In many of his writings on epistemology, R. M. Chisholm has defended the view that there are two markedly different senses of the expression ‘appears red’. When ‘appears red’ is used in the comparative sense, it may be paraphrased by ‘appears the way red things usually do in daylight’; used in its non-comparative sense, it does not have this or any other paraphrase, – it is a simple unanalyzable predicate. I believe there is no such distinction, but that a correct analysis of ‘appears’ locutions will uncover something of interest which creates the illusion of such a distinction; to establish these claims is the burden of this note.

There is a sense of the word ‘appears’ which has nothing to do with the ways in which physical objects present themselves to our senses. Thus, one may say ‘It appears that John has left town’, and perhaps, in the same sense of ‘appears’, one may say ‘This book appears red’ – meaning ‘All our evidence (none of which need consist in seeing the book) leads us to the guess that the book is red’. I do not know if ‘appears red’ can in fact be used in this sense (I would be more likely to say ‘This book appears to be red’); I mention it only to set it aside. The two senses of ‘appears red’ with which Chisholm is concerned are both phenomenological senses: to say, in either of these senses, that a book appears red is to say something about the nature of our experience of it.

Let us look now at Chisholm’s arguments for the existence of two senses. It is plausible to suppose that no analytic sentence is synonymous with a synthetic one; to show that ‘appears red’ has two senses it will then be sufficient to show that there is a sentence containing the expression ‘appears red’, all of whose other terms are unambiguous, and which is analytic on one reading, synthetic on another. Chisholm’s central argument employs this strategy: the sentence which is claimed to be analytic when ‘appears red’ is read comparatively, synthetic when ‘appears red’ is read noncomparatively is (1) ‘Things which are red usually appear red in
If we read 'appears red' comparatively, then (1) may be paraphrased by (2) 'Things which are red usually appear in daylight the way in which things which are red usually appear in daylight', which is analytic. Chisholm gives no paraphrase for the noncomparative version of (1), but he does give an important clue to what he has in mind: the sense of 'appears red' that makes (1) synthetic is the sense of 'appears red' that makes the following true: 'There is a certain way of appearing — appearing red, — which, as it happens, we have found to be the way in which red things usually appear.'

That 'appears red' can mean something like 'appears the way red things usually appear in daylight' is a datum of linguistic intuition that seems to me quite correct. The paraphrase can no doubt be improved: 'usually appear in daylight' might perhaps be sharpened to 'characteristically would appear if looked at in daylight' (even if red things were never looked at in daylight, there is still a characteristic way they would appear if looked at in daylight); one might also want to replace 'in daylight' by 'in standard conditions'. I will grant that some such paraphrase is correct; my quarrel then will be with the non-comparative sense. It is, however, worth pointing out that (1) and (2) are quite likely not analytic: (2), for example, entails 'There is a way in which red things usually appear in daylight', which does not seem to be a necessary truth. I propose that we amend (1) to (1'). If there is a way in which red things usually appear in daylight, then red things usually appear red in daylight;² the paraphrase (2') 'If there is a way in which red things usually appear in daylight, then red things usually appear in daylight the way red things usually appear in daylight' will be analytic. I believe Chisholm would accept this emendation: he would say that (1') was analytic on the comparative reading, synthetic on the non-comparative reading.

(1') we have agreed, can be read as analytic. Can it also be read as synthetic? One way to answer this question is to try to imagine a situation in which (1') would be false on some reading. The sort of situation Chisholm apparently has in mind is a world — let's call it $W$ — just like ours except that red things there appear the way green things appear in our world, and conversely. I do not think, however, that it is clear that (1') does have a reading on which it is false in $W$; further, it does not seem possible to argue this question one way or the other without first deciding whether 'appears red' has a non-comparative sense. For example,