seems to suggest a different relation of assertion to belief in the following passage:

I want to say first of all with the assertion ‘it’s going to rain’ one expresses belief in that just as one expresses the wish to have wine with the words ‘Wine over here!’ (1980*a*: §472)

This passage claims that if I assert that *p* then I express a belief that *p*. So in asserting that (*p* & I don’t believe that *p*), I express-and-assert a belief and the lack of it, namely a self-contradiction, whereas in asserting that (*p* & I believe that not-*p*), I express-and-assert contradictory beliefs about whether *p*. We will postpone discussion of this account until Section F below.

Finally, Wittgenstein observes (1980*b*: §290) that ‘under unusual circumstances [the] sentence [“It’s raining but I don’t believe it”] could be given a clear sense’. In (1980*a*: §§485–7), he gives two examples of non-absurd uses of omissive sentences. The first is when I exclaim in amazement, ‘He’s coming but I still can’t believe it’ (1980*a*: §485). Such a case is not absurd since the locution ‘I can’t believe it’, and its cognates have a conventional use as expressions of surprise rather than literal disavowals of belief. The second example is of a railway announcer who is convinced that the train whose scheduled arrival he is obliged to report won’t arrive. He announces its impending arrival and adds, ‘Personally I don’t believe it’ (1980*a*: §§486–7). Wittgenstein then gives an example of a non-absurd use of a commissive sentence, that of a soldier who produces military communiqués but adds that he believes they are incorrect. Wittgenstein’s point is that the absurdity in speech is not guaranteed by a mere *utterance of a sentence* of one of Moore’s omissive or commissive forms; rather it requires their *assertion*.

<sup>6</sup> Moran denies that Wittgenstein should be thus construed, which construal he calls the Presentational view: ‘that in the first person present-tense the verb-phrase “I believe” is not in fact psychological, but rather represents a mode of presenting the relevant proposition which follows it’ (1997: 144). He goes on to show that the Presentational view is both implausible and does not comport with Wittgenstein’s texts, and infers from this that it is not Wittgenstein’s position that one who asserts a Moorean sentence contradicts herself. However, we do not impute the first of the two conjuncts of the Presentational view to Wittgenstein, but rather only the second, or more precisely only the doctrine that one who asserts ‘I believe that *p*’ also asserts *p* (whatever else she may be doing).

#### D. CONSTRAINTS ON AN ACCOUNT OF MOOREAN ABSURDITY

Our question is the source of Moorean absurdity: What makes utterances such as ‘It’s raining, but I don’t believe it’, as well as thoughts expressible with such words, absurd? Moore traces the absurdity of the utterance of the sentence, ‘It’s raining but I don’t believe it’ to the speaker’s being thereby committed to a self-contradiction. On this account, the absurdity is explained as a severe failure of *theoretical rationality*, a form of rationality concerned with tracking the truth. Norms constitutive of theoretical rationality include prohibitions against forming beliefs on insufficient evidence and against drawing inferences that are either deductively invalid or inductively weak. Extreme failures of theoretical rationality may be absurd. For instance, it seems absurd for a person to commit herself to a *self-contradiction* that, with a minimum of reflection, she would be able to see cannot be true, whether in virtue of syntax as in, ‘It is raining and not raining’ or in virtue of semantics, as in, ‘Women aren’t females’. It also seems absurd for her to commit herself to a pair of propositions that *contradict each other*, such as ‘I believe that p’ and ‘I don’t believe that p’ that, with a minimum of reflection, she would be able to see cannot both be true.

Having discerned one source of absurdity in a severe failure of theoretical rationality, the question arises whether a different form of rationality could provide another. *Practical rationality* is a form of rationality concerned with prudent action. Among norms thought by many to be constitutive of practical rationality is the prescription to pursue that action most likely to achieve one’s desires, given how one believes the world to be. It would be a violation of this prescription to go to a petrol station to buy petrol in the conviction that it is shut. A related prescription is to choose that action most likely to maximize subjective expected utility, namely the weighted average of the desirabilities of each possible outcome of that action, the weights being the probabilities of those outcomes. Thus, unless Jeb places value on risk *per se*, and so long as he places some value on monetary gain, his choice of what he deems to be a 50 per cent chance of a \$100 gain over what he deems a sure thing of that gain, would violate this prescription to maximize one’s subjective expected utility. Might it be possible to explain the absurdity to be found in Moore’s examples in terms of a failure of practical rationality so extreme that the agent, with little reflection, would see that her enterprise is an inept way, from among her options, of achieving her aims? We shall find below that some accounts of Moorean absurdity are couched in terms of practical rather than theoretical rationality.

An account of the source of Moorean absurdity must, it seems, elucidate that source in terms of practical rationality, theoretical rationality, or some other system of norms. Moreover, many accounts of Moorean absurdity appeal to a

notion of implication by claiming, for example, that in asserting a proposition  $p$ , a speaker implies that she believes that  $p$ ; or that in asserting that she believes that  $p$ , she implies that  $p$ . To be assessed adequately such claims require elucidation in terms of one or another established notion of implication. Among such notions of implication are logical ( $p$  implies  $q$  just in case there is no way for it to be true that  $p$  but false that  $q$ ); evidential ( $p$  is adequate evidence for the truth of  $q$ ); probabilistic (it is highly likely that  $p$ , given that  $q$ ); or pragmatic implication, where this notion of pragmatic implication might in turn take any of the following forms: semantic presupposition ( $q$ 's being true is a necessary condition for  $p$  having truth value at all); pragmatic presupposition ( $q$  must be accepted as part of the conversational 'common ground' in order for assertion of  $p$  to be conversationally appropriate); conversational implicature (given general norms of conversation, we may infer that one who asserts that  $p$  speaker-means that  $q$ ); or conventional implicature (given the meaning of 'p', one who uses 'p' in a speech act must also speaker-mean that  $q$ ). Any account appealing to a notion of implication is obliged to tell us what kind of implication is at issue: Further, any such account must accommodate the following three data.

1. In addition to the better known omissive, 'p but I don't believe it', an analogous commissive paradox is to be found in 'p but I believe that not-p'.
2. Moorean absurdity arises when a person does not *assert* an omissive or commissive Moorean proposition but rather *judges* that it is true.

Here is one account of the source of the absurdity of Moorean judgment. Suppose that I judge that ( $p$  & I don't believe that  $p$ ). On the assumption that judgment, construed as an episodic instantiation of belief, distributes over conjunction, I judge, and so believe, that  $p$ . This belief in turn falsifies the second conjunct of what I judge and so falsifies the whole conjunction. Although an omissive Moorean proposition can be true and can be judged true, *it cannot be true if it is judged true*. Moreover, discerning this fact about your own judgment of ( $p$  & I don't believe that  $p$ ) requires, as we just saw, a minimum of reflection. It is thus not difficult to see why one who judges true an omissive Moorean proposition is guilty of a severe failure of theoretical rationality, and thus why it is that his belief is absurd. Although an omissive Moorean belief is self-falsifying as opposed to a belief in a necessary falsehood (such as someone's belief that it is raining and not raining) it is nonetheless like such a belief in the respect that both are severe failures of theoretical rationality.

Consider now the commissive case. Suppose that I judge that ( $p$  & I believe that not- $p$ ). Then since judgment distributes over conjunction, I judge and thus believe that  $p$ . But what I judged is true only if I also believe that not- $p$ . Thus what I judged is true only if I have contradictory beliefs about  $p$ , one of which must thus be mistaken. Moreover I should be able to see this fact with a minimum of reflection. This is again a severe failure of theoretical rationality,

and again an explanation of the absurdity of my judgment is ready to hand. This account of the absurdity of the two kinds of Moorean judgment seems simpler than that for Moorean speech, since the former, unlike the latter, need not rely upon pragmatic notions such as implicature, assertion, or expression. Instead we have seen two relatively clear senses in which one who believes either a commissive or omissive Moorean sentence must be in error in a way that would manifest itself to minimal reflection. As we will see below, some authors have fastened upon this asymmetry in the hopes of explaining the absurdity of Moorean speech in terms of that of Moorean thought. If the explanation of the absurdity of Moorean assertion can be delivered, with little further explanatory cost, in terms of the absurdity of Moorean thought, then one seems to get both explanations parsimoniously.

3. If possible, an account of Moorean absurdity should not appeal to controversial principles of epistemic or doxastic logic.

Epistemic (doxastic) logic attempts to codify inferential relations among states of knowledge and belief as opposed to their contents. Candidates for such logical laws include the thesis that knowledge distributes over conjunction (one who knows that  $p$  &  $q$  knows that  $p$  and knows that  $q$ ), and that belief is deductively closed (one who believes that  $p$ , and who believes that  $p$  logically entails  $q$ , believes that  $q$ ; or even more strongly that if  $p$  logically entails  $q$ , and one believes that  $p$ , one believes that  $q$  as well.) While knowledge- and belief-distribution seem unexceptionable, other principles are controversial. For instance, it does not seem true as a psychological principle that a person's beliefs are deductively closed: lack of attention or simply an absence of interest in the question may prevent a person from drawing consequences from her beliefs. Nor does it seem true as a psychological principle that a person who believes that  $p$  also believes that he believes that  $p$  or conversely. For example, my sincere professions of open-mindedness about the status of women or of lack of prejudice against them may both be mistaken. So I might believe that women are inferior to men without believing that I believe this. Equally, I might mistakenly believe that I believe that women are not inferior.

## E. SCHOOLS OF THOUGHT CONCERNING MOOREAN ABSURDITY

Authors developing accounts of Moorean absurdity may be seen as offering answers to the question, 'In what does this form of absurdity consist?' Attempts to answer this question generally bifurcate into two kinds. One explains the relevant sort of absurdity in terms of a severe failure of theoretical rationality, the other as a severe failure of practical rationality. In principle, each kind of approach can be applied either to Moorean judgment or to Moorean speech. Approaches

to Moorean absurdity could thus, in principle, fall into four categories: Moorean Speech as Theoretically Irrational (I), Moorean Judgment as Theoretically Irrational (II), Moorean Speech as Practically Irrational (III), and Moorean Judgment as Practically Irrational (IV). Further, for a theory focussing on Moorean judgment (or speech) the question immediately arises whether it can be applied to Moorean speech (or judgment) as well. Theories of type (II) and (IV) have the advantage that they can make use of what we shall call

*Shoemaker's Principle*: What can (coherently) be believed constrains what can (coherently) be asserted, whereas the converse is not true.<sup>7</sup>

What can coherently be believed constrains what can coherently be asserted because assertion is, *inter alia*, an ostensible manifestation of belief. If what that assertion purports to manifest is incoherent, then the assertion will be incoherent as well. For instance, not only is it incoherent to believe, 'I have no beliefs,' it is also incoherent to assert it—not because the content of that assertion is necessarily false, but because the assertion purports to manifest a belief which, given the content, cannot be true. On the other hand, belief is not an ostensible manifestation of a speech act, assertion or otherwise. This is suggested by the fact that while it is incoherent to assert, 'I am making no assertions' it is coherent to believe it.

If Shoemaker's Principle is correct, then a satisfactory account of Moorean judgment as theoretically irrational can be extended, via this principle, to an account of Moorean speech, at least for those cases in which the speech act is assertion. Similarly for an account of Moorean judgment as practically irrational. It is less clear whether an account of Moorean speech can be carried over to an account of Moorean judgment. We discuss eighteen approaches to Moorean absurdity under the four headings delineated above.

## I. Moorean Speech as Theoretically Irrational

### 1. *Self-report-of-belief-as-assertion*

This Wittgenstein-inspired approach construes assertion of 'I believe that p' as an assertion of p. Thus one who asserts 'p and I believe that not-p' has, given assertion-distribution (if one asserts that p & q, then one asserts that p and one asserts that q), asserted both p and not-p, thereby manifesting an extreme failure of theoretical rationality. Malcolm (1995), Linville and Ring (1991), and Jacobson (1996) hold that to assert 'I believe that not-p' *just is* to assert that not-p; Heal holds that it is *in effect* to assert that not-p. So my assertion, 'p and I believe that not-p' *consists* of (for Malcolm, Linville and Ring, and Jacobson) or *requires* (for Heal 1994: 296) two contradictory assertions. Evidently the reason why, on this approach, a Moorean utterance is absurd is that one making it

<sup>7</sup> (1996: 76). This principle is anticipated in Wolgast (1977: 118).

commits herself to these contradictory assertions, and so manifests a severe failure of theoretical rationality.

This approach requires treatment of the omissive case. Assertion of 'I do not believe p' neither constitutes nor requires the assertion of not-p. Goldstein (1993: 94–95) holds that if I assert that I don't believe that p then I deny that p. This is incorrect: an agnostic who truthfully reports, 'I neither believe that God exists nor believe that He doesn't' would, on that principle, be making contradictory assertions about the existence of God. Surely that is not so, and proponents of this approach have not addressed the problem raised by the omissive case.

In a similar vein, Collins (1996) construes all self-ascriptions of belief, 'I believe that p', as ways of assigning the truth value T to p. This presumably is not meant as a semantic thesis, since on that view even the supposition that I believe that p would be an assignment of T to p; rather the intent is evidently that one who *asserts* 'I believe that p' assigns T to p. At the same time Collins provides a semantic analysis of 'I believe that p' as 'If not-p, then I am mistaken about p'. On this analysis the sentence, 'I believe that p, but not-p' logically entails 'I am mistaken about p'. But, Collins contends, 'S is mistaken about p' means 'S assigns a truth value to p, and whatever that truth value is, p has the other truth value.' As a result, assertion of 'I am mistaken about p' commits me to either, 'I assign T to p, but p is F'; or to 'I assign F to p, but p is T'. Collins claims (1996: 310) without explanation that both of these sentences express a self-contradiction. Yet without such an explanation a sentence such as 'I assign T to p, but p is F' is at least as mysterious as our original Moorean sentences. Collins also does not address the omissive case.

## 2. *Speaker's implicature*

According to this approach, the speaker is said to contradict herself in her assertion of a Moorean sentence, but not by virtue of asserting an explicit contradiction. Rather she conversationally implicates a content that explicitly contradicts what she asserts (Martinich 1980; Levinson 1983: 105). Imagine a person who tells an evidently lost tourist, 'There's a Tourist Information booth around the corner.' Here the speaker seems to suggest that those manning the booth are likely to help the tourist to find her way. But were she to add, 'but they aren't likely to help you find your way. You would do better to ask that cab driver over there', then by explicitly denying the *implicatum* of her first remark she cancels or revokes it. Doing so would not make her sequence of utterances absurd. By contrast, if my remark 'It's raining' conversationally implicated that I believe that it's raining, then my adding, 'but I don't believe it' would cancel that *implicatum* with no resulting absurdity. Yet that prediction is contradicted by the fact that such an utterance is absurd. So the absurdity of Moorean assertion does not seem explicable in terms of 'imply' when taken as conversational implicature.

By contrast, one who describes someone as 'poor but honest' suggests, insinuates, or implies but does not literally say, that there is a tension of some

kind between poverty and honesty, perhaps that being impoverished tends to make a person dishonest. This implication is due to the meaning of 'but', as suggested by the oddity of someone's saying, 'She was poor but honest, which is not for a moment to suggest that there is any tension between poverty and honesty.' Cases of this sort are thus termed conventional implicature. Since an assertion can be made with virtually any words whatsoever, it is not plausible that any words or expressions could themselves have as part of their conventional meaning that the speaker believes the proposition they are used to assert. Nor could the *implicatum* in question be due to the indicative grammatical mood, which could be used by someone uttering a sentence for the purpose of putting forth a proposition as a supposition or a guess rather than an assertion. Furthermore, a convention is a practice that could have been otherwise, but it is not an optional feature of assertion that it is used for the manifestation or expression of belief. As Williamson (1996) has pointed out, a speech act not governed by the norm that the speaker believe its content to be true, would not be the speech act of assertion. Moorean absurdity seems explicable neither in terms of conversational nor conventional implicature.

### 3. *Speaker's representation*

Someone who asserts that *p* represents herself as believing, or knowing that *p*, and the state of affairs thus represented contradicts her assertion that she does not believe (or know) that *p* (Black 1952; Unger 1975: ch. VI; DeRose 1991, 2002; Williamson 1996, 2000: 252–60). Thus for instance, DeRose (1991) endorses an explanation of the absurdity of asserting 'It is raining but I don't know that it is' given by Unger (1975: 252–65). According to DeRose

If I 'flat out' assert that *p* then I represent it as being the case that I know that *p* (2002: 597–8)

Here a 'flat out' assertion is distinguished from assertions like 'I think that *p*' or 'I'm pretty sure that *p*' or 'Maybe *p*'. So given that assertion distributes over conjunction, if I assert that (*p* and I do not know that *p*) then I assert that *p* and so I represent it as being the case that I know that *p*. But I also assert that I do not know that *p*. However, those who exemplify Moorean absurdity must be doing more than representing themselves as believing or knowing what they assert. Julie the art teacher can represent herself as, say, an astronaut by painting and displaying an image of herself in a spacesuit. In so doing, she may also represent herself as believing or knowing that she is an astronaut (perhaps she embellishes the drawing with a thought-bubble enclosing the words, 'I'm in space!'). If she does so while remarking, 'But I am not an astronaut', the performance generates no absurdity recognizably Moorean. Is the problem here that Julie has used pictorial rather than verbal representation? Surely not: She might represent herself as believing that she is an astronaut by supposing for the

sake of argument that she believes that she is one; she will generate no absurdity if she points out, in the process, that she has never left the troposphere.

#### 4. *Assertion as expression*

One cannot coherently assert a Moorean sentence ‘p but I don’t believe that p’ because asserting the first conjunct would express an intentional state, namely belief that p, that the second conjunct denies one is in (Rosenthal 1995a: 197, 199; 1995b: 317, 319): if I assert that (p and I don’t believe that p) then I assert that p and thereby express a belief that p. But I also assert that I don’t believe that p, ‘. . . thereby denying that the whole sentence can be used to make any coherent assertion’.<sup>8</sup> It is not, however, clear how the second conjunct does in fact deny that the whole sentence can be used to make a coherent assertion. Perhaps the failure of coherence results from a contradiction between what is expressed (the speaker’s belief that p) and what the speaker asserts, that she does not believe that p. Yet beliefs, as opposed to their contents, are particulars and thus don’t stand in relations of contradiction, consistency, entailment, etc., to anything else. Short of an elucidation of the notion of expression showing it to be a mode of commitment but not a species of assertion, this expressivist position will not account for the *explanandum*. Nor does it provide any suggestions as to how we might approach the commissive case.

## II. Moorean Judgment as Theoretically Irrational

### 5. *Moorean judgment is self-falsifying or requires contradictory beliefs*

This approach was explained above in Section D.2 (Williams 1996, 1998).<sup>9</sup>

<sup>8</sup> (1995b: 317). On p. 319 of the same work, Rosenthal writes, ‘I cannot assertively produce the sentence “It’s raining but I don’t think it is” because asserting the first conjunct would express an intentional state that the second conjunct denies that I am in.’ (See also p. 324.) We shall, however, only take Rosenthal to be committed to the view that one cannot coherently assert the sentence in question.

<sup>9</sup> This position is similar to Armstrong (1971), who defends a Lockean account of communication, according to which my act of assertion is my way of signaling to you my objective to get you to think me sincere. Deutscher comes close to the same position, but fails to clearly distinguish the omissive from the commissive paradox. Addressing the commissive case, he says, ‘What is wrong with “p but I believe that not-p” is this. If the speaker is correct then what he says is false’ (1965: 54). By ‘correct’, Deutscher means, ‘correct in believing the conjunctive saying’. But this is true only of the omissive case. In a modified analysis, Deutscher says, ‘if the speaker believes all that he says when he utters “p but I don’t believe that p”, then it is logically impossible for him to hold *any* correct beliefs’ (1967: 184, our italics). This can’t be right, however. Although it is impossible that my belief that (p and I don’t believe that p) is correct (because it is self-falsifying), this does not mean that I cannot at the same time correctly believe that p. Deutscher could have repaired this flaw by substituting, ‘then it is logically impossible for him to hold *all* correct beliefs’. That would hold true for both omissive and commissive Moorean belief, but would then fail to capture the essence of the absurdity, since my belief that I have at least one false belief fits that diagnosis without being absurd at all.



### 6. *The impossibility of undefeated evidence*

According to some epistemologists, a proposition  $p$  is *warranted* for  $S$  just in case  $p$  is in  $S$ 's belief system, there is adequate evidence for  $p$ , and that evidence is not 'defeated' by effective counterevidence. Following Klein, de Almeida remarks that warrant for a proposition can always be traced back to others of  $S$ 's beliefs. He thus suggests that we can speak of '*warrant paths* extending from the propositions that one believes to the propositions that one is entitled to believe given one's present stock of beliefs' (2001: 46). He also propounds a Rule of Revision: When a proposition  $p$  is added to a belief system, any belief that would block the warrant path to that belief must be removed from the belief system (2001: 47, citing Klein 1986: 266). Thus suppose that I believe that ( $p$  and I believe that not- $p$ ). Then by belief-distribution it follows that I believe  $p$  and that I believe that I believe that not- $p$ . This latter belief is, de Almeida contends, a reason to refrain from believing  $p$ . Thus if I believe that ( $p$  and I believe that not- $p$ ), I violate the Rule of Revision. Similarly if I believe that ( $p$  and I do not believe  $p$ ), then I believe both  $p$  and that I don't believe that  $p$ . The fact that I believe that  $p$  gives me a reason for believing that I believe that  $p$ , which is itself reason for rejecting the belief that I believe that not- $p$ . In both the omissive and commissive cases, then, de Almeida contends that Moorean propositions are ones for which one can have no non-overridden evidence.

### 7. *The impossibility of justifying Moorean belief*

Williams (2004) adopts a principle that seems implicit in Gareth Evans's *Varieties of Reference* (1982: 225–6) that

Whatever justifies me in believing that  $p$  also justifies me in believing that I believe that  $p$ .

by arguing that

All circumstances that justify me in believing that  $p$  are circumstances that tend to make me believe that  $p$ .

All circumstances that tend to make me believe that  $p$  are circumstances in which I am justified in believing that I believe that  $p$ .

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All circumstances that justify me in believing that  $p$  are circumstances that justify me in believing that I believe that  $p$ .

He also assumes the plausible principle that

Whatever justifies me in believing that ( $p$  &  $q$ ) justifies me in believing that  $p$  and justifies me in believing that  $q$ .

Now suppose that I enjoy justification for believing that ( $p$  & I do not believe that  $p$ ). Then given the conjunctive principle above, I have justification for believing that  $p$ . By Evans's principle, I enjoy the same justification for believing

that I *do* believe that p. But by the conjunctive principle, I also enjoy precisely the same justification for believing that I *do not* believe that p. This is logically impossible, because anything that justifies me in believing that something is the case renders me unjustified in believing that it is not the case and *vice versa*.

To explain the absurdity of the commissive belief, Williams needs the different principle that

Whatever justifies me in believing that p also justifies me in believing that I do not believe that not-p.

Williams claims that this follows from Evans's principle, together with the assumption that I am minimally rational and reflective: if I am at all rational then I will recognize the fact that whatever justification I have for believing that p renders me unjustified in believing that not-p. By Evans's principle, whatever justification I have for believing that p is justification for taking myself to believe that p. But if I take myself to enjoy justification for holding the belief that p and recognize that this justification renders me unjustified in believing that not-p then I should take myself as not believing that not-p.

Now suppose that I am justified in believing that (p but I believe that not-p). Then given the conjunctive principle, I again have justification for believing that p. By the new principle, this means that I enjoy the same justification for believing that I *do not* believe that it is not raining. But by the conjunctive principle, I also enjoy precisely the same justification for believing that I *do* believe that it is not raining. This is logically impossible, as we saw above.

However Vahid (forthcoming) points out that as it stands, Williams's argument for Evans's principle proves too much. The conclusion of the argument is an instance of its first premise. Therefore on the basis of that argument we may construct a valid sorites for the highly implausible conclusion that

All circumstances that justify me in believing that p are circumstances that justify me in believing that I believe that I believe that . . . I believe that p.

### 8. Moorean judgment requires contradictory beliefs

Heal's principle: If I believe that I believe that p then I believe that p, explains the absurdity of commissive Moorean belief as follows: If I believe that (p but I believe that not-p) then by belief-distribution, I believe that I believe that not-p. So from Heal's principle, I believe that not-p. But again by virtue of believing the conjunction, I believe that p. But how is the absurdity of omissive Moorean belief that (p & I don't believe that p) to be explained? Heal could try appealing to an analogous principle: If I believe that I don't believe that p then I don't believe that p. The possibility of omissive Moorean belief refutes this new principle, for now if I believe that (p but I don't believe that p) then I do and I don't believe that p. Moreover, the original principle taken together with the new one would prohibit a more sophisticated commissive belief. For if I believe that (I believe that q but I believe that I don't believe that q) then it now follows that I do and I

don't believe that  $q$ : If I hold this commissive belief then I believe that I believe that  $q$ , so by the original principle, *I do believe that  $q$* . I also believe that I believe that I don't believe that  $q$ , which by applying the original principle and then the new one, means that *I don't believe that  $q$* .<sup>10</sup>

### 9. *The irrationality of conscious Moorean belief*

Baldwin claims that I cannot be rational if I *consciously* believe a Moorean proposition since this requires me in the omissive case to 'believe that I believe and fail to believe the same thing', and in the commissive case to 'believe that I believe and disbelieve the same thing' (1990: 230). Baldwin presumably reasons that since my belief in the first conjunct is conscious then *I believe that I believe that  $p$* , and since I believe the second conjunct then *I believe that I don't believe that  $p$*  in the omissive case and *I believe that I believe that not- $p$* , in the commissive case.

The first case is not accurately described as one in which I 'believe that I believe and fail to believe the same thing', for that would be a case in which I believe that (I believe that  $p$  and I don't believe that  $p$ ). Rather it is a case in which I have contradictory higher-order beliefs about whether I believe that  $p$ . Nor is the second case accurately described as one in which I 'believe that I believe and disbelieve the same thing', for that would be a case in which I believe that (I believe that  $p$  and I believe that not- $p$ ). Rather it is a case in which both my higher-order beliefs are correct only if I have contradictory beliefs about whether  $p$ . Deriving the *single* beliefs supposedly required needs the principle that belief *collects* over conjunction. This principle is disputable: I don't seem to believe the conjunction of everything I believe. Further, the explanation does not clearly apply to the commissive case. Although in the omissive case I am irrational to believe a self-contradiction (if the principle is true) or to hold contradictory beliefs (if it isn't), my belief in the commissive case that I hold them is less so, since my *consciousness* of my own irrationality may be my first step toward removing it.

In a similar spirit to that of Baldwin, Kriegel (2004: 108–9) adopts the Brentano-inspired principle

- 1) If I consciously believe that  $p$  then I believe that ( $p$  & I believe that  $p$ )<sup>11</sup> to
- 2) I consciously believe that ( $p$  & I don't believe that  $p$ )

<sup>10</sup> Heal recognizes that her principle might be occasionally defeated. But Moorean belief is *always* absurd. Therefore the circumstances in which such principles are false are those in which the absurdity of Moorean belief persists. Hence the principles cannot explain the persistent absurdity.

<sup>11</sup> More accurately, Kriegel's principle is: if I consciously believe that  $p$  then I believe that ( $p$  & I *myself* believe that  $p$ ). While we agree that this *de se* element is needed, ignoring it effects neither our exposition of Kriegel's account nor our criticism of it.

to give

- 3) I believe that [p & I don't believe that p & I believe that (p & I don't believe that p)].

He then appeals to a second principle that

- 4) If I believe that (q & I believe that p) then I believe that (I believe that q & I believe that p)

and claims that 3) and 4) entail

- 5) I believe that (p & I don't believe that p & I believe that p & I believe that I don't believe that p).

Kriegel observes that the second conjunct of what I believe in 5) contradicts the third. So if I have a conscious omissive Moorean belief, then I have a self-contradictory belief. But 3) has the form *I believe that (q & I believe that q) where q is p & I don't believe that p*. So all that 4) seems to yield is

- 5') I believe that [I believe that (p & I don't believe that p) & I believe that (p & I don't believe that p)].

Perhaps Kriegel's strategy is to apply 4) to the last conjunct of what I believe in 3), namely

- 6) I believe that (p & I don't believe that p)

and then replace 6) with what follows. But 4) cannot be applied to 6) because 6) does not have the form *I believe that (q & I believe that that p)*.

Kriegel's account of the absurdity of the commissive belief (2004: 188 n. 28) is also flawed. He observe that 1) and

- 7) I consciously believe that (p & I believe that not-p)

entail

- 8) I believe that [p & I believe that not-p & I believe that (p & I believe that not-p)].

which by 4) supposedly yields

- 9) I believe that (p & I believe that not-p & I believe that p & I believe that I believe that not-p).

So if I hold the conscious commissive belie then I believe (among other things) that I hold contradictory beliefs. But what follows from 4) and 8) is

- 9') I believe that [I believe that (p & I believe that not-p) & I believe that (p & I believe that not-p)].

Suppose instead that we apply 4) to the last conjunct of what I believe in 8), namely

- 10) I believe that (p & I believe that not-p)

and replace 10) with what follows, namely

11) I believe that p & I believe that not-p  
to yield

12) I believe that [p & I believe that not-p & I believe that p & I believe that not-p].

This is slightly different from 9), but still gives the result Kreigel requires. But now he needs the principle that if the content of what I believe entails so-and-so, then so-and-so is part of the content of what I believe. Without further qualification, this is false. I may believe that a triangle is equilateral without believing that it is equiangular.

Kriegel can repair his account of the conscious omissive belief by using 1) plus the fact that belief distributes over conjunction: if the second conjunct of what I believe in 3) is true then I *do not* believe that p. But if the last conjunct of what I believe in 3) is also true then (since belief distributes over conjunction) I *do* believe that p. So 3) describes a self-contradictory belief after all. We get a different result for the commissive belief. If the second conjunct of what I believe in 8) is true then I *believe that not-p*. If the last conjunct of what I believe is also true then (since belief distributes over conjunction) I *believe that p*. But as kreigel himself notes (2004: 118 n. 28) a better result would be that if I hold the commissive belief consciously, then I believe that I hold a pair of contradictory beliefs. This result follows from 4) alone. If I believe that (p & I believe that not-p) then by 4) I believe that (I believe that p & I believe that not-p). But if I hold the commissive belief *unconsciously*, do I really think I hold contradictory beliefs?

### *10. Moorean belief entails contradictory beliefs if that belief is true and one believes the consequences of one's beliefs*

Sorensen contends that

(om<sup>1</sup>) p & I don't believe that I believe that p

and

(com<sup>1</sup>) p & I believe that I believe that not-p

seem less absurd to believe than their original counterparts and that as iteration of the belief operator increases, only omissive absurdity appears to decrease. Using the notation 'B<sup>n</sup>a~p' where the superscript denotes the number of iterations of the belief-operator (so that 'B<sup>3</sup>ap' means that a believes that he believes that he believes that p) Sorensen writes (2000: 42):

My solution endorses the intuition that 'p & B<sup>n</sup> ~p' is a Moorean sentence for all n, but 'p & ~B<sup>n</sup>p' need not be a Moorean sentence when n is a large number. 'p & B<sup>n</sup>a~p' does not entail that a has a specifiable directly opposed belief. But 'Ba(p & B<sup>n</sup>a ~p)' entails that a has directly opposed beliefs about p, under the assumption that a believes the consequences of his beliefs and that 'p & B<sup>n</sup>a~p' is true. This entailment follows directly for n = 1. When n > 1, the entailment is secured by a necessary condition for self-attributing higher-order beliefs.

The condition in question is that if I believe<sup>m+n</sup> that *p* then I believe<sup>n</sup> that *p* (2000: 39–42) namely a recursive application of the *principle of belief elimination*:

If I believe that I believe that *p* then I believe that *p*.

Sorensen appeals to this principle together with the principle that belief is closed under logical consequence:

If a logical consequence of *p* is *q* and I believe that *p*, then I believe that *q*.

It follows that I cannot hold a true belief in *com*<sup>1</sup> unless I hold contradictory, or ‘directly opposed’ beliefs about whether *p* (compare Sorensen 1988: 40–2). For if I believe that (*p* & I believe that I believe that not-*p*), then a logical consequence of what I believe is that *p*, so *I believe that p*. But if my belief in *com*<sup>1</sup> is true then I believe that I believe that not-*p*, in which case the principle of belief elimination ensures that *I believe that not-p*. Since that principle may be applied recursively, the same diagnosis of the absurdity will hold for any order of iteration of the belief-operator, as, say, in *com*<sup>4</sup>. It also applies to the original commissive belief, in which case the principle is not needed. Sorensen’s account diagnoses no such absurdity in *om*<sup>1</sup>. If I believe that (*p* & I don’t believe that I believe that *p*) then a logical consequence of what I believe is that *p*, so I believe that *p*. But if my belief in *om*<sup>1</sup> is true then I don’t believe that I believe that *p*, in which case the principle of belief elimination fails to apply.

Sorensen must explain the absurdity of the original omissive case as follows: If I believe that (*p* & I don’t believe that *p*) then a logical consequence of what I believe is that *p*, so *I believe that p*. But if my omissive belief is true then *I don’t believe that p*. This is not, as Sorensen supposes, a case of contradictory beliefs but rather a flat contradiction. Secondly, I do seem to be absurd in some way if I believe *om*<sup>1</sup>. For example, it would be absurd of me to believe that

God exists but I think I am not a believer.

Finally, Sorensen’s appeal to the truth of the principle that belief is closed under logical consequence is problematic. It is clear that it fails as a psychological principle. I may believe that a triangle is equilateral without believing that it is equiangular. Nor can it be true of me as a principle of ideal rationality, given Searle’s Principle (1992: 155–62):

If I believe that *p* then I have the ability to think the occurrent thought that *p*.

This principle explains why although we may intuitively suppose that a dog has rudimentary beliefs about the food in its bowl (which helps us explain its behavior as it strains at its leash) we hesitate to attribute to it the belief that it will be beaten in Lent. Clearly, it does not have the concept of Lent and so lacks the ability to think thoughts of Lent. The requirement also explains our difficulty in characterizing the beliefs of other species in any fine-grained way, since it is difficult to specify, using the linguistic expressions of our thoughts, exactly what

concepts (or derivatively, thoughts) are available to those with radically different linguistic capacities and ways of behaving.

Now suppose that I believe that Singapore is a democracy but have no idea what a plutocracy is. Since I cannot think the occurrent thought that Singapore is a plutocracy, I cannot think the occurrent thought that it is either a democracy or a plutocracy. So by Searle's principle, I cannot believe that Singapore is either a democracy or a plutocracy. True, this will not stop me believing that the sentence, 'Singapore is either a democracy or a plutocracy,' states some truth or other. But that would be a different belief altogether. For one thing, it is not necessary that the sentence in question state what it does, because we could have used 'plutocracy' the way we now use 'workers' state'. Although I cannot think thoughts of plutocracy, I may still think the thought that a sentence that I don't understand, states some truth or other. My ignorance of what counts as a plutocracy is an indictment of my knowledge, but hardly counts as a failure of ideal rationality. So if I am a maximally rational thinker, but I have no idea what a plutocracy is, I will see that my belief in the democracy of Singapore entails some truth or other that is stated by the sentence 'Singapore is either a democracy or a plutocracy'. Moreover, I will believe that this sentence states some truth or other. But I will not know which truth it is. Nor will I believe that truth. This falsifies Sorensen's principle, even as a principle of ideal rationality.

A defender of Sorensen might endorse Robert Audi's (1994) distinction between a dispositional belief and a disposition to believe. Then she could claim that Sorensen's principle should be understood as saying that a maximally rational person is disposed to believe the logical consequences of her original beliefs. This move will not, however, help Sorensen. Since I am unable to think thoughts about plutocracies, I cannot form any beliefs about them (as opposed to forming beliefs about sentences). But then I cannot be disposed to form such beliefs either, simply because I cannot be disposed to form what I am unable to form. Moreover, since an infinite series of similar disjunctions are entailed by a first disjunct, the principle compels us to say that an ideally rational believer would believe (or be disposed to believe) each of an infinite series of similar disjunctions. Searle's principle falsifies this prediction in the case of an ideally rational thinker who lacks the concepts needed to think the second disjunct.

Sorensen tries to circumvent this difficulty by making my 'thorough obedience' to the principle a test of my degree of ideal rationality (1988: 37). But although we might admit that degrees of rationality are vague, surely there is a difference between total obedience and none. So what is missing from Sorensen's account is a principled degree of disobedience to the principle that is distinctive of the degree of Moorean irrationality. This means that Moorean absurdity cannot be explained in terms of falsehood of the principle either. Is my failure to believe the logical consequences of all of my beliefs, a form of irrationality? If so, it is a very mild form. My failure to be disposed to form such beliefs seems even milder. By contrast, a Moorean believer is guilty of a severe irrationality.

### III. Moorean Speech as Practically Irrational

#### 11. *The impossibility of Moorean assertion (because of misuse of language)*

When a person utters the words, ‘p but I don’t believe that p’, a presupposition of honest assertion, namely that one knows or believes or at least does not disbelieve what one is saying, is not met. Black thinks it follows that it would be neither true nor not true that the speaker has made an honest assertion. And from this, he infers that she has made no assertion at all. She has instead attempted to make an assertion but failed (Black 1952). But suppose I say, in exasperation to an obtuse psychiatrist who keeps on reassuring me that people aren’t persecuting me, ‘Look here, I bloody well know that they aren’t, but I can’t help believing they are!’ That would evince a rational recognition of my own irrationality. Couldn’t he understand what I was trying to say? Further, as we have seen, it is not clear how one might argue that it is impossible to believe ‘p but I don’t believe that p,’ as opposed to arguing that such a belief must put one in error.

#### 12. *The impossibility of Moorean assertion (because of assertability conditions)*

The speech acts of asserting p and of asserting that I think that p have, ‘. . . roughly the same conditions of assertability. Any conditions in which I could say that p are conditions in which I could say I think that p,’ and the converse holds as well (Rosenthal 1995b: 320). Thus in response to the question whether it is raining, one could just as appropriately reply, ‘Yes’ as say, ‘I think so.’ Assume now that if p has a set p(AC) of assertability conditions, then *not-p* has a disjoint set of assertability conditions, that is  $p(\text{AC}) \cap \text{not-}p(\text{AC}) = \{\}$ ; likewise that  $p(\text{AC}) = \text{I believe } p(\text{AC})$ . Thus, if ‘p’ is assertible for speaker S, then ‘I believe that p’ is as well; whence ‘it is not the case that I believe that p’ is not assertible for S. And if ‘I believe that p’ is assertible for S, then ‘p’ is as well; whence ‘not-p’ is not. Hence, assuming that assertion distributes over conjunction, any attempt to assert ‘p but I don’t believe it’ must fail, and one attempting to assert this Moorean sentence shows a severe failure of practical rationality. On the assumption that ‘not-p’ and ‘I believe that not-p’ also have roughly the same assertability conditions, a similar account can apply to the commissive case.<sup>12</sup>

Why, however, should it be granted that the assertability (as opposed to the truth-) conditions for p and not-p are disjoint? If this is intended to flow from Shoemaker’s Principle, we shall need an argument for why it is not possible to

<sup>12</sup> Shoemaker (1996) offers a similar account in terms of ‘assent conditions’, that is conditions under which it would be appropriate to assent to a proposition, leaving conversational factors aside. He restricts discussion to what he calls ‘mental assent’, which is an episodic instantiation of belief—what others might call judgment. Shoemaker also espouses only one direction of the connection, namely that any condition under which it is appropriate mentally to assent to p is a condition under which it is appropriate mentally to assent to ‘I believe that p.’



believe both  $p$  and not- $p$ , or some other incursion into doxastic logic. To this end Shoemaker (1996) considers ‘assent conditions’, that is conditions under which one assents to a proposition. He restricts discussion to what he calls ‘mental assent’, which is an episodic instantiation of belief—what others might call judgment. He holds as well that one cannot mentally assent to  $p$  without mentally assenting to *I believe that  $p$* , at least if both contents present themselves for consideration. Hence, if one mentally assents to  $p$  and *I don’t believe that  $p$* , one mentally assents to  $p$  and to *I don’t believe that  $p$*  (by belief-distribution); but one’s mental assent to  $p$  entails that one also mentally assents to *I believe that  $p$*  if one entertains the question whether one believes that  $p$ . Thus, if one entertains this question, and mentally assents to the omissive Moorean proposition, one mentally assents both to a proposition  $q$  and its negation, thus showing a severe failure of theoretical rationality. Whether an analogous line of thought applies to the commissive case is unclear. It would require the further premise that if one mentally assents to the proposition *I believe that  $p$* , then one mentally assents to the proposition that  $p$  if one considers whether  $p$ . We know of no sound argument on behalf of this conclusion.

### 13. *The inexpressibility of Moorean belief*

Suppose that one could assert ‘ $p$  but I don’t believe it’. In that case the first conjunct would express belief that  $p$ , yet the second conjunct would express belief that not- $p$  (Wolgast 1977: 119). But, Wolgast contends, one cannot believe both that  $p$  and not- $p$  (1977: 118). For this reason one cannot use ‘ $p$  but I don’t believe it’ to express beliefs. Since, further, an assertion is an expression of belief, one cannot, contrary to our supposition, assert the Moorean sentence. Hence any attempt to assert this sentence must show a failure of practical rationality. For this account to be persuasive, we should need reason to deny that one can believe contradictory propositions. We would also need reason to believe that a disavowal of belief, ‘I don’t believe that  $p$ ’, is also an expression of disbelief, namely that I believe that not- $p$ . After all, someone who asserts ‘I don’t believe that God exists nor do I believe that He does not’ has not expressed the belief that God does not exist.

### 14. *Moorean assertion as a self-defeating speech act*

Each speech act requires that certain conditions be met for it to be performed non-defectively. One who utters a Moorean sentence cannot use it to perform a non-defective speech act, and thus cannot use it to perform a speech act (Vanderveken 1980; Searle & Vanderveken 1985). For Vanderveken, this is due simply to his Postulate VIII that, ‘. . . no speaker can succeed in simultaneously committing himself to having a psychological state and asserting that he does not have that psychological state’ (1980: 264). The commitment to the psychological state in question is, of course, carried by the assertion of  $p$ : The speaker is committed to

believing that *p*. Postulate VIII seems too strong, however. I could believe a set of propositions that, unbeknownst to me, imply that I believe that *p*. If in such a situation I were to say, 'I do not believe that *p*', I would seem to betray my inconsistency by means of a speech act rather than failing to perform a speech act at all. We note also that the present approach focuses on omissive Moorean propositions, and leaves it unclear how it is to be applied to the commissive case.

### 15. *The speaker's self-defeating intentions*

Someone who makes a Moorean assertion that *p* has self-defeating intentions due to her primary intention of imparting knowledge or instilling belief that *p* in her audience (Baldwin 1990, following a suggestion by Burnyeat 1968). Baldwin holds that if I assert that *p* to you then I have the *primary* intention that you will come to believe that *p* by recognition of this intention. In so intending I have the *secondary* intention to make you believe that *p*, as well as a secondary intention to make you believe that I believe that *p*. So when I assert that *p*, the second of my secondary intentions is to make you *believe that I believe that p*. But when I go on to assert, in the omissive case, that I don't believe that *p*, the first of my secondary intentions is to make you *believe that I don't believe that p*. So I intend to make you form contradictory beliefs about what I myself believe. And when I go on to assert, in the commissive case, that I believe that not-*p*, the first of my secondary intentions is to make you *believe that I believe that not-p*. So I intend to make you think that I have contradictory beliefs about whether *p*.

This latter intention can only be strictly described as my single intention to make you believe both that I believe that *p* and believe that not-*p*. To derive this from my intention to make you believe that I believe that *p*, together with my intention to make you believe that I believe that not-*p*, would require other principles. Such principles would likewise be needed in the omissive case, in order to derive my single intention to make you believe both that I do and I don't believe that *p*, from my intention to make you believe that I believe that *p*, together with my intention to make you believe that I don't believe that *p*. Even if such principles could be provided and defended, it remains unclear why these intentions are supposed to be absurd. One way an intention can be absurd is by being an intention to bring about an impossibility. But given the possibility of contradictory beliefs I intend an impossibility in neither case.

Perhaps the thought is instead that I will charitably assume, in the omissive case, that you will not be so irrational as to form contradictory beliefs. Thus I should be able to work out that my primary intention will be frustrated. And in the commissive case, I will see that you will not be so uncharitable as to think that I have contradictory beliefs, so I should again realize that my primary intention will be frustrated. But in the omissive case, suppose that I *do* intend to make you form contradictory beliefs (for example, in the fashion of 1984's thought police), or that, in the commissive case, I do intend to make you think (or even let you know) that I am irrational in holding contradictory beliefs (for example

as in O'Brien's apology to Smith in 1984). Suppose further that I succeed. Now the absurdity of my assertion does not seem explicable merely in terms of the frustration of these intentions.

By contrast, Jones argues that if I assert that  $p$  to you then I have the primary intention that you will come to *know* that  $p$  by means of your recognition that I intend this (1991: 185). He argues as well that this intention succeeds only if you believe that I know the truth of what I assert. Since assertion distributes over conjunction, if I assert that ( $p$  and I believe that not- $p$ ) then I assert that I believe that not- $p$ . But Jones thinks that you will then 'inevitably suppose that there is some reason' why I believe that not- $p$  (1991: 185) and thus you will not believe that I know that  $p$ . So you will not come to know that  $p$ , thus frustrating my primary intention.

The inevitability of this supposition can be challenged (see Welbourne 1992: 238). Moreover, Jones does not consider the omissive Moorean assertion, ' $p$  but I do not believe that  $p$ '. However, Jones could repair his account as follows: if you believe that I know the truth of what I assert then you will believe that what I assert is true. So when I assert that ( $p$  and I believe that not- $p$ ) you will think that I believe that not- $p$ . So you will not think that I know that  $p$ , since you will know that I cannot know what I believe to be false. Similarly, when I assert that ( $p$  and I don't believe that  $p$ ) you will think that I don't believe that  $p$  and again you will not think that I know that  $p$ , since you will know that I cannot know what I don't believe. So in either case, my primary intention is frustrated.

Welbourne agrees with Jones that if I make an assertion to you then I have the primary intention that you will come to know what I assert because you recognize that I intend this (1992: 237), but thinks that this intention succeeds only if you come to believe that I know what I assert. But when I assert to you that ( $p$  and I don't believe that  $p$ ) I assert that I don't believe that  $p$ . If you believe that I know that I don't believe that  $p$  then you must believe that I don't believe that  $p$ . So you must accept that a condition of my knowing that  $p$  (namely my belief that  $p$ ) is not satisfied. Accordingly, you won't believe that I know that  $p$ , so you won't believe that I know that ( $p$  and I don't believe that  $p$ ) either. So I have frustrated my intention in asserting this, because I have told you in effect that I am insincere. Jones accounts for the commissive Moorean assertion in the same way on the assumption that a condition of my knowing something is that I don't believe that it is false. We note that it seems plausible to say that I can only impart knowledge to you if I make you think I have the knowledge in the first place. (We further note that Jones needs the principle that if you believe that I know a conjunction then you believe that I know its conjuncts.)

All three of these accounts assume that Moorean assertions only exemplify one intentional type. Jones and Welbourne think of asserting as letting know, where the assertor intends to impart knowledge, while Baldwin thinks of it as a case in which the assertor intends to instil belief. So lies fit neither Jones's nor Welbourne's account, since a liar does not intend to impart knowledge. One's

assertion may also be described as a provocative contention when one intends to 'wind up' her hearer. One's intention in this case is to remain divided in belief and so it fails to fit Baldwin's account. But the supposition that a Moorean assertor is lying or 'winding her hearer up' does nothing to remove the absurdity, especially since the hearer is rarely in a position to know the correct description of the assertion.

### *16. Social pragmatism*

The utterer of a Moorean sentence fails to meet the conditions given by Brandom's social pragmatism (1983, 1994) for the making of an assertion. According to this approach, one who asserts that *p* undertakes justificatory responsibility for that proposition in the following sense: To an interlocutor's challenge to that assertion with such words as, 'How do you know?', the assertor is obliged to reply with a justification (be it an argument, an appeal to sensory experience, or deferral to another's authority). If such a challenge is made and the speaker gives an inadequate reply or none at all, she is obliged to retract that assertion. Doran holds that one who asserts both that *p* and that she doesn't believe that *p*, cannot possibly fulfil both sets of justificatory obligations that this pair of assertions creates: Justifying *p* will prevent her from being able to justify her assertion that she does not believe that *p*, and vice versa. For this reason she cannot use the Moorean sentence to make an assertion (Doran 1995). Hence her utterance is severely practically irrational. Doran does not discuss the commissive case; evidently she would deny that a speaker could justify both an assertion that *p* and that she believes not-*p*. However, it is unclear what would prevent a speaker from justifying the claim that most spiders are harmless (by appeal to arachnidan evidence) and a further claim that she believes otherwise (by appeal to evidence concerning her own phobic behavior). Furthermore, from the premise that a speaker ought to retract a challenged assertion that she has been unable to justify, it does not follow that she has made no assertion at all; stubborn allegiance to untenable views is unfortunately all too quotidian. Accordingly, we need a fuller account of normative constraints on assertion to infer that assertion of a Moorean sentence is impossible rather than merely inappropriate.

### *17. The incredibility of the speaker*

Williams holds that an assertor offers his hearer the *prima facie* justification to believe him, in other words, to believe that he is sincerely telling the truth (1996: 136). But when the assertion is Moorean, the offer turns out to be worthless. For if you believe me when I tell you that (*p* and I don't believe that *p*) then you must think that I believe that *p* (in virtue of believing me sincere) and also believe that I don't believe that *p* (in virtue of believing that I tell the truth). So you have contradictory beliefs if you believe me. And in the commissive case, if you believe me when I tell you that (*p* and I believe that not-*p*) then you must think that I

believe that  $p$  (in virtue of believing me sincere) and also believe that I believe that not- $p$  (in virtue of believing that I tell the truth). So this time you must think that *I* have contradictory beliefs if you believe me. You thus cannot believe me in either case without being theoretically irrational or thinking that I am theoretically irrational. Williams contends that since an assertor should assume that both he and his hearer will charitably avoid ascriptions of irrationality if possible, the assertor is thus in a position to see with minimal reflection that he will not be believed in either case. Since being believed is the point of assertion, the assertor should see (again with minimal reflection) that his plan (to be believed) is bound to fail. So such an assertor is practically irrational.

It may be doubted, however, whether an assertor who does not plan to be believed is thereby severely practically irrational. After all, one might feel sure, under interrogation, that the authorities think her guilty, and yet maintain her innocence with no intention of being believed. Further, it is not clear that the assertor of a Moorean sentence as Williams conceives her is always in a position to see that her plan to be believed is bound to fail. Perhaps she thinks it a reasonable bet that her interlocutor will simply take her at her word and find her inconsistent. In that case it is not clear that her Moorean utterance is severely practically irrational.

#### IV. Moorean Judgment as Practically Irrational

##### 18. *The incredibility of Moorean sentences*

Hintikka holds that ‘the gist of Moore’s paradox may be said to lie in the fact that’ the omissive proposition *p* and *I don’t believe that p* ‘is necessarily unbelievable by the speaker’ (1962: 67). He espouses the principle that

‘in the case of an individual’ a failure to obey the principle: if I believe that  $p$  then I believe that I believe that  $p$ , may be taken as impossible (1962: 67)

He also holds that if I believe that ( $p$  and I don’t believe that  $p$ ) then I believe that  $p$  (since belief distributes over conjunction) and so (from Hintikka’s principle) *I believe that I believe that p*. But since belief distributes over conjunction, *I believe that I don’t believe that p*. Thus I have contradictory higher-order beliefs about whether I believe that  $p$ , and Hintikka seems to take this to be impossible.<sup>13</sup>

Hintikka’s principle does not seem true as a universal law of psychology, given that my belief that  $p$  may be a prejudice that I fail to recognize within myself. Nor is its failure that of inconsistent belief. Hintikka could stipulate that my obedience to it, like my avoidance of contradictory beliefs, is a condition of

<sup>13</sup> Shoemaker at one point also claims that Moorean belief is impossible (1996: 85–6). Presumably he would not on this basis hold that Moorean belief involves a severe failure of theoretical rationality. Likewise for Goldstein (2000: 86): ‘. . . we not only cannot assert Mooroonically but also cannot believe Mooroonically; why we cannot have a Mooronic attitude’.

theoretical rationality. Then my Moorean belief would be impossible, given that I'm perfectly rational. Then, however, the account faces the problem, discussed above, of explaining the absurdity of my Moorean beliefs in circumstances such as self-deception that defeat my obedience to it.

## F. OPEN QUESTIONS AND CONTRIBUTIONS TO THIS VOLUME

We have canvassed eighteen different attempts to explain Moorean absurdity. Not all these attempts appear equally viable, yet even after rejecting a substantial number of these we have a surfeit of candidate explanations. On the one hand this suggests the fecundity of Moorean absurdity as a source of philosophical speculation; on the other it raises the question whether such speculation might be all too ad hoc. If a candidate explanation is to be acceptable it must respect the desiderata formulated in Section D. In addition, however, a candidate explanation gains plausibility as it provides answers to one or more of the following, currently unresolved questions. We raise some of these questions below, indicating when a contribution to this volume offers an answer to it.

### **Does Moorean absurdity find precursors in philosophers before Moore?**

Sorensen in 'The All-Seeing Eye: A Blind Spot in the History of Ideas' (Chapter 2) finds isolated approximations to Moorean absurdity in Jean Buridan, Parmenides, Plato, Sextus Empiricus, Augustine, Descartes, Spinoza, and others. He argues that Moore's paradox is the culmination of a critique of idealism within the analytic tradition and considers the history of theories of vision to provide a backdrop for the notion of a blindspot. In 'Moorean Pretense' (Chapter 11), Robert Gordon argues that Descartes's *Meditations* can be seen as a form of Moorean pretence, for example Descartes's pretence that that he falsely believes that he has a body.

### **Can Moorean Absurdity be given a grammatical characterization?**

In an effort rigorously to delineate our topic, some have sought a grammatical characterization of Moorean sentences. Jay Atlas, in his 'What Reflexive Pronouns Tell Us about Belief: A New Moore's Paradox De Se, Rationality, and Privileged Access' (Chapter 6), argues that Moorean absurdity need not arise in an utterance of the form, 'p but I do not believe it'. Rather, what is needed is an indirect reflexive pronoun such as 'I myself' whose proper use guarantees that the speaker knows that she is speaking of herself. On this basis, Atlas challenges claims by Moran (2001) that Moorean absurdity exemplifies a dichotomy between

theoretical and practical approaches to the self. Atlas also challenges an argument offered by Shoemaker (1996) that if one believes that *p*, then one believes that one believes that *p*. He concludes more generally that the ordinary concept of belief does not bring with it a commitment to privileged access.

### **What sort of infraction generates the absurdity?**

We said in Section E that extant explanations of Moorean absurdity account for that phenomenon either as a severe violation of theoretical rationality, or as a severe violation of practical rationality. Is one of these the correct system of norms in terms of which to account for Moorean absurdity, or are there other systems whose violation might instead account for that phenomenon? Claudio de Almeida, in 'Moorean Absurdity: An Epistemological Analysis' (Chapter 3) offers an account of Moorean belief as a form of theoretical irrationality. He characterizes Williams's (1994) analysis as: You rationally believe that *p* only if there is no simple and compelling argument that we can reasonably expect you to be aware of to the effect that your believing that *p* is either self-falsifying or ensures the presence of contradictory beliefs in your doxastic system. De Almeida argues that this account is both unnecessary and incomplete as an explanation of the absurdity of Moorean belief, and offers a rival account from which he draws general conclusions about the nature of justification. Thomas Baldwin in 'The Normative Character of Belief' (Chapter 4) construes Moorean absurdity as consisting in a set of inconsistent commitments whether that absurdity be produced by an assertion or a belief. Baldwin motivates his approach with an analogy between judgments and performative utterances, and is careful to eschew what we described above (Section D.3) as principles of epistemic or doxastic logic in the course of his explanation. Finally, Mitchell Green ('Moorean Absurdity and Showing What's Within', Chapter 9) offers an account of Moorean absurdity as violating either norms of theoretical rationality, or norms internal to speech acts such as assertion, while leaving it open in any given case whether it is the one or the other.

### **Does Moorean absurdity also come in forms involving other epistemic operators besides belief?**

For instance, 'It's raining, but I don't know that it is' sounds paradoxical to some. Similarly, 'It's raining but I'm not certain that it is' sounds paradoxical to some. Other candidates include 'I believe that Moore has two hands but I don't believe that I know that he has two hands' and 'It's raining but I know that I'm convinced that it's not raining' and even 'It's raining but I have no justification at all for believing that it's raining'. Adler and Armour-Garb, in 'Moore's Paradox and the Transparency of Belief' (Chapter 7) investigate the question with some care, concluding that only cases involving belief generate Moorean absurdity.

Their reason is that only belief has the property of *transparency*: An attitude A is transparent to its content C just in case one who bears A to C is such that C holds (from their point of view). Belief is transparent, given this definition, whereas, for instance, desire is not.

### May Moorean absurdity be exemplified in other speech acts beside assertion?

Some authors claim that questions and imperatives can generate Moorean absurdity, as in, ‘What time is it? but I don’t want to know what time it is,’ or ‘Shut the door but I don’t want you to shut the door’ (Searle and Vanderveken 1985; but for dissent see Heal 1977). Others have argued that Moorean absurdity is found even when an indicative sentence is put forth with other than assertoric force, as in the case of supposition (Green 2000). Adler and Armour-Garb investigate the question, as does Green.

### Might an account of Moorean absurdity provide a way of identifying further examples of this phenomenon?

For example, are ‘I have no beliefs now’, ‘All my beliefs are false’, or ‘I don’t exist (as a believer)’, cases of Moorean absurdity? If ‘It’s raining but I’m convinced that I believe it isn’t’ is genuinely Moorean, is ‘It’s raining but I believe I’m convinced it isn’t’? If Superman informs me that I’m acquainted with him when he is disguised as another person, whom I think idiotic, is my remark, ‘I falsely believe that you are an idiot’, an instance of Moorean absurdity? (Crimmins 1992, discussed by Rosenthal 2002, Hájek and Stoljar 2001). Was Luis Buñuel’s remark, ‘I’m still an atheist, thank God,’ as he was banished from Spain for attacking religion, a case of Moorean absurdity? Acknowledging that this ability to identify further examples of Moorean absurdity is consistent with the inability to *enumerate* all such instances (Sorensen 2000), Williams (‘Moore’s Paradoxes, Evans’s Principle, and Iterated Belief’, Chapter 5) notes Sorensen’s comment that

om<sup>1</sup>) p & I don’t believe that I believe that p

and

com<sup>1</sup>)p & I believe that I believe that not-p

seem less absurd to believe or assert than

om) p & I don’t believe that p

or

com) p & I believe that not-p.

Moreover, as iteration increases, omissive absurdity appears to decrease, while commissive absurdity does not. Thus, with four iterations,



om<sup>4</sup>) p & I don't believe that I believe that I believe that I believe that I believe that p

seems less absurd to believe or assert than om<sup>1</sup>, whereas the absurdity of believing or asserting

com<sup>4</sup>) p & I believe that I believe that I believe that I believe that I believe that I believe that not-p

seems undiminished. Williams argues that despite appearances, any *belief* in any iteration of om or com is equally absurd. However, he agrees that there is a decrease in the absurdity of an assertion of om) as iterations increase. He also defends a definition of Moorean belief: that any belief is Moorean just in case its content is (i) a possible truth that (ii) reports no irrationality in the believer, but (iii) it is impossible to have justification for that belief.

### **Is Moorean belief, insofar as it makes its holder absurd, conscious?**

André Gallois in 'Consciousness, Reasons, and Moore's Paradox' (Chapter 8) argues that only consciously held attitudes can provide one with reasons for action or for the holding of an attitude. Gallois concludes that only consciously held beliefs are integrated with the rest of the self, and he accounts for the absurdity of a new species of Moorean absurdity. In the process he relates these issues to integration in fiction, and to different ways of attributing reasons.

### **Does having a Moorean 'ring' refute a philosophical position?**

Some philosophical positions seem to imply that it would be appropriate to say something having the form of a Moorean absurdity. For instance, an eliminativist in the philosophy of mind denies that there are any beliefs. She is thus committed to the following conjunction: 'There are no beliefs, though I don't believe it.' Does this commitment refute her position? Alan Hájek's 'My Philosophical Position Says "p" and I Don't Believe "p",' (Chapter 10), investigates this question, attending to eliminativism about belief, the view that belief requires assignment of high or maximal probability, the denial of higher-order beliefs or higher-order probabilities, eliminativism about truth, pragmatism, relativism about truth, truth-value gluts or gaps, and the philosophical 'meta-induction' that all philosophical theories are false.

### **Is the study of Moorean absurdity crucially an investigation into the pathology of belief or other attitudes?**

It is natural to hold, given the absurdity of such thoughts or utterances as 'P but I don't believe it', that Moorean absurdity is primarily of interest for failures

or rationality. However, in his paper ‘Moorean Pretense’ (Chapter 11), Robert Gordon argues that the ability to pretend-true a situation such as is expressed by the just-quoted sentence may be a cognitive achievement. On his account, Moorean pretense is not absurd. It underlies Cartesian doubt, is rampant in modern science, and is a defining feature of dramatic irony. It may underlie the ability to understand that people’s behavior is sometimes based on false beliefs rather than on the actual facts. Most children gain this ability at about the age of 4. However, children with autism usually do not acquire it at all, and Gordon speculates that this failure may be tied to their well-established failure to engage in spontaneous pretense.

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