

MOORE AND WITTGENSTEIN ON THE INSULATION OF SCEPTICISM FROM EVERYDAY LIFE

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ABSTRACT

This paper arises from work on Wittgenstein's On Certainty, and its underlying concern is as much with Wittgenstein's response to Moore's Proof, as with the latter's viability. In elucidating the Proof, one must consider two opposed accounts of the relation of scepticism and everyday belief. The first, which underlies the received interpretation of Moore as a dogmatic proponent of commonsense, places sceptical and everyday practice on the same level. The second account – apparently advocated, for instance, by Stroud – insulates scepticism and everyday belief from each other. Each of these opposed positions is implausible, I will argue. Scepticism and everyday doubt and belief are not insulated from each other, but neither do they operate on the same level. The difficulty is to nuance their relationship correctly. Although Moore is not a naïve dogmatist, his way of showing how scepticism relates to everyday belief is unsatisfactory. My view, following Baldwin, is that there is interaction but non-equivalence between these practices. However, I argue that Baldwin is insufficiently uncritical of Moore, and neglects an interesting analogue, in the case of knowledge, of Moore's paradox concerning belief.

1. Moore, Wittgenstein and Moorean truisms

This paper arises from work on Wittgenstein's On Certainty, and its underlying concern is as much with Wittgenstein's response to Moore's Proof, as with the latter's viability. For Wittgenstein, the most valuable part of Moore's defence of commonsense is found in the earlier of his two famous articles – where he presents the class of what I will term Moorean truisms. I believe that in this Wittgenstein is correct; even so, most philosophical attention continues to be focussed on the Proof. He found the continuation of Moore's apparent engagement with scepticism in "Proof of an External World" (1939) less convincing; it is the latter in particular which led to categorisation of its author as a dogmatic proponent of commonsense. In On Certainty, Wittgenstein does not dwell on the validity of Moore's Proof, but focusses instead on one of its key assumptions – that Moorean truisms are possible objects of knowledge.

There are two ways in which Moore is a philosopher of commonsense, therefore. The first lies in his affirmation in "A Defence of Common Sense" of the interesting class of Moorean truisms, which he claims to know for certain. The list should be quoted at length, since it is the most interesting and important part of Moore's article:

There exists at present a living human body, which is *my* body. This body was born at a certain time in the past, and has existed continuously ever since, though not without undergoing changes...Ever since it was born, it has been either in contact with or not far from the surface of the earth; and, at every moment since it was born, there have also existed

many other things, having shape and size in three dimensions...from which it has been *at various distances*...Among the things which have, in this sense, formed part of its environment... there have, at every moment since its birth, been large numbers of other living human bodies, each of which has, like it, (a) at some time been born, (b) continued to exist from some time after birth, (c) been, at every moment of its life after birth, either in contact with or not far from the surface of the earth; and many of these bodies have already died and ceased to exist. But the earth had existed also for many years before my body was born; and for many of these years, also, large numbers of human bodies had, at every moment, been alive upon it; and many of these bodies had died and ceased to exist before it was born. Finally (to come to a different class of propositions), I am a human being, and I have, at different times since my body was born, had many different experiences... e.g. I have often perceived both my own body and other things which formed part of its environment, including other human bodies...[list continues].¹

Moore also claims that other people know for certain comparable truisms about themselves; and that the fact that they do is also generally known for certain:

each of *us*...has frequently *known*, with regard to *himself* or *his* body and the time at which he knew it, everything which, in writing down my list of propositions in (1), I was claiming to know about myself or *my* body and the time at which I wrote that proposition down.

The claims that Moore makes about his body are not those that Descartes would regard as indubitable – unlike Cartesian certainties, they are neither known a priori, nor are they immediate psychological self-certainties – or in Wittgensteinian terms, immune to error. **[summarise what else they are]** Furthermore, while Descartes' position is egocentric, Moore's is intersubjective. He claims that he knows that very many people know a similar set of truisms about themselves – that is, truisms with the same content. If we add the further claim that people know that others know a similar set of truisms, then these would constitute a kind of "common knowledge", as Moore probably intended they should. There would thus be an objective character to Moorean commonsense. It is essential to note Moore's further comments on these truths – that he does not know how he knows them, or at least is less sure how he knows them, than that he does. This idea of Moore's assumes a vital significance in On Certainty, where it is transformed into the suggestion that the Moorean truisms are not genuine objects of knowledge at all.

Another, apparently less salutary, aspect of Moorean commonsense is the allegedly dogmatic commitment to it exhibited in his famous Proof. It turns out, however, that Moorean commonsense was conceived as a unity in that truisms and Proof go together – the Proof is intended simply as a reminder that we do know the truisms. (Wittgenstein recognises that more needs to be said about the latter.)

¹ ref

2. Moore's Proof

In his 1939 article, Moore develops what he regards – perhaps, unusually for him, rather immodestly – as his version of Kant's "Refutation of Idealism" in the Critique of Pure Reason, which was intended to prove "the existence of things outside us". While the Proof is a staple of the literature on scepticism – "that old chestnut", Paul McDonald has called it – its import continues to be much debated. In fact, Moore presents it as a response to idealism – which he interprets as the denial that there are things outside us – rather than scepticism, a fact overlooked by many commentators. That his target is idealism rather than scepticism is understandable when one recalls that in his early career, Moore had been converted to idealism by McTaggart, and that his and Russell's break with idealism is a convenient point to mark the beginnings of the Analytic Tradition.

Though Kant's "Refutation of Idealism" aimed to correct the "scandal" of scepticism, Moore does not refer to "the sceptic" in PEW [check]. For him, idealism is the denial of the existence of material objects [check]. Berkeley and Mill, in contrast, argue that idealism simply offers a different analysis of the concept of an external world – for Berkeley, a material object is an Idea, observed by God, while for Mill it is a "permanent possibility of sensation". The kind of idealism under question is ontological idealism, as opposed to German Idealist mind-dependence idealism – though I believe that there is a continuum between these positions – but it might be thought that while Berkeley and Mill treat idealism as an ontological thesis, Moore treats it as an epistemic one. However, in light of his analysis, that interpretation may be mistaken. (Baldwin perhaps too sharply separates ontological and epistemic questions; at least, that is what a Wittgensteinian would say.)

Commentators have felt that Moore's verbose discussion of "things outside us" contrasts with his unduly laconic presentation of the Proof itself. Certainly his obsession with clarity and accuracy of utterance produce a writing style that misapplies Analytic ideals to almost comically absurd effect. For Crispin Wright, there is "grinding rumination on what it means to describe objects as 'external', or 'outside our minds' or 'presented in space' or 'to be met with in space'. No particularly startling consequences are elicited to reward the reader's ordeal. And the actual 'Proof' – which everyone on first reading feels blatantly begs the question – is confined to the last few pages". Stroud is more charitable: "He begins by explaining in considerable detail precisely what he is going to prove and what it would take to prove it—clearing off the table and rolling up his sleeves, as it were, while describing exactly what he is going to do before getting down to performing the remarkable feat itself".² Even so, the assumption that the Proof is the key element of the article may be a case of the tail wagging the dog.

In his lengthy analysis of the concept of "external objects", Moore explains that by "things outside us" he means things to be met with in space – in contrast to pains and after-images. Things outside us are not dependent for their existence on being perceived or experienced. If he can prove the existence of any such objects, Moore holds, he will have proved the existence of an "External World". This he believes he can do. He disputes Kant's claim to have provided the "only...possible" demonstration, arguing that he can provide "a large number of

² Wright (2004); Stroud, (1984), p. 83.

different proofs, each of which is...perfectly rigorous".³ He reduces this variety to one memorable example, which involves

...holding up my two hands, and saying, as I make a certain gesture with the right hand, "Here is one hand", and adding, as I make a certain gesture with the left, "and here is another" ("Proof" 166).

This demonstration, Moore holds, is a "perfectly rigorous" proof of the existence of external objects; he knows the premises to be true, and they entail the conclusion:

I knew that there was one hand in the place indicated by combining a certain gesture with my first utterance of "here" and that there was another in the different place indicated by combining a certain gesture with my second utterance of "here". How absurd it would be to suggest that I did not know it, but only believed it, and that perhaps it was not the case! You might as well suggest that I do not know that I am now standing up and talking — that perhaps after all I'm not, and that it's not quite certain that I am! ("Proof" 166)

Here then is the gist of Moore's proof:

Premise: Here is a hand

Conclusion: There is a material world (since any hand is a material object existing in space)

where the premise is asserted in a situation in which Moore is, as he supposes, holding his hands up in front of his face, in good light, in a lucid perceptual and cognitive state, and so on.

Moore believes that he has satisfied three conditions of a successful proof:

- (1) The premisses are distinct from the conclusion.
- (2) The premisses are known to be true – as we saw, Moore regards it as absurd to suggest that he does not know that here is one hand and here is another, or that he only believes it but cannot be certain.
- (3) The conclusion follows from the premisses; if it is true that here is one hand and here is another, then it could not possibly be false that two human hands – and thus two material objects – exist.

Moore concedes that he has not given proofs of the Proof's premisses, and that if these are required, he has not given a Proof of the External World. He believes that no such proofs can be given: "I should need to prove for one thing, as Descartes pointed out, that I am not now dreaming". However, Moore insists, against many philosophers, that "I can know things, which I cannot prove; and among things which I certainly did know, even if (as I think) I could not prove them, were the premisses of my two proofs".[ref] So, he concludes, the complaint that his Proof is ineffective because he does not know the premisses, is groundless.⁴

As Baldwin claims (SEP), "It is commonly supposed that Moore...sets himself to refute philosophical skepticism; and that his performance, though intriguing,

³ Kant and Moore refs.

⁴ Baldwin ed. p. 170.

is unsuccessful. But this interpretation is incorrect: Moore's avowed aim is to prove *the existence* of an external world, not to prove *his knowledge of the existence* of an external world". As Moore writes in the Schilpp volume:

I have sometimes distinguished between two different propositions, each of which has been made by some philosophers, namely (1) the proposition 'there are no material things' and (2) the proposition 'Nobody knows for certain that there are any material things'. And in my latest British Academy lecture called 'Proof of an External World' ... I implied with regard to the first of these propositions that it could be *proved* to be false in such a way as this; namely, by holding up one of your hands and saying 'This hand is a material thing; therefore there is at least one material thing'. But with regard to the second of the two propositions ... I do not think I have ever implied that *it* could be *proved* to be false in any such simple way ... ('A Reply to my Critics' 668)

For Baldwin, Moore's Proof just "exhibits" knowledge that "Here is a hand", rather than "proving" it. It is simply a "reminder" or illustration that we do indeed know the Moorean truisms.

That may indeed be what Moore intended, but Baldwin is wrong to endorse Moore's distinction between (1) and (2). Moore holds that one can prove the existence of an "External World", without proving that anyone knows for certain that it exists. But in proving *the existence* of an external world, one inevitably proves one's *knowledge of its existence*. It is not quite right to say that the problem can be expressed in the form of a new Moorean paradox – "P but I do not know for certain that p" – which like the original paradox concerning belief, involves an utterance that makes no sense, though of course the state of affairs described could be, and often is, true. Moore is rather claiming something equally paradoxical but of a different form: "I am proving that p, without thereby showing or proving that I know that p". Seemingly he fails to realise that proving that p is a fully self-conscious act, it cannot be accidental; if I prove that p – as opposed merely to attempting to prove that p – the upshot is that I know that p, and moreover that I have proved or shown that I know that p. I am thinking about the world and thereby about myself. (The truth in the original Moorean paradox concerning belief.) **[something about KKK? Williamson, Coastguard]**

How does one go about proving that one knows that p, as opposed to proving that p? One shows that one has gone about acquiring the belief that p in the right way. But the construction of a successful proof that p must be something that of itself induces belief in p in the right way. A successful proof induces justified true belief and therefore knowledge that p. Moore is extrapolating, wrongly, from the coherence of the third-person case – "I am proving that p, without thereby proving that X knows that p", where X may not be familiar with, or not understand the proof – to that of the first-person case.

Moore's position nonetheless constitutes a staging-post to Wittgenstein's much richer treatment – it would be wrong to deny that scepticism is a major concern of On Certainty, even if not the only one. Wittgenstein agrees with Moore both that one cannot say how one knows Moorean truisms, and that they cannot be doubted; and as Morawetz points out, they agree that one does not need to seek

particular evidence for such propositions.⁵ As Wittgenstein writes at OC 424: "If I were to tell someone that that was a tree, that wouldn't be just surmise.' Isn't this what Moore was trying to say?" Where Wittgenstein parts company with is over the latter's further claims that I do know that that is a tree; and that although I do not need particular evidence for it, I do nonetheless have conclusive evidence for "That is a tree". Wittgenstein denies both of these claims.

Moore's Proof raises in dramatic fashion the question of whether scepticism and everyday practice are on a level, or are insulated from each other. In elucidating the Proof, therefore, one must consider two opposed interpretations of the relation of scepticism and everyday belief: an allegedly Moorean equivalence of sceptical and everyday practice, which places them on the same level, and a radical dichotomy – apparently advocated, for instance, by Stroud – which insulates each from the other. To treat them as on a level is to treat sceptical doubt as if it were akin to ordinary doubt; on the received interpretation of Moore as a dogmatic proponent of commonsense, this is just what he does. Each of these opposed positions is implausible, I will argue. Scepticism and everyday doubt and belief are not insulated from each other, but neither do they operate on the same level. The difficulty is to nuance their relationship correctly. And although Moore is not a naïve dogmatist, his way of showing how scepticism relates to everyday belief is unsatisfactory. My view, following Baldwin, is that there is interaction but non-equivalence between these practices. Epistemic norms and everyday judgments interact. However, I believe that Baldwin is too generous to Moore in endorsing the latter's distinction between proving that p, and proving that I know that p. This distinction, which supports insulation, is tenuous at best.

Note on contextualism: the question under consideration is the relation between scepticism on the one hand, and empirical practices or contexts on the other.

[James Pryor is a contemporary self-confessed dogmatist – for example in "The Sceptic and the Dogmatist". Agrees with Moore that the premise supports the conclusion – Wright denies this.]

3. Questioning received interpretation of Moore as dogmatist of commonsense (1): "commonsense reversal" leads to standoff

It follows from the preceding analysis of Moore's intentions in presenting his Proof that the dominant interpretation of him as a dogmatic proponent of commonsense, for whom knowledge does not require vindication in the face of sceptical argument, is mistaken – but quite understandable. This interpretation is found in early papers by Malcolm, Ambrose and Lazerowitz in the Schilpp volume onwards. **[check Moore's replies there]** On this view, Moore almost ostentatiously declines to develop his Proof into an illuminating diagnosis of scepticism, and a positive epistemological standpoint; he regards sceptical and everyday practices as on a level, treating sceptical doubt as if it were akin to ordinary doubt. **[If he doesn't intend to construct a case, he's a modernist, but so is Reid, cf. Hume]** In what follows, I will take the Proof as it is

⁵ Morawetz (1978), p. 91. Wittgenstein and Knowledge, University of Massachusetts Press.

normally taken – the only way, despite Moore's intentions, that it can coherently be understood – as anti-sceptical rather than anti-idealist.

Malcolm and Ambrose both argue that Moore presents the Proof as an empirical demonstration. He points out his hands in order to establish that there are external things, seemingly just as one would do to establish the existential proposition "There is a coin in the collection plate" by pointing out a particular coin in the plate. He insists that his assertion that there are external things is, and is intended to be, "empirical" (S, 672), and that the term "external object" is an "empirical" term. But for Malcolm and Ambrose, it is not that Moore gives incomplete or inadequate evidence for the existence of his hands – since sceptical doubt is not empirical doubt, no amount of empirical evidence would refute it. This is certainly evidence for the received view.

The consensus that Moore is a dogmatist of commonsense endures. Despite his disentangling of Moore's intentions cited earlier – the understanding that Moore's Proof just "exhibits" knowledge that "Here is a hand", rather than "proving" it – and his rejection of the dogmatist interpretation, Baldwin argues that a formulation of the sceptical dialectic must show the importance of Moore's "common sense" affirmations of certainty (presumably the Moorean truisms) while avoiding his dogmatic insistence that knowledge does not require vindication in the face of sceptical argument; he holds that *On Certainty* best indicates how this is to be achieved.⁶ Marie McGinn also regards Moore as a dogmatist, who treats scepticism as simply beyond belief, in conflict with all our convictions; his view, she argues, is that since scepticism cannot bring conviction, it is intellectually bankrupt. This line of interpretation, I suggest, classifies Moore with the venerable "scepticism is not really believed" tradition exemplified in opposed ways by Hume and Reid, rather than with the modernist "scepticism is not meaningful" tradition of Schopenhauer, Russell and Wittgenstein, which constructs what is often called a semantic case against scepticism.⁷ **[is this classification wrong?]**

It is not just for the reasons considered in section 2 above, that the received interpretation does not capture the complexity – and confusion – of Moore's position. There are further considerations which will now be addressed. In "Hume's Philosophy" he holds that scepticism is "in a certain sense...quite incapable of disproof...": "The only proof that we do know external facts lies in the simple fact that we do know them", he continues.⁸ ***[Does this amount to dogmatism? Russell and Schopenhauer agree with these claims, but does Wittgenstein?]*** Recognition that scepticism is at least in a sense incapable of disproof means that Moore is aligned with the modernists. It is true that the Proof has some of the enacted dogmatism of Dr. Johnson, who responded to Berkeley's denial of matter by kicking a stone, saying "I refute it thus" – though Johnson's refutation is more clearly inadequate since it is consistent with, and explicable by, Berkeley's theory. But even though I disagree with their alternative interpretations, I believe that Stroll, Soames, Lycan and others are right to deny that Moore is a dogmatist.

One reason that his Proof is not just dogmatic assertion is that it makes the substantive claim that its commonsense reversal is more compelling than the

⁶ Baldwin (1990), pp. 289, 267.

⁷ The use of "modernism" as a characterisation of a philosophical as opposed to artistic standpoint is developed by Skorupski.

⁸ "Hume's Philosophy", quoted McGinn p. 47.

sceptic's doubt. (In fact, as we will see, Moore has succeeded only in showing that there is a standoff between these, but that is an achievement nonetheless.) This reversal has been interpreted as affirming the epistemic priority of the engaged standpoint of everyday life, rejecting Descartes' prioritising of the theoretical over the practical standpoint.⁹ (Moore does not say that explicitly.) Lycan recognises this fact, holding that Moore's argument is based on an appeal to differential certainty between the everyday proposition "I had my breakfast before I had lunch", and McTaggart's philosophical claim "Temporal modes such as pastness and futurity are monadic properties of events". Moore holds that we are more certain of our everyday knowledge than of any philosophical theory that explains how we have or fail to have it. Moore here regards sceptical and everyday practice as on the same level; but the standoff/reversal endures.

Thus Moore's laconic Proof involves more than a dogmatic insistence on commonsense. It has a core strategy, that of reversing the sceptic's train of reasoning. [*Where does Moore state this? Does CW's transmission analysis show that this strategy is no good?*] He responds to the sceptic's modus ponens argument with the corresponding modus tollens:

S knows that he has two hands
 If S does not know that he is not dreaming, then S does not know that he has two hands
 Therefore: S knows that he is not dreaming.

The sceptic in contrast argues, also on the basis of a closure principle, that:

S does not know that he is not dreaming
 If S does not know that he is not dreaming, then S does not know that he has two hands
 Therefore: S does not know that he has two hands.

What is dogmatic, I suggest, is the conclusion that Moore draws from this strategy: on the basis of his conviction that the sceptical conclusion must be false, he claims that he knows the denial of the sceptical hypothesis. Many would regard the result as a stand-off – as indeed Moore himself did, when he focussed on scepticism right at the end of his career, in the article "Certainty". This is a more cautious piece of work than the better-known earlier articles, and its conclusion is clearly undogmatic. In its closing section he explicitly accepts a closure principle, but argues that it cuts both ways – so that the sceptical argument from closure can be turned on its head:

...if I don't know now that I'm not dreaming, it follows that I don't know that I am standing up, even if I both actually am and think that I am. But this [consideration] cuts both ways. For, if it is true, it follows that it is also true that if I do know that I am standing up, then I do know that I am not dreaming. I can therefore just as well argue: since I do know that I'm standing up, it follows that I do know that I'm not dreaming; as my opponent can argue: since you don't know that you're not dreaming, it follows that you don't know that you're standing up. The one argument is just as good as the other, unless my opponent can

⁹ As Gascoigne (2002), p. 138, puts it. I am indebted here to his discussion.

give better reasons for asserting that I don't know that I'm not dreaming, than I can give for asserting that I do know that I am standing up.¹⁰

In fact, Moore need not even have committed himself to a closure principle, just to parity of reasoning, arguing that "If it is true that, if I don't know now that I'm not dreaming... then it is also true that, if I do know that I am standing up, then..."

Baldwin's claim that in "Certainty", Moore acknowledges defeat, is misleading, therefore. Although Moore now seems to accept that he cannot know for certain that he is not dreaming, he persists in his core strategy of reversing the sceptic's train of reasoning: "...can any good reason be given for saying that it is logically possible [that I should be having all the sensory experiences you are having, and also that I am remembering what I do in fact remember, and yet I should be dreaming]? So far as I know nobody ever has, and I don't know how anybody ever could. And so long as this is not done my argument, 'I know that I am standing up, and therefore I know that I am not dreaming', remains at least as good as [the sceptic's]".¹¹

(Wittgenstein probably accepts closure, but given his non-cognitive account of Moorean truisms, it is irrelevant to his analysis. Obviously we are not required to know the known implications of propositions that are not themselves objects of knowledge. Unless, that is, closure can be expressed in negative terms, as follows: in order not to doubt the Moorean truisms, one must know their known implications.)

Instead of looking at Moore's final work, Soames looks back to some of his earliest Analytic work. He argues that the Proof is an "ironic" attack on the presuppositions of those who attempt to refute Cartesian scepticism, and that the core of Moore's response to scepticism is found in "Hume's Philosophy" from 1909, and in two subsequent lectures published as chs. 5 and 6 in Some Main Problems of Philosophy. In these, Moore argues that the sceptic bases their conclusion – that we cannot know that there are hands – on a restrictive account of knowledge: "The sceptic assumes that we can be certain about what knowledge is before we decide whether what we all ordinarily take to be paradigmatic cases of knowledge really are genuine. But this is backwards...". Moore holds that our understanding of knowledge arises primarily from simple cases such as "I know that this is a pencil". Sceptical arguments rest on general principles about the limits of knowledge that assume some understanding of the concept, which they then undermine by implying that there are no such straightforward cases of it. On Soames' view, Moore holds that anyone who demanded a proof of the external world would already have accepted the sceptic's restrictive conception of knowledge; his Proof is intended to show that there is no need for it in the first place.¹² On this interpretation of Moore, the "scandal" is not, as Kant thought, that no proof has succeeded, but that philosophers continue uncritically to accept that the sceptic has a legitimate demand for one.

I do not agree that the rather Wittgensteinian argument of Some Main Problems is the "core" of Moore's response to scepticism; it is, rather, a distinct, earlier

¹⁰ In Philosophical Papers (New York: Collier Books, 1962). (Baldwin ed. pp. 171-96); quotation Baldwin ed. pp. 190-1.

¹¹ Baldwin ed. p. 194.

¹² Soames, p. 23.

line of argument; and since a sense of irony is not something with which Moore is not normally credited, the suggestion that his Proof is ironic seems unlikely.

[how does preceding discussion relate to whether Moore treats the two positions as on the same level, or insulated? Differential certainty argument certainly assumes they are on the same level]

4. Questioning received interpretation of Moore as dogmatist of commonsense (2): Stroud on internal and external questions

In an influential analysis, Barry Stroud endorses the received interpretation that Moore is a dogmatist who assimilates sceptical questions to everyday questions of the form "Are there any major rivers in North Africa?" In contrast, Stroud himself is sympathetic to the claim of insulation of scepticism and everyday life, **[check]** and argues that what Moore says seems irrelevant to the philosophical issues: "the philosophical sceptic's denial of our knowledge [is] the outcome of an investigation into the basis of all the knowledge or certainty we think we have about the world around us. That is why... we feel it is not a 'sufficient refutation' of that scepticism simply to bring forward 'a particular case . . . in which we do know of the existence of some material object' [in Moore's words]. The philosopher's assessment of all of our knowledge of the world around us is meant to apply to every particular case in which we do think we know of some material object, so no case that could be brought forward would escape that scrutiny".¹³

Stroud writes that "...we [feel] that Moore... fails to answer the philosophical question about our knowledge of external things... because we understand [it] as requiring a certain withdrawal or detachment from the whole body of our knowledge of the world. We recognize that when I ask in that detached philosophical way whether I know that there are external things [all] of my knowledge of the external world is supposed to have been brought into question at one fell swoop; no particular piece of it is to be available as unquestioned knowledge... That might be called an 'external' reaction to the question whether anything is known about the external world... Descartes was not interested in whether we know this or that particular thing about the world around us, but whether we know anything at all about it." **[If one pushes this position too far, scepticism becomes irrelevant to everyday life]**

Stroud considers the possibility **[a claim independent of the possibility/coherence of an external standpoint]** that ordinary practice is insulated from philosophy – that the truth of our ordinary assertions is compatible with the truth of the sceptic's. Moore might then show that our everyday claims are "true and legitimate", without thereby deciding the philosophical problem of the external world.¹⁴ On this interpretation, in the terminology of Carnap's "Pseudoproblems in Philosophy", Moore is giving an "internal" response to scepticism, which cites actual methods of establishing truths in a given area – as opposed to an "external" response which detaches itself from our body of knowledge, questioning it all simultaneously.

¹³ Stroud, The Significance of Philosophical Scepticism, p. 120, 109.

¹⁴ Stroud, p. 100.

Stroud argues that Moore's very refusal or inability to grasp the "increasingly elusive" external conception makes his remarks philosophically distinctive and important. Moore, he holds, steadfastly remains with the familiar, unproblematic understanding of sceptical questions, as on the same level as empirical ones. One may draw comparisons with Wittgenstein here, who often juxtaposes sceptical and everyday doubt, for example in his amusing tree example, "he's not mentally ill, just doing philosophy"; unlike Moore, he is an ironist who appreciates the collision of sceptical and everyday stances. And as Stroud notes, Moore, also unlike Wittgenstein, does not diagnose the sceptic's doubts, but simply denies them; he insists that his assertion that there are external things is meant to be "empirical", and that in proving it, he meant to prove that "There are no external things" is simply false (S, 672).¹⁵ [cf LW and modernists – not false, but senseless] (We will see shortly that Stroud's assumption is wrong; Wittgenstein's position shows that to diagnose the sceptic's doubt rather than assessing their truth-value is not thereby to accept an "external" viewpoint.) Moore does not attempt to explain why the external reaction is incoherent. He just – so Stroud says – fails to recognise it, being philosophically lobotomised in some way. Stroud thus sides with interpreters of Moore as a dogmatic proponent of commonsense, who misses the sceptic's point, rather than begging the question against him. However, Stroud does hold that despite being philosophically lobotomised, Moore sometimes grasp the sceptic's way of talking. (The psycho-surgery had not been a complete success, then.)

The counterpart of the naïve dogmatist is the naïve sceptic – a case study is the Durham Business Studies student who contacted the present writer to express his alarm after reading Descartes. What both ingenus fail to realise is that the debate is a philosophical one; so a serious response to the student, and to Descartes, is to urge him to read more philosophy, such as work by Moore and Wittgenstein, and thus understand counterarguments to scepticism. (The absurdist response to him, and to philosophy, has always been present – Aristophanes in The Clouds satirised Socrates – but has become very popular in the 20th century, partly due to Monty Python.) Both ingenus need to become Sober Critical Thinkers, able to evaluate arguments raised by sceptics and their opponents.

Clearly there is something to the interpretation of Moore as a naïve dogmatist. Unlike Wittgenstein, Moore does not probe the motivation of the sceptic, and the philosophical assumptions that give rise to that stubbornly enduring standpoint. But he does sometimes recognise that scepticism and everyday beliefs are on different levels, and moreover, holds that they are insulated. He holds that commonsense is committed to realism:

...the common opinion that doubt is essential to scepticism arises from the mistaken opinion that if a man sincerely believes that a thing is doubtful he must doubt it. In the case of sincere philosophical opinions this seems to me certainly not the case... There is, therefore, a sort of scepticism that is compatible with a complete absence of doubt on any subject whatever.¹⁶

¹⁵ Stroud, p. 119.

¹⁶ PEW or SMPP? pp.198-9.

So in fact, Moore does hold – as Descartes also did, in the quotation in Ch. 2 – that philosophical scepticism is essentially second-order, and, moreover **[the key qn]** can co-exist with lack of first-order doubt. (Descartes distinguishes "the actions of life and the investigation of truth" – "no sane person ever seriously doubts such things [as the sceptics doubted]"; but in the exercise of pre-emptive doubt, it is unreasonable to refuse to reject them...i.e. an intellectual, not practical exercise, if one can make sense of this.)

Moore is not always a naïve, internal-standpoint dogmatist, therefore; he recognises that scepticism cannot be silenced by procedures that settle everyday disputes. As we saw in section 2, however, the way that Moore develops this claim is unpersuasive. He holds that sceptical doubt is doubt about whether one knows, rather than about whether p; that there is a distinction between proving that p and proving that one knows that p.

To reiterate, scepticism and everyday doubt and belief are not insulated from each other, but neither do they operate on the same level; the difficulty is to nuance this relationship correctly. Moore, as well as holding sometimes that scepticism and everyday belief are on the same level, also at times seems to want to insulate them from each other – shown by his distinction between proving that p, and proving that I know that p. That is the insulation claim, applicable according to some, to Cartesian scepticism; but the distinction is tenuous.¹⁷ It exists in the third-person; one can prove that p, without proving that X knows that p. But one cannot do so where X = oneself. Moore – and Baldwin – are quite mistaken in thinking that one can believe that something is doubtful without actually doubting it.¹⁸

Although he is mistaken in supporting Moore's distinction between proving that p and proving that one knows that p, Baldwin is absolutely correct in holding that sceptics do not have to adopt an external viewpoint – that our epistemic practices have enough internal strains for the critic to exploit. But it is the critic, rather than the sceptic, that is required here. Stroud's – and Carnap's – contrast between "internal" and "external" questions, with its suggestion of "stepping outside" ordinary practice, is incoherent and unnecessary; in its place, one should use the notion of critical reflection. As Wittgenstein's discussion shows, while naïve dogmatism is inadequate, the notion of an external standpoint is incoherent. He holds that the sceptic posits a doubt beyond ordinary doubt, and that this is an illusion: "a doubt that doubted everything would not be a doubt" (OC 450).

Moore takes credit, after Hume, for acknowledging the conflict between what philosophers say in the study or seminar room, and what they and everyone else does in everyday life. But his understanding of the conflict is vague and dim, compared with Wittgenstein's vivid grasp of it, expressed in remarks such as the following:

¹⁷ Baldwin does concede that it may be tenuous – check p.291.

¹⁸ CURRIE: One can believe that something is doubtful without doubting it; just as one can believe that something is desirable without actually desiring it. "Doubtful" could just be "can be doubted", "there is some reason to doubt", just as "desirable" can mean "there is some reason to desire". Victoria Beckham is considered desirable, but I don't desire her. In a statistical sense she is desirable, but in a normative sense, not.

I am sitting with a philosopher in the garden; he says again and again "I know that that's a tree", pointing to a tree that is near us. Someone else arrives and hears this, and I tell him: "This fellow isn't insane. We are only doing philosophy" (OC 467).

It is interesting that Wittgenstein raises the question of insanity, rather than saying simply "You may be puzzled". He is clearly taking a dig at Moore, while allowing that the debate, while not an empirical one, has bearings on the empirical.

For Baldwin, the decisive objection to Moore is that he fails to appreciate the normativity of the concept of knowledge: "general norms, or standards, are not grounded in particular cases [as] general empirical truths are...our assent to principles concerning what one can know is not just a matter of generalising from [such] cases".¹⁹ Our standards are not just descriptions of our practice, but derive from reflection on it; it is the matter from which they are formed. Ordinarily it is inappropriate – Wittgenstein would say senseless – to challenge Moorean truisms, but our rational [**philosophical?**] confidence in them must withstand sceptical challenge.²⁰

(One should perhaps question the "dichotomy" between scepticism and everyday life assumed both by insulators and those who regard them as on the same level. Michael Williams in Natural Doubts argues that scepticism arises from reflections on intuitive problems of knowledge that arise in everyday thinking about it; instance, the closure principle conflicts with the idea that sufficient evidence is needed for knowledge.)

McGinn comments that Moore Proof "makes us feel the tension between the unliveability and the unanswerability of scepticism".²¹ We feel that Moore does know what he claims to know; but recognise that he has no (philosophical?) right to say that he knows it. In order to refute scepticism, we need an understanding of how commonsense functions; mere dogmatic assertion of commonsense is no substitute for philosophical explanation. Such an understanding is what Wittgenstein attempts to provide in On Certainty; unlike McGinn and others, however, I think that this understanding involves the refutation of scepticism by means of "semantic" arguments. But that is material for another occasion.

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¹⁹ Moore, p. 272.

²⁰ Moore, p. 274.

²¹ McGinn p. 51.