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WITTGENSTEIN, MOOREAN ABSURDITY
AND ITS DISAPPEARANCE FROM SPEECH

ABSTRACT. G. E. Moore famously observed that to say, ¨I went to the pictures last Tuesday but I don't believe that I did'' would be "absurd". Why should it be absurd of me to say something about myself that might be true of me? Moore suggested an answer to this, but as I will show, one that fails. Wittgenstein was greatly impressed by Moore's discovery of a class of absurd but possibly true assertions because he saw that it illuminates "the logic of assertion". Wittgenstein suggests a promising relation of assertion to belief in terms of the idea that one "expresses belief " that is consistent with the spirit of Moore's failed attempt to explain the absurdity. Wittgenstein also observes that "under unusual circumstances", the sentence, "It's raining but I don't believe it" could be given "a clear sense". Why does the absurdity disappear from speech in such cases? Wittgenstein further suggests that analogous absurdity may be found in terms of desire, rather than belief. In what follows I develop an account of Moorean absurdity that, with the exception of Wittgenstein's last suggestion, is broadly consistent with both Moore's approach and Wittgenstein's.

1. INTRODUCTION

G. E. Moore famously 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, the nature of such absurdity remains controversial. On the one hand such sayings seem distinct from semantically odd Liar-type sayings such as, "What I'm now saying is not true" because what Moore said might be true: you may consistently imagine a situation in which Moore went to the pictures last Tuesday but fails to believe that he did. 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. Why should it be absurd of me to say something about myself that might be true of me? Moore suggested an answer to this, but as I will show, one that fails. Wittgenstein was greatly impressed by Moore's discovery of a class of absurd but possibly true assertions because he saw that it illuminates "the logic of assertion".

Wittgenstein suggests a promising relation of assertion to belief in terms of the idea that one "expresses belief" that is consistent with the spirit of Moore's failed attempt to explain the absurdity. Wittgenstein also observes that "under unusual circumstances", the sentence, "It's raining but I don't believe it" could be given "a clear sense". Why does the absurdity disappear from speech in such cases? Wittgenstein further suggests that analogous absurdity may be found in terms of desire, rather than belief.

In what follows I develop an account of Moorean absurdity that, with the exception of Wittgenstein's last suggestion, is broadly consistent with both Moore's approach and Wittgenstein's. My strategy for so doing is as follows.

In §2 I explain the problem in Moore's terms. In §3 I examine the failure of Moore's suggestion for explaining the absurdity. In §4 I sketch Wittgenstein's own response to it. In §5, I show that the work of both Moore and Wittgenstein helps demonstrate the need for five constraints on any satisfactory account of Moorean absurdity, one of which is that it should explain why it would be absurd to *believe* that (I went to the pictures last Tuesday but I don't believe that I did). In §6 I examine a set of examples of putatively Moorean absurdities in order to define Moorean belief and in §7 I explain its absurdity. In §8 I explain the absurdity of Moorean assertion in terms of the expression of belief and show how this enables an account of assertion. In §9 I use this account to explain the genuine disappearance of absurdity from speech. In §10 I show how the appearance of the absurdity in speech is sometimes an illusion. Finally I show in §11 that contrary to Wittgenstein's suggestion, there is no analogous absurdity in terms of desire.

2. THE PROBLEM OF MOORE'S ABSURDITIES

Moore did not only observe that to use the sentence

"I went to the pictures last Tuesday but I don't believe that I did"

assertively would be "absurd" (1942, 543). He also makes the same point for

"I believe that he has gone out, but he has not" (1944, 204).

Moore points out that no absurdity arises if I make such assertions in the third person or past tense as, "Williams 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 is careful to distinguish absurdity from paradox. What is *absurd* is for me to assert such sentences. What is *paradoxical* is that this absurdity persists in the absence of semantic contradiction in my words themselves (Baldwin 1993, 209) for what I say about myself might be true. So a natural way of resolving the paradox is to explain the source of the absurdity, but not in wholly semantic terms. Doing so would locate a contradiction-like phenomenon while recognising that no contradiction lies in the meaning of what I have asserted. That no contradiction lies in my words is shown by the fact that if I deny them by saying, "If I went to the pictures last Tuesday then I believe I did" or "If he has not gone out then I believe he has not gone out" then I do not report a necessary truth about myself.[1]

3. MOORE'S ACCOUNT OF THE ABSURDITIES

Moore did not think he had a complete explanation of the absurdity (Baldwin 1993, 211). Nonetheless he held that in making a first-person present-tense indicative assertion I "imply", in an everyday or "non-mysterious" sense (1944, 542), that I believe it. Thus Moore's first principle is that

If I assert that p then I imply that I believe that p.

So when I assert that (p & I don't believe that p) I assert that p. So I imply that I believe that p, which flatly contradicts the second conjunct of my assertion. So what I assert flatly contradicts what I imply by asserting it (Baldwin, 1993, 210). We should note that Moore also assumes that assertion distributes over conjunction:

If I assert that (p & q) then I assert that p and I assert that q.

This seems unobjectionable however. Surely in telling you that today is hot and humid, I both tell you that today is hot and tell you that today is humid.[2]

Moore's first example, "I went to the pictures last Tuesday but I don't believe that I did" has the *omissive* form *p & I don't believe that p*, so-called because it self-reports a *specific lack of true belief*. By contrast, his second example, "I believe that he has gone out, but he has not" has the *commissive*[3] form *p & I believe that not-p*, so-called because it self-reports my *specific mistake in belief*. This semantic difference is inherited from the genuine difference between atheists and agnostics.[4] This difference is partly obscured by the fact that if

you ask me "Is it raining?" and I truthfully reply "I don't believe so", you are usually justified in taking me to believe that it's not raining, unless I then qualify my self-report with "but then I've no beliefs about it either way".

Moore himself probably did not see this difference. For he deals with the commissive example by using a second principle that

If I assert that p then I imply that I don't believe that not-p.

Since assertion distributes over conjunction, if I assert that (p & I believe that not-p) then I assert that p. So I imply that I don't believe that not-p, which flatly contradicts the second conjunct of my assertion. So again, what I assert flatly contradicts what I imply by asserting it. But this proposal fails to explain the omissive assertion. For on the second principle, if I assert that (p & I don't believe that p) then I imply-and-assert that I neither believe that not-p nor believe that p, which is neither a flat self-contradiction nor a contradiction in belief, but rather a possible state of sensible agnosticism.

To repair this problem Moore could either apply the first principle to the commissive case as well or apply the first principle to the omissive case and the second to the commissive case. On the first option, I assert that p and so I imply that I believe that p. But this does not flatly contradict my assertion that I believe that not-p. Instead I have implied-and-asserted that I have a pair of contradictory beliefs about whether or not p. So the two absurdities are conceptually distinct. On the second option, I have implied-and-asserted a flat 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 absurdity comes out as conceptually identical. This means choosing between economy of *explanandum* and economy of *explanans*. The first option is best because as we just saw, the omissive self-report of specific ignorance is semantically distinct from the commissive self-report of specific mistake. So one might expect a semantic difference in the contradiction-like phenomena that constitutes the resulting absurdity.

But this account still faces the problem of elucidating the required "non-mysterious" sense of "imply". Moore claims (1942, 542–543) that his first principle,

arises from the fact, which we all learn by experience, that in the immense majority of cases a man who makes such an assertion does believe or know what he asserts: lying, although common enough, is vastly exceptional.

This statistical claim is plausibly true. But as Baldwin points out, (1990, 228) this ''suggests that the absurdity ... is comparable to that of a report of a flying pig, and also that in the mouth of a known habitual liar paradoxical sentences should not sound at all absurd''.

We may appreciate the first difficulty by noting that in the immense majority of cases in which words pass through lips, the source of those words is an inhabitant of the planet Earth. So in this sense of ''imply'', the passing of words through lips, for example, ''The planet Earth is worth saving'' implies that their producer is an Earthling. But although it would be surprising to hear someone add, ''although I'm not an Earthling'', such an utterance is not absurd in the same way as Moore's examples, because it betrays no failure of rationality. By contrast, my original omissive or commissive speech act of assertion seems to constitute grounds for criticism of my rationality, as opposed to the mere truth of what I have asserted.

The second difficulty lies in the fact that if you learn that I'm lying to you when I make omissive or commissive Moorean assertions, this knowledge does nothing to expunge the absurdity. Nor will any other context of communication expunge it (as Rosenthal notes in 1995, 203). For example, your knowledge that I'm reminding you, misinforming you, confessing to you or announcing to you, does nothing to expunge it either. So insincere Moorean assertions, notably Moorean lies, will have to be explained as well. This second difficulty is compounded by Moore's suggestion (1944, 210–211) that

a person's saying certain words assertively *tends* to make his hearer believe that he does believe the proposition expressed ... and I think this may be all that's meant by saying his saying so-and-so implies that he believes that so-and-so.

Given this, my assertion to you that the pubs are open will tend to make you believe that they are. But if you persist in disagreeing and I say ''You won't tend to believe what I am going to say (I know) but I tell you the pubs damn well *are* open!'' then I have not contradicted myself. Indeed all of what I've said might be true. But if it *is* true and I add, ''but in fact I don't believe they are'', or ''but in fact I believe they aren't'', then Moorean absurdity appears in a way that cannot be explained by Moore's own account.

I now examine how Wittgenstein developed his views on the topic in response to Moore. This will help in formulating further constraints on any satisfactory account of Moorean absurdity.

4. WITTGENSTEIN'S RESPONSE TO MOOREAN ABSURDITY

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, 56).

In his letter to Moore the day after Moore's paper to the Moral Sciences Club Wittgenstein notes the importance of Moore's discovery of an absurdity "which is in fact similar to a contradiction, though it isn't one" and adds that Moore has "said something about the logic of assertion" (1974, 177). So Wittgenstein agrees with Moore that his examples are not semantic self-contradictions but sees that Moorean assertion nonetheless involves a contradiction in some other way. Wittgenstein's point is that a satisfactory explanation of where the contradiction is located will involve an analysis of assertion, in other words its "logic". Wittgenstein also points out (1974, 177) that

It makes sense to say "Let's suppose: p is the case and I don't believe that p is the case" whereas it makes *no* sense to assert "|-p is the case and I don't believe that p is the case".

Although Wittgenstein probably did not see the difference between the omissive and commissive forms any more clearly than Moore, his insight is that no absurdity arises if instead of asserting one of Moore's propositions, I verbally conjecture that it is true. This gives verbal supposition a role in identifying the absurdity.

In the *Investigations* Wittgenstein coins the singular term "Moore's paradox" which he formulates (1953, 190) in terms of supposition rather than in Moore's terms of an absurd assertion of a possible truth:

"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.

Since Wittgenstein identifies use with speaker-meaning, his claim is two-fold: that my assertion or self-report that I believe that p is, or involves, my assertion that p, but my verbal supposition that I believe that p (for the sake of argument) bears no relation to my verbal supposition that p (for the sake of argument).[5]

Let us set aside the first claim for the next two paragraphs. It is now a small step to consider Wittgenstein's remark in the context of *non-verbal* supposition, as a mental act of supposing something true as a means of deduction. We would all agree that, in this sense,

I might suppose that Britney Spears is now President of the USA without believing that she is. Moreover, no failure of rationality arises if I suppose that Moore's omissive or commissive examples are true of me, as opposed to believing this. In other words, no irrationality need infect me if I suppose specific instances of my ignorance or mistaken belief to exist in order to deduce their consequences.

Thus Wittgenstein points out that no absurdity arises when Moorean propositions are verbally or mentally supposed either as the antecedent or the consequent of conditionals, as in, "If I never hold any true beliefs then I always fail to recognise any fact" (Baldwin 1993, 207). But clearly I would be no less absurd if I believe one of Moore's propositions to be true without asserting it. By contrast, I can quite sensibly suppose that I hold such beliefs. Indeed unlike belief, I can sensibly suppose anything at all, even that I am supposing nothing now. For unlike rational beliefs, useful suppositions need not track the truth.

Consistently with this last point, Shoemaker (1995, fn 1, 227), observes that "What can be coherently believed constrains what can be coherently asserted but not conversely".[6] But since "coherently" is ambiguous between "consistently", "appropriately" and "rationally" then the principle best stick with Moore's own term "absurdly", by which he seems to mean, "irrationally, either in theory or practice". This yields:

> If I cannot non-absurdly believe that p then I cannot non-absurdly assert that p, but not conversely.

The failure of the converse is supported by the fact that my assertion, "I'm asserting nothing now", is unlike Moore's example. For although this would be an absurd thing to assert, I could quietly believe in my continuing obedience to a Trappist vow of silence without the least absurdity. By contrast, it would still be absurd of me to silently believe either of Moore's examples.[7] Given Shoemaker's constraint it seems sensible to first give an account of the account of the absurdity of Moorean belief and then account for the absurdity of Moorean assertion. For if the explanation of the absurdity of Moorean assertion can be delivered, at minimal explanatory extra cost, in terms of the absurdity of Moorean belief, then one seems to get both explanations with best economy.

In the first volume of his *Remarks on the Foundations of Psychology* (1980a, §490), Wittgenstein elaborates on his formulation of the paradox:

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.

Here Wittgenstein more clearly claims that

If I assert that I believe that p then I assert that p.

Wittgenstein holds that both my self-report of belief, "I believe that p" and my plain assertion, "p" have roughly similar uses and so, for Wittgenstein, roughly similar meanings. Thus Wittgenstein adds, 'One might also put it like this: "I believe p" means roughly the same as "p"' (1980a, §472). His point is that both tell a hearer something about my own attitude to the outside world as well as something about the world itself (as I take it to be). Moreover, to decide whether I believe that p all I normally have to do is to look to the outside world and decide whether p (1980a, §488, §501).

On this view of it, the absurdity of Moorean assertion lies in the fact that my assertion that I believe that p at least involves my assertion that p. So this strategy of getting an absurdity out of my assertion or self-report that I believe that p is quite different from Moore's, which was to get the absurdity out of my assertion that p. Wittgenstein's strategy succeeds in explaining the absurdity of the commissive Moorean assertion, for in asserting that (p & I believe that not-p) I assert that I believe that not-p and so assert that not-p, which contradicts my assertion that p. So although *what* I have asserted is not a self-contradiction, nonetheless my *assertion* of it involves contradictory assertions.

Contemporary followers of Wittgenstein, notably Heal (1994) have defended this account, but as I have argued elsewhere (Williams 1998, §§3–6), there are serious difficulties in it. Firstly the principle that by asserting, "I believe that not-p", I assert that not-p, is challenged by my act of saying, "I *think* the pub's not closed, but I wouldn't like to say so, so don't quote me". In support of the principle, Heal points out that by saying sincerely "I believe that not-p", I express my belief that not-p. Given Heal's assumption that in expressing a belief, I assert what I express, it follows that by saying sincerely "I believe that not-p", I assert that not-p. But Heal's assumption is challenged by cases in which beliefs are expressed by conversational implicature. By answering your question, "Where do her parents live?" with "Somewhere in Thailand", I express my belief that I cannot be more informative than I have been without going beyond what I am in a position

to assert. But I do not seem to have asserted this. Moreover it is unclear how Heal's account could deal with *insincere* Moorean assertions.

But the decisive objection is that the account cannot explain the absurdity of the omissive Moorean assertion. For in asserting that (p & I don't believe that p) I assert a *lack* of belief, to which the just-disputed principle cannot apply. We might attempt to repair this problem by supplementing the account with a second principle that if I assert that I don't believe that p then I deny that p. But then on that principle, an agnostic who truthfully reports, "I neither believe that God exists nor believe that he doesn't" would be making contradictory assertions about the existence of God. Plainly he isn't. Likewise, my admission of ignorance of your innocence is not an accusation of your guilt.

However elsewhere (1980a, §472) Wittgenstein suggests a more promising relation of assertion to belief:

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!"

This is plausibly read as the claim that

If I assert that p then I ostensibly express my belief that p.

Since assertion distributes over conjunction, in asserting that (p & I don't believe that p), I assert that p and so ostensibly express my belief that p. But I also assert that I don't believe that p. So I assert-and-ostensibly-express a belief and the lack of it. In other words, I assert-and-ostensibly-express a self-contradiction. By contrast, in asserting that (p & I believe that not-p), I assert-and-ostensibly-express contradictory beliefs about whether p. However the term "express" will need elucidation, a task I will postpone until §8.

Wittgenstein also observes that "under unusual circumstances", the sentence, "It's raining but I don't believe it' could be given a clear sense" (1980b, §290). Indeed he gives two consecutive examples of non-absurd uses of omissive sentences. The first is when delighted by the imminent arrival of a friend, I exclaim in amazement, "He's coming but I still can't believe it" (1980a, §485). The second is of a railway announcer who is convinced that the train won't arrive. Under orders, he announces its arrival and adds, "Personally I don't believe it" (1980a, §§ 486–487). 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 appearance of the absurdity in speech is not guaranteed by a mere *utterance* of a sentence of Moore's

omissive or commissive forms, as opposed to its *assertion*. This is an important point to bear in mind and is one that is entirely consistent with the spirit of Moore's own writings.

Wittgenstein also supplements Moore's point that first-person present-tense conjugations play a crucial role in Moorean assertions. For Wittgenstein claims (1953, 190) that if there were a verb meaning, "to believe falsely" then it would not have any significant first-person present indicative. His point is that first-person present-tense *assertions* such as, "I now mistakenly believe that it's raining" are not "significant", in the sense that they do not have a semantic content that can be communicated or successfully voiced.

Wittgenstein adds (1953, 190) that it is 'a most remarkable thing, that the verbs "believe", "wish", "will" display all the inflexions possessed by "cut", "chew", "run"', thus suggesting analogous absurdity may be found in terms of desire, rather than belief.

5. FIVE CONSTRAINTS ON ANY SATISFACTORY ACCOUNT OF MOOREAN ABSURDITY

We have seen that any satisfactory account of Moorean absurdity must

(1) identify a contradiction, or something contradiction-like, but not with the Moorean proposition itself
(2) make this identification for both Moorean assertion and Moorean belief (in a way that recognises that if I cannot non-absurdly believe that p then I cannot non-absurdly assert that p, but not conversely)
(3) be equally plausible for omissive and commissive forms of the paradox

and

(4) explain the role of circumstances which result in the disappearance of the absurdity from speech.

As we just saw, we are indebted to Moore himself for specifying the first condition, to Wittgenstein for suggesting a way to the second, to Moore for his unwitting choice of examples as a way of recognising the third (now supplemented by Shoemaker) and to Wittgenstein for clearly pointing out the fourth. The third constraint, of which most early commentators (including Moore himself) run afoul, is now more generally recognised. Nonetheless it is still common to find

accounts of the absurdity in which authors have the omissive cases in mind that fail to account for commissive cases or *visa versa*.[8]

However there is a fifth constraint to be added. For there is a class of assertions that intuitively share the paradigmatic absurdity of Moore's examples. These include the non-conjunctive, "I have no beliefs now", "Although you think all my opinions mistaken, you are always right" as well as the non-first person "God knows that we are not theists" and the commissive "God knows that I am an atheist" (see Sorensen 1988, Chapter 1). On the other hand there is a class of absurd assertions that are clearly not Moorean, such as "It's raining and not raining", "I am asserting nothing now" and "It's raining but I believe that it is raining without the least justification" (compare Adler 1999 267–268). In the middle is a third class of borderline candidates for the essential absurdity such as, "All my present beliefs are mistaken". So a satisfactory account of Moorean absurdity should also

(5) provide a way of identifying further examples of Moorean absurdity.

6. DEFINING MOOREAN BELIEFS IN THE LIGHT OF EXAMPLES.

An obvious strategy for satisfying this last constraint is to compare and contrast putatively Moorean beliefs with beliefs in Moore's own two examples. Since the first constraint prohibits any Moorean belief in a self-contradiction or necessary falsehood, it is easy to see that although my belief that it is both raining and not raining would be absurd, it would not be absurd in the same way as a belief in Moore's examples. It would be irrational of me to hold such a belief because I should be able to see, with a minimum of reflection upon syntax or semantics, that what I believe cannot be true. By contrast, since Moore's examples report my specific ignorance or mistaken belief, they report no irrationality on my part, since my non-omniscience or fallibility is not itself irrational. But other cases are not so easily discernible as non-Moorean. Take my belief that

All my present beliefs are mistaken.

This can be read in two ways. If we read it as

All my present beliefs (excluding this) are mistaken

then this might be true of me, but then I am not irrational if I believe or assert it. For it might report the fact that I have just learned that I

am the victim of systematic delusion. Such knowledge might well improve my rationality. So on this reading it is not Moorean. On the other hand if we read it as

All my present beliefs (including this) are mistaken

then it is not a possible truth. For if it is true then my belief of it is mistaken, so it is false. So on no reading is it Moorean.

Since the mere truth of Moore's examples constitutes no irrationality in me, his examples also differ from my belief that I hold a self-contradictory belief. For the same reason, my belief that

It's raining but I believe that it is raining without the least justification

is not a Moorean belief. By contrast, my belief that

I have no beliefs now

intuitively shares the paradigmatic absurdity, despite the fact that it is not a belief in a conjunction. Whereas Moore's examples report *specific* instances of my ignorance or mistaken belief, the content of this belief reports my present state of *universal* ignorance. The existence of such a state does not impugn my rationality. But in so reporting it, it also reports my specific ignorance of the truth of that very content, if the moment of reporting is the moment at which I assert or believe it. This explains why quantifying more generally over all moments, as in

I *never* hold any true beliefs

would likewise be absurd of me to believe or assert.

So what is essential to the absurdity of someone believing or asserting a Moorean proposition is that such an assertion *transparently self-reports that person's specific present instance of ignorance or mistaken belief*. This explains why

It is raining but Williams does not believe it is

is non-Moorean, since it does not transparently *self*-report a specific instance of my ignorance. For it is not absurd of me to believe it if I know or even mistakenly believe that in fact I am not Williams. Nor will you find it an absurd thing for me to assert to you if you know that I know or mistakenly believe that I'm not Williams. Nor does it seem absurd in the same way as Moore's examples for me to believe that

It's raining but my father's only son does not believe it

even if I am my father's only son. For this is not an irrational thing for me to believe if I know or mistakenly believe that I am my father's daughter. A further failing of self-reporting occurs when I am so drunk that I fail to realise that the person I am looking at in the mirror is me because I mistakenly believe I am looking through a window. Were I to tell you that the person in the glass mistakenly believes that it is raining then I would become credible to you in virtue of your knowledge that I foolishly fail to know myself under my reflected guise.

Likewise, as Moore pointed out, no absurdity arises for past tense versions of his examples such as

Yesterday I failed to correctly believe the fact that it was raining.

Nor it is found in future tense versions such as

Tomorrow I will mistakenly believe that Big Brother is not a fiction

which might sensibly predict the result of my appointment to be brainwashed at the Ministry of Love. A disguised self-report of a specific present instance of ignorance or mistaken belief is also found in

God knows that we are not theists

despite not being conjugated in the present tense, because the personal pronoun, ''we'' includes a self-report. For in asserting or believing either, I still believe or assert something about myself as well.

Our examination of the examples so far suggests the following incomplete definition:

MP′) Any belief is Moorean just in case the content of that belief is a possible truth that self-reports no irrationality but the belief in it is irrational (in the same way as Moore's examples)

Of course the definition is incomplete since we still must now account for the specific way in which it is irrational to believe Moore's examples.

7. THE ABSURDITY OF MOOREAN BELIEF

Neither Moore nor Wittgenstein explicitly consider the absurdity as it arises in belief as opposed to assertion. Nonetheless an account of it can be given that is broadly consistent with both Moore and Wittgenstein.

All commentators who explain the absurdity of Moorean belief (for example Heal 1994, 21–2) appeal to the principle that belief distributes over conjunction:

If I believe that (p & q) then I believe that p and I believe that q.
Moreover it is hard to see how the absurdity of Moorean belief could be explained without it. Although an appeal to doxastic principles in explaining the absurdity of Moorean belief should be generally regarded with suspicion, this principle is an exception. For unlike BB-type principles for example, it seems to follow from the very concept of belief. If I fail to believe that today is hot or fail to believe that today is humid, surely I cannot hold the belief that today is hot and humid. Since the principle is a definitional truth, appealing to it prejudges no question of rationality.

Now consider Moore's omissive example. If I believe that (p & I don't believe that p), then since belief distributes over conjunction, I believe that p. But then what I believe is false, since its second conjunct is false. Although my belief is not a belief in a necessary falsehood it is self-falsifying. Although what I believe might be might be true of me and although I might believe it, it cannot be true of me *if* I believe it. In other words, it is logically impossible for me to *truly believe* it. By contrast I *can* truly believe Moore's commissive example. For if I believe that (p & I believe that not-p) then since belief distributes over conjunction, again I believe that p, which is consistent with the second conjunct of what I believe, but only if I hold contradictory beliefs about whether p.

Moreover, discerning this fact, as we just saw, requires a minimum of reflection.[9] So it is not difficult to see that I am severely irrational in the way I theorise and thus why my belief is absurd.

In believing Moore's omissive proposition I have a self-falsifying belief. In believing Moore's comissive proposition, I escape this irrationality only by the irrationality of holding contradictory beliefs. Thus both beliefs are equally absurd because these two failures of theoretical rationality are equally severe. For both types of belief are equally useless as guides to the truth. Any evidence that (absurdly) justifies me in believing the omissive proposition would justify me in believing what is then false. Likewise any evidence for my belief that p is *ipso facto* evidence against my belief that not-p and conversely. Nonetheless the two irrationalities are distinct, as we should expect from the clear difference between an instance of ignorance and an instance of mistaken belief.

The absurdity of other Moorean beliefs can be explained in the same way. With one exception, all these beliefs are self-falsifying. For example, if I now believe that I have no beliefs now, then my belief is

true only if it is false. Since my belief is non-conjunctive, no appeal is needed to the principle that belief distributes over conjunction. Likewise, suppose that I believe that although you think all my opinions mistaken, you are always right. If my belief is true then you would be right to now think that it is mistaken, so it is false. Finally, suppose that I believe that God knows that I am not a theist. To explain the absurdity of my belief we must acknowledge the *facticity of knowledge*:

If I know that p then p

If my belief is true then since God's knowledge is factive, I do not believe that God exists. But in believing that God knows that I am not a theist, I believe that God exists. So my belief cannot be true.

To see the comissive exception, suppose that I believe that God knows that I am an *atheist*. If my belief is true then since God's knowledge is factive, I believe that God does not exist. But in believing that God knows that I am an atheist, I believe that God exists. So my belief escapes self-falsification only if I hold contradictory beliefs about whether God exists. Since I am in position to work this out with a little reflection (as we just did) I would be theoretically irrational in continuing to hold such beliefs.

Now we know the exact way in which it is irrational to believe Moore's examples, we may say that

MP) Any belief is Moorean just in case the content of that belief is a possible truth that self-reports no irrationality but the belief in it is self-falsifying on pain of contradictory beliefs.

One virtue of this definition is that it allows that there is nothing absurd in my belief that

At least one of my present beliefs is mistaken

because this content fails to self-report a *specific* instance of mistaken belief. Asserting or believing it would be a perfectly reasonable disclaimer of my infallibility that is has most probably been long true of me (See De Almeida 2001, §4). Thus no deep contradiction-like flaw in me is revealed.

Of course, my belief in my own disclaimer guarantees that I have at least one false belief. For by *reductio ad absurdum*, if my belief that I have at least one mistaken belief is false then none of my beliefs are mistaken, including my belief in this disclaimer. On the one hand this means I have *inconsistent beliefs*, namely a set of beliefs that cannot all be true. But on the other hand, it also means that my belief in my

own mistakenness is infallible. Since I was most likely mistaken in some of my many beliefs anyway, such a tight grasp of the truth that I am indeed mistaken represents a useful motive for finding out the truth about *which* specific mistaken beliefs I hold by looking again at the quality of evidence.

The lesson to be drawn from this is that Moorean absurdity is not to be analysed in terms of inconsistent beliefs but rather in terms of contradictory beliefs. For self-contradictory or contradictory beliefs are inconsistent but not conversely. Inconsistency in my beliefs does not necessarily undermine my justification in the way my self-contradictory or contradictory beliefs do. Any evidence for my belief that p is *ipso facto* evidence against my belief that not-p and conversely. Thus any evidence for the truth of my self-contradictory belief that (p & not-p) is evidence for its falsehood. By contrast, evidence for my belief in my occasional mistakenness need not count against any of my other beliefs, nor *visa versa*. I would now have inconsistent beliefs, but not contradictory ones. My correct belief in my occasional mistakenness does not entail beliefs that contradict each other, since we may consistently suppose that I don't believe that all of my beliefs are true. So unlike a Moorean belief, one that is self-falsifying on pain of contradictory beliefs, my belief that some of my beliefs are mistaken is not Moorean, for by contrast, such commitment to the necessity of at least one false belief is benign.[10]

8. THE ABSURDITY OF MOOREAN ASSERTION

Suppose that we elucidate Moore's "non-mysterious" sense of "imply" as "ostensibly express". Then Moore's first principle that

If I assert that p then I imply a belief that p

becomes Wittgenstein's more promising principle that

If I assert that p to you then I ostensibly express belief that p to you.

This move is consistent with the following passage from Moore (1912, 125):

The truth is that there is an important distinction, which is not always observed, between what a man *means* by a given assertion and what he *expresses* by it. Whenever we make any assertion whatever (unless we do not mean what we say), we are always expressing one or of two things–namely, either that we *think* the thing in question to be so or that we *know* it to be so.

Let us elucidate ''express'' as both factive and intentional. It is factive in the sense that I express N only if I have N, where N is a noun phrase such as ''belief'', ''interest'' or ''indifference''. This usage is of ''express'' is true to its Latin root, ''press out'', for a woman cannot express milk from her breast unless she has it. Moreover it conforms to Moore's usage above. So if I *express* a belief that p to you that p then I have the belief that p. By contrast I *ostensibly express* N to you just in case I represent myself to you as expressing my N to you, as when insincerely express interest in seeing your holiday snapshots again for the umpteenth time by telling you that I'd love to see them. Let us also use ''express'' as containing a relevant intention, according to which muttering ''Bush is mad'' in my sleep does not express my belief that Bush is mad, but merely *manifests* that belief. I manifest N just in case I behave in a way that *affords* you reason to think I have N. By contrast, I express N just in case I behave in a way that *offers* you reason to think that I have N, in other words, intentionally affords you that reason. Where N is a belief this gives us a definition of expression of belief:

> I express my belief that p to you just in case I believe that p and I behave in a way that intentionally offers you reason to think that I believe that p

as well as a definition of ostensible expression of belief:

> I ostensibly express my belief that p to you just in case I behave in a way that intentionally offers you reason to think that I believe that p

As we should expect, all expressions of beliefs are ostensible expressions of belief but not conversely. We may now give a definition of assertion in terms of expression of belief:

> I assert that p to you just in case I ostensibly express my belief that p to you with the intention of changing your mind in a relevant way.[11]

The reference to ostensible expression accommodates lies, which are surely genuine assertions. In lying to you that the pubs are still open I offer you a reason to think that they are still open. The change of mind I intend to bring about is to make you mistakenly believe that the pubs are still open. The change is relevant in the sense that the proposition I assert forms the core of the description of that change. Likewise in letting you know that it is raining I offer you reason to think that it is raining by expressing genuine sincerity. The change of mind I aim for in this case is to impart to you my knowledge that it is raining.

This account of assertion also has the advantage of accommo-
dating non-verbal assertions. Carrying an umbrella only counts as a
manifestation of my belief that it will rain, since it only affords you
reason to think that hold that belief. By contrast, shaking it defiantly
in your face when you scoff at my forecast of rain counts as my
assertion that it will rain, since I have deliberately offered you a
reason to think that it will rain (namely that I think so myself) with
the intention of changing your opinion about the weather.

This means that there can be non-verbal Moorean assertions as
well, as when you ask me if the pubs are still open and I nod my head
in emphatic agreement while saying, "I don't believe so". Perhaps
Moore has such a case in mind in explicitly distinguishing between
the uttering of words assertively and making an assertion (Baldwin
1993, 207).

In what sense do I offer you reason to think that I believe that p
in asserting to you that p? A liar attempts to represent himself as a
sincere truth-teller. But if lying were known to be the universal
norm then this attempt would always fail with the result that the
practice of lying could never succeed. 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 (compare Williamson 1996). Thus if
you are to make sense of my speech acts then the rational thing for
you to do is to assume that I am sincere unless observation sug-
gests otherwise. Thus my speech act of assertion that p gives you
prima facie reason to think me sincere. This is broadly consistent
with Moore's failed attempt to elucidate "imply". What immedi-
ately follows from the account is the principle that *my assertion
ostensibly expresses my belief in it*:

> If I assert that p to you then I ostensibly express my belief that p to
> you.[12]

Having granted the sincerity of my assertion, you now have some
defeasible reason to grant its truth. For granting that I'm sincere in
what I tell you grants me the minimal authority I need for you to
accept my testimony. Admittedly, there are cases in which I make the
honest mistake of sincerely telling a falsehood. There are also cases in
which I insincerely tell the truth by presenting my lucky guess as an
assertion or by getting my facts backwards in an attempt to lie. But
given that you are not in a position to suspect that this is one of these
rare cases, my assertion that p also gives you *prima facie* reason to
believe my words by giving you *prima facie* reason to believe me

sincere. This account also vindicates Moore's second principle when ''imply'' is read as ''ostensibly express'', namely that *an assertion ostensibly expresses lack of belief in its falsehood*:

> If I assert that p to you then I ostensibly express my lack of belief that not-p to you.

For if you are to make sense of my speech acts then you must charitably assume that I do not hold contradictory beliefs about whether p. So once you have granted the *sincerity* of my assertion that p you must also grant that don't believe in the falsehood of my own words, in other words that I'm innocent of a stronger form of insincerity, namely *lying*.

Some who write about expression (see Green, Chapter 2) might object that it is impossible to express a lack of anything, perhaps because of the facticity of expression. If I can only express what I really have, how can I express something that isn't there? Surely a woman couldn't express a lack of milk from her breast. But we can see that the facticity of expression is compatible with the possibility of expressing a lack of N, once we notice that a lack of N, such as a lack of confidence, is something real that I can have within me. If you ask me if I'm interested in going to a party and I shrug my shoulders, I may express indifference to your proposal. My indifference is something real inside me, but an equivalent way of describing it is as my lack of interest both in going and in not going to the party.

It now follows that that there is a more direct way for me to express my belief that p to you, namely by asserting to you that I believe that p. For making this assertion gives you a *prima facie* reason to believe me sincere and so gives you a *prima facie* reason to believe my words. Thus a third principle drops out of the account, that *my self-report of belief expresses that belief*:

> If I assert that I believe that p to you then I ostensibly express my belief that p to you.

In accordance with the first principle, in making such an assertion I also ostensibly express my higher order belief that I believe that p as well.[13]

A fourth principle that my account yields is that *self-report of lack of belief expresses my lack of belief*:

> If I assert that I don't believe that p to you then I ostensibly express my lack of belief that p to you.

For making this assertion gives you *prima facie* reason to believe my words.

We can now explain the absurdity of Moorean assertion. When I make the omissive assertion to you that (p & I don't believe that p) then I assert that p (since assertion distributes over conjunction) and so by the first principle that my assertion ostensibly expresses my belief in it, I ostensibly express a belief that p. But I also assert that I lack that belief. So by the fourth principle that my self-report of lack of belief ostensibly expresses my lack of belief, I ostensibly express that lack of belief that p. So I ostensibly express a belief and the lack of it. In other words, I ostensibly express a self-contradiction. You have no reason to accept my assertion that p since I have told you that I am insincere. Moreover, if you accept what I express then you must think that I do and don't believe that p.

When I make the commissive assertion to you that (p & I believe that not-p) then I assert that p (since assertion distributes over conjunction) and so by the first principle, I ostensibly express a belief that p. But I also assert that I believe that not-p. So by the third principle that my self-report of belief expresses that belief, I ostensibly express my belief that not-p. Thus I ostensibly express contradictory beliefs. You have no reason to accept my assertion that p since I have told you that I am lying. Moreover, if you accept what I express then you must think that I hold contradictory beliefs about whether p.

In either case I am in a position to see that you will think that I'm making a feeble joke rather than adopting contradictory beliefs or ascribing contradictory beliefs to me. So I should realise that you will not accept my assertion. So if I persist in my assertion I am practically irrational in the sense that I am trying to achieve something I can see won't succeed.

This account satisfies Shoemaker's constraint because in either case, what I express by making the assertion is identical to what is the case if I truly believe my own assertion.

Moreover, the account can be easily extended to the other Moorean assertions, namely those assertions the belief of which would be Moorean. For example, if I now assert to you that I have no beliefs now, then by the first principle, I ostensibly express my belief that I now have no beliefs. But by the fourth principle that my self-report of lack of belief expresses my lack of belief, I ostensibly express that total lack of belief. So I ostensibly express a belief and the total lack of belief. So what I express is self-contradictory.

Moreover it also accounts for the absurdity in non-assetoric contexts such as, "What time is it? But I don't want to know what time it is".[14] In asking a question under the right circumstances I offer you the *prima facie* reason to think that I want to know the answer. Such circumstances exclude those in we both know that I am checking the accuracy of your watch. So I express a desire to know the time, the existence of which is contradicted by my second remark. Likewise in issuing a command I express the desire that it be executed by offering you the *prima facie* reason to think that I want it executed. Such circumstances exclude those in we both know that I am reluctantly passing on an order from above. Thus in saying, "Shut the door! But I don't want you to shut it", I express a desire that you shut the door, the existence of which is contradicted by my second remark.

9. THE DISAPPEARANCE OF THE ABSURDITY FROM SPEECH

My account of assertion enables us to explain examples such as Wittgenstein's in which no absurdity appears in my uttering a Moorean sentence to you. In each case the absurdity is expunged by your background knowledge that I'm not attempting an assertion at all. To see this, it is best to first distinguish between successfully making a *bona fide* assertion and making a successful assertion. I fail to make a *bona fide* assertion if I utter, "The pubs are still open" but am too drunk to articulate these words intelligibly. Nor do I succeed in making a *bona fide* assertion if I utter these words as an actor in a play, since all I attempt is to depict the assertion of a fictional guise. Having successfully made a *bona fide* assertion, that assertion may succeed or fail depending upon its *point*, in other words what change of mind I intend to bring about in you. In attempting to inform or let you know that p, I intend to get you to *know that p*. When I lie to you that p, I intend to get you to *mistakenly believe that p*.

One way in which I do not make a *bona fide* assertion is when you know that I am not speaking *propria voce*. My articulate utterance, "It's raining but I don't believe it" under the footlights may depict the absurd assertion of my fictional guise. But since we both know that this is not *my* assertion, I offer you no reason to think that I believe what I say. Wittgenstein's last two examples fall into the same category, for our common knowledge that I'm parroting the words of the announcement or communiqué means that I am not even

attempting to make you think I believe them, since we both recognise that quoting isn't asserting either. Another such case arises when I sarcastically repeat your claim that the pubs are closed and add, "I *don't* think!" No absurdity arises because we both know that I am only quoting your assertion in order to deny it.

The absurdity may sometimes disappear even when I speak *propria voce*. Obviously no absurdity arises if I utter a Moorean sentence to you as a feeble joke or in order to test a microphone since it is clear to you in either case that I am not attempting an assertion. Now consider Wittgenstein's first example, in which I exclaim to you, "He's coming but I still can't believe it". In order to avoid uncharitably judging me irrational, you should not take the second part of my exclamation as the literal truth, but rather as an expression of my amazement occasioned by my recognition of a fact that merits yet resists belief. Since we both know that I am not offering you a reason to think I lack the belief that he's coming, I have only asserted the first half of my exclamation. But half an assertion isn't *an* assertion. Likewise, once we know that Luis Buñuel's remark, "I'm still an atheist, thank God" was made ironically as he was evicted from Spain for attacking Christianity, then his parenthetical addition gives us no reason to think he believes in God. We will take it as a conventional expression of relief that his assertion is true rather than an expression of gratitude to God. A final case arises when you ask me whether the capital of Thailand is Bangkok or Saigon. If I am a contestant in your quiz in which success is understood to be the mere utterance of the correct answer rather than the manifestation of knowledge, no absurdity arises if I answer, "The capital of Thailand is Bangkok" and then truthfully add, "but actually I have no beliefs about this either way". My guess is not an assertion because it offers you no reason to think I believe it.

10. THE ILLUSION OF THE APPEARANCE OF THE ABSURDITY IN SPEECH

There are circumstances in which the appearance of Moorean absurdity in speech is itself an illusion. This is the lesson to be learned from Crimmins' example (1992, as discussed by Hájek and Stoljar 2001 and Rosenthal 2002).

Suppose the following. Superman informs me that I'm acquainted with him when he is disguised as some other person, whom I think

idiotic. However, he does not tell me who this other person is. Moreover, I accept his words on the strength of his reliability and intelligence. I now seem compelled to acknowledge my acceptance of his news with the reply,

> I mistakenly believe that you are an idiot.

A meta-paradox now surfaces. Since the logical form of my remark is equivalent to that of Moore's commissive example, it should be absurd. But it does not appear to be so. Moreover, in apparent contradiction of Wittgenstein, I seem to have used the first-person present indicative to make a non-self-defeating assertion.

But in fact the appearance of absurdity is an illusion that arises from an easily made confusion between two readings of my remark, only one of which is absurd. Since I am now attempting to address Superman in order to report my mistaken belief about him, it is natural to take my unguarded reply as my assertion that

> I *now* mistakenly believe that *you, Superman,* are *now* an idiot.

Taken this way, the absurdity is more apparent. Moreover the absurdity is genuine. For since it is semantically equivalent to

> You, Superman, are not now an idiot but I now believe that you are now an idiot

it would be absurd of me to believe it or to assert it to Superman as explained above in §7 and §8. Indeed the absurdity of asserting it has an additional source. Superman would not accept the sincerity of such an assertion since he knows that I have just accepted his testimony *on the strength of his intelligence* and so knows that I now believe that he is *not* now an idiot. Moreover I cannot sensibly attempt to make the assertion in order to *inform* him that my words are true. That would involve attempting to impart to him my knowledge that he is now an idiot. But I do not have this knowledge, since I believe that he is not an idiot. Nor would my assertion fare any better as a lie, since Superman himself knows that he is not now an idiot.

Nonetheless there must be some way in which I can sensibly acknowledge my acceptance of Superman's news. Finding the appropriate way of doing so is problematic because Superman did not let me know the identity of the person with whom I'm acquainted and whom I think idiotic. Had he done so then I wouldn't have this problem. For example, had he informed me that his *alter ego* is Clark Kent then I would have to stop believing that Clark is an idiot. For

otherwise I would have to start believing that Superman is an idiot, but we both know that's not true. In that case I could simply inform Superman that I have just changed my mind about Clark. But I can't do that in this case since I don't know which idiot he has in mind. This is because I don't pick out that person by the description of Superman's normal guise, namely "the only person with the letter S emblazoned on his leotard". Nonetheless let us suppose for the sake of argument that his *alter ego* is one of a domain of several persons,[15] for example, my colleagues at the *Daily Planet*, whom I can pick out by some description, such as "the only mild mannered reporter who wears spectacles".

This suggests that I could try addressing him under a domain, as in "I now believe that you, one of my colleagues at the *Daily Planet*, are now an idiot". But that won't work either, since I'm now trying to address Superman, not one of those idiots. Nor could I address Superman under the description of his disguise, such as "the only mild mannered reporter who wears spectacles" since I don't know that this description picks out the person I'm addressing. However, we saw in **§6** that I may avoid making a Moorean assertion if I self-report my specific instance of ignorance or mistaken belief as it arises other than *now*. So I can sensibly acknowledge my acceptance of Superman's testimony by now replying,

> I mistakenly believe that you are an idiot whenever I meet you disguised as that colleague at the *Daily Planet*.

No absurdity appears because I am careful not to say that I *now* hold a belief that is mistaken. Put this way, my reply is akin to "Some of my beliefs are false", since either tells you that not all my beliefs are always true. But as we noted in **§7**, this is not a Moorean assertion. I escape the Moorean specificity of my self-report of mistaken belief because I don't know *when* my beliefs are mistaken, since I don't know when I'm acquainted with Superman's *alter ego*.

Another way to put the solution is as follows. Superman's news makes me believe that there is some person that I cannot identify that I believe (whenever I meet him or indeed think of him under the description that I normally use to pick him out) to be an idiot. It also makes me believe that this unidentified person is Superman. But this does not make me believe that Superman is an idiot.

Since my unguarded reply, "I mistakenly believe that you are an idiot" masquerades as the absurd, "I *now* mistakenly believe that *you, Superman,* are *now* an idiot" when it is really elliptical for the sensible,

"I mistakenly believe that you are an idiot *whenever I meet you disguised as that colleague* at the *Daily Planet*", its apparent absurdity is an illusion.[16]

11. THE ABSENCE OF ANALOGOUS ABSURDITY IN TERMS OF DESIRE

We are now in a position to examine Wittgenstein's suggestion that an analogous absurdity may be found in terms of desire, rather than belief. It turns out that there is no such analogue, but seeing why this is so tells us something distinctive about desire. In the omissive case the analogue would be exemplified by

   I'm drinking beer now but I don't want to be drinking it now.

Unlike Moore's examples this is not absurd to assert or believe. No absurdity is found either in the comissive analogue

   I'm drinking beer now but I want to be not drinking it now.

I could sincerely and truly report either of these facts when you force me to drink at the point of a gun. Nonetheless there does seem to be something distinctly odd if I now *desire* to bring about these facts or even wish they would transpire. Under what circumstances would I want to be drinking a beer I don't want or even positively shun? If the oddity were parallel to Moorean absurdity then my omissive desire would be self-frustrating. The parallel explanation would require that desire collect over conjunction:

   If I now desire it be the case that (p & q) then I now desire it be the case that p and I now desire it be the case that q.

So in now desiring it now be the case that (p & I don't now desire that it be the case that p) I would desire it now be the case that p, which would frustrate the fulfillment of my higher-order desire. In other words the fulfillment of my desire to now drink a beer to which I'm indifferent would result in a desire for beer that frustrates my desire to be indifferent to it. In the commissive case, now desiring it be the case that (p & I now desire that it be the case that not-p) would be fulfilled only if I now desire that it be the case that not-p. But since I also desire it now be the case that p, I would have contradictory desires, only one of which can be fulfilled. In other words the fulfillment of my desire to now drink a beer I want to avoid would result in wanting that beer as well as wanting to avoid it.

This can't be correct however. Although it would be kinky of me to now want you to force me to do something I don't want to do, we can readily imagine circumstances in which pursuing the kinky desire would not be irrational or self-frustrating (we may hastily avoid the details). The reason for this is that desire does not always distribute over conjunction. Surely I can want to drink beer with lemonade without wanting to drink beer and without wanting to drink lemonade. Likewise I may reasonably desire a beating I want to avoid, because in so doing, I do not desire a beating, only a beating I want to avoid. Indeed if I were to desire a beating, that would spoil all the fun! If I get what I want then my desire to avoid a beating will be frustrated. But that doesn't matter because the highest order desire is trumps. In other words, the fulfilment of that desire is all that matters.

Since I can sensibly desire analogues of Moore's example, desire is more like supposition than belief. A further similarity lies in the fact that as a good Buddhist, I may sensibly desire to have no desires. But desire is still not as *laisser-faire* as supposition since it is still irrational of me to hold self-contradictory desires. My sincere desire to have a series of monogamous affairs with lots of different women at the same time may be understandable, but is one it would be practically irrational for me to pursue. This shows a contrast between wanting and wishing. If I know that a state of affairs will never come to pass, I may sensibly wish that state of affairs were to come to pass but I cannot sensibly want to bring it about. Thus I may sensibly wish I were 10 years younger although I cannot sensibly want to make myself 10 years younger.

NOTES

[1] Here I take "if" as implication. Although such an inference is generally invalid, most would allow it here. For example, Stalnaker 1975 and 1984 would allow it on pragmatic grounds since here you don't know which disjunct is true. If we symbolise "I believe that p" as "Bp" we have the following proof:

1.	$\sim(p \,\&\, \sim Bp)$	Suppose the falsehood of Moorean assertion
2.	$\sim p \lor \sim\sim Bp$	De Morgan's Law
3.	$\sim p \lor Bp$	$\sim\sim$ elim
4.	$p \rightarrow Bp$	$\rightarrow$ equivalence.

[2] As a reviewer has pointed out, there is more that could be said about the conditions under which assertion distributes over conjunction. For one thing, a conjunctive assertion must surely be an assertion of conjuncts both of which are semantically coherent, unlike, say, an attempt to assert that "2 plus 2 is 4 and

green ideas sleep furiously''. In such a case I would not have succeeded in making a *bona fide* assertion since the conjunction as a whole is unintelligible.

[3] Sorensen coins these useful terms in (1988, 16). This difference in formalism is disguised by Moore's examples. This is one reason to think that Moore himself did not see the difference. If we formalise ''I went to the pictures last Tuesday but I don't believe that I did'' as ''p & $\sim$Bp'' then ''I believe that he has gone out, but he has not'' becomes ''Bp & $\sim$p''. By commutation this yields ''$\sim$p & Bp''. To achieve canonical reference to belief this may be represented as ''p & B$\sim$p''.

[4] If a lack of belief that p entailed a belief that not-p then agnosticism would be impossible:

1.	$\sim$Bp $\rightarrow$ B$\sim$p	Suppose.
2.	$\sim$Bp & $\sim$B$\sim$p	Suppose agnosticism
3.	$\sim$Bp	2, &-elim
4.	B$\sim$p	3, 1.
5.	$\sim$B$\sim$p	2, &-elim
6.	B$\sim$p & $\sim$B$\sim$p	4,5, &-intro. Contradiction.

And the converse entailment would prohibit contradictory beliefs:

1.	B$\sim$p $\rightarrow$ $\sim$Bp	Suppose.
2.	Bp & B$\sim$p	Suppose contradictory beliefs
3.	Bp	2, &-elim
4.	B$\sim$p	2, &-elim
5.	$\sim$Bp	4, 1, MP
6.	Bp & $\sim$Bp	3,5, &-intro. Contradiction.

[5] As a reviewer has pointed out, there is another pragmatic sense of ''suppose''. If you ask me whether it is raining as I peer uncertainly through a semi-opaque window, I might reply ''I suppose so''. This seems to be roughly equivalent to saying '' I believe so'', while acknowledging a lack of confidence in the existence of rain. I take this to be a peripheral sense that is not the one that I discuss.

[6] This constraint is anticipated in Wolgast (1977, 118).

[7] So although Rosenthal may be correct in claiming that ''Moore's paradox occurs with sentences. . . which are self-defeating in a way that prevents one from making an assertion with them'' (2002, 167), this claim is too narrow as a definition of Moorean absurdity.

[8] This constraint on explanation is recognised by Williams (1979, 1998, §2), De Almeida (2001, 30) and Heal (1994, 6). Hájek and Stoljar's (2001, 209) diagnosis of the absurdity of commissive Moorean assertion – that I express contradictory beliefs (because I assert that p and so express a belief that p and also assert that I believe that not-p and so express a belief that not-p) – does not apply to the omissive assertion.

[9] As De Almeida (2001, 42) notes, I need the minimal intelligence to present myself with such an argument for the absurdity. But this hardly constitutes an objection.

[10] Against De Almeida's objection (2001, 42–43). The tripartite distinction between holding a self-contradictory belief, as when I believe that (p and not-p), holding a pair of contradictory beliefs, as when I believe that p and I believe that not-p and holding an inconsistent set of beliefs, as when I believe that p and believe that q and believe that not-(p and q) is the distinction between believing something that contradicts itself, holding a pair of beliefs that contradict each other and holding a set of

beliefs that cannot all be true. The distinction is underpinned by the fact that belief does not collect over conjunction. Some commentators (for example De Almeida himself 2001) make the same distinction by describing beliefs as "contradictory", "strongly inconsistent" and "weakly inconsistent".

[11] Compare Williams (1996, §7).

[12] However Rosenthal (1995, 203) rejects this approach based on the claim that a Moorean assertion is "absurd even in soliloquy, where no betrayal of insincerity is relevant; one cannot [coherently] say even to oneself 'It's raining but I don't think it is'". But this is a bad example, since soliloquy is apt to be absurd anyway. Unless soliloquy is merely a stage performance, in which case it is just the pretence of assertion, isn't talking to myself a sign of madness? For example if I tell myself that p as an attempt to let myself know that p, then the attempt is pointless since I already have the knowledge I'm trying to impart. On my account we can explain the absurdity of omissive Moorean soliloquy as my attempt to make myself both believe that I believe that it's raining (in virtue of making myself believe I'm sincere) and believe that I don't believe that it's raining (in virtue of making myself think I'm telling the truth). The absurdity is now revealed as my attempt to make myself irrational. On the other hand if my soliloquy is merely a stage performance then I have depicted this absurd attempt on the part of my fictional guise, although I have not made an assertion myself, absurd or otherwise.

[13] However Rosenthal (1995, 199, compare Hájek and Stoljar 2001) denies this. He holds that by asserting that p I express the belief that p, but in reporting that I believe that p, I do not express this belief (2002, 168). Rosenthal assumes that since my report of belief, "I believe that p" expresses my higher order belief that I believe that p, then it cannot also express my belief that p as well. For he also assumes that if it did, then there would be no difference between reporting a belief by "I believe that p" and expressing a belief by "p". On my account both assumptions are false. For my assertion "I believe that p" both expresses my belief that I believe that p and also expresses my belief that p. But this does not mean that there is no difference between reporting a belief by "I believe that p" and expressing a belief by "p". The difference is that in making the plain assertion "p" I do not express a belief that I believe that p.

[14] Searle (1983, 9) claims that a "generalisation of Moore's paradox" occurs with non-assetoric speech-acts:

...in the performance of each illocutionary act with a propositional content, we express a certain Intentional state with that propositional content, and that Intentional state is the sincerity condition of that type of speech act.

Accordingly, Searle's list of illocutionary acts that violate their sincerity conditions constitutes "I order you to stop smoking but I don't want you to stop smoking", "I apologize for insulting you, but I am not sorry that I insulted you", and "Congratulations on winning the prize, but I am not glad that you won the prize". Also included by his account would be "I promise to visit you next Thursday but I don't intend to". For dissent however, see Heal 1977.

[15] Hájek and Stoljar (2001, 209) make this point.

[16] This account is similar to Rosenthal's (2002). He observes that "one must, at the time of assertion, have an occurrent thought with that content" (2002, 170). So Moore's omissive example "... is not assertible because one conjunct denies the

occurrence at that time of the occurrent intentional state required for the other conjunct to perform a genuine illocutionary act'' (2002, 170). So in asserting that (p & I don't believe that p), I deny that I have the occurrent belief that p, one that I must have if my assertion that p is to be *bona fide*. Rosenthal would say that the commissive assertion is not assertible because one conjunct asserts the occurrence at that time of an intentional state ''manifestly incompatible'' (2002, 170) with that required for the other conjunct to perform a genuine illocutionary act. So in asserting that (p & I believe that not-p), I assert that I have the occurrent belief that not-p, one that I cannot have if my assertion that p is to be *bona fide*, unless I hold contradictory occurrent beliefs about whether p.

But when I address Superman by saying ''You are not an idiot but I believe that you are'' the ''belief the second conjunct ... reports is, by contrast, not occurrent at the time of assertion; it is merely something I am disposed to mentally affirm under other circumstances'' (2002, 170). So my reply to Superman roughly means ''You are not an idiot but I am inclined (under other circumstances) to think you are''. Of an omissive variant of my reply, ''You are not an idiot but I don't believe you are not'', Rosenthal would presumably say that the second conjunct merely reports, at the time of assertion, the lack of my disposition to mentally affirm idiocy under other circumstances. So my omissive reply to Superman roughly means ''You are not an idiot but I am not inclined (under other circumstances) to think you are not''.

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