

## ABSTRACT

### Common Sense Epistemology: A Defense of Seemings as Evidence

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Starting from an internalist, evidentialist, deontological conception of epistemic justification, this dissertation constitutes a defense of common sense epistemology. Common sense epistemology is a theory of ultimate evidence. At its center is a type of mental state called “seemings”—the kind we possess when something *seems* true or false. Common sense epistemology maintains, first, that all seemings are evidence for or against their content and, second, that all our ultimate evidence for or against a proposition consists in seemings. The first thesis entails phenomenal conservatism—an increasingly prominent and controversial epistemic principle. Together these theses imply that what stances we’re intellectually permitted to take will ultimately come down to what seems to be the case.

Following a short introduction, the groundwork for the project is laid in Chapter Two. Common sense epistemology is presented in detail and situated within a larger epistemic framework. Starting assumptions are made explicit and briefly defended. The significance of the project is highlighted, including for those who reject the starting assumptions. I then begin my defense.

The defense of common sense epistemology offered herein is holistic in that I strengthen the metaphysical and historical foundations of the theory in addition to arguing straightforwardly for its truth. In Chapter Three I show how common sense epistemology is a contemporary outworking of epistemic insights contained in the work of Scottish philosopher Thomas Reid. In Chapter Four I give one of the most detailed accounts of seemings available and defend their existence. In Chapter Five I present my main argument for common sense epistemology. I begin with a Reidian argument for phenomenal conservatism. After concluding that all seemings are ultimate evidence, I consider what other kinds of mental states might serve in that role. All the likely alternatives are considered and rejected, leaving seemings as the lone candidate. In Chapter Six I respond to the problem of cognitive penetration—an influential objection that arises during my defense of phenomenal conservatism.

Together these chapters compose one of the most thorough and sustained defenses of phenomenal conservatism and common sense epistemology in the literature.