

Moore (1939), "Proof of an External World"  
Moore (1925), "A Defense of Common Sense"  
Moore (1959), "Four Forms of Skepticism"  
Moore (1959), "Certainty"

### **Moore's "Proof"**

1. Here is one hand.
2. Here is another hand.
- C. There are external things.

This is a genuine, rigorous proof, claims Moore. He says that it satisfies three conditions required for something to be a proof: (1) the premises are different from the conclusion, (2) he knows that the premises are true, (3) the conclusion follows from the premises. (See page 166.)

### **Some questions**

Is Moore's argument a response to skepticism about the external world? The conclusion of the argument is that there are external things, not that Moore (or I) know that there are external things.

Does Moore know that the premises are true? Why does he think he knows? Does he need to know that the premises are true for this to be a genuine proof? Does he need to know that he knows the premises are true in order for this to be a genuine proof?

What is the misprint example on page 167 supposed to show?

On page 168-9, Moore says that some philosophers will be unsatisfied by his argument. Why does he think that some philosophers will be unsatisfied? Is he right that those philosophers have no good reason to be unsatisfied?

### **Is the skeptic inconsistent?**

In other essays, Moore makes other suggestions about the problem of skepticism about the external world. In "A Defense of Common Sense", Moore makes a claim like this:

A skeptic who sincerely says "No one can know anything about the external world" is inconsistent. What the skeptic means is "There are other human beings (besides myself) and no human being (including myself) knows anything about the external world (including other human beings)." So, the skeptic believes: (1) he knows that there are other human beings, and (2) he does not know anything about other human beings. So the skeptic has inconsistent beliefs. (See page 116-117.)

However, it is not clear that Moore is correct that this skeptic is being inconsistent. It is not obvious that sincerely asserting "No human being can know anything about the external world" shows that the skeptic believes that he knows that there are other human beings. I can sincerely say "No talking frog has ever greeted me on the street." But that does not show that I believe that there are talking frogs. But perhaps there is some other way the skeptic has inconsistent beliefs.

So let us suppose Moore is correct that the skeptic has inconsistent beliefs.

Does this solve the problem of skepticism about the external world?

Even if Moore is correct, this does not explain what is wrong with skeptical arguments.

For example, this does not explain what is wrong with Stroud's argument.

Moreover, if we can find nothing wrong with a certain skeptical argument it would seem that logic and rationality require us to accept the conclusion. But if we accept the conclusion, and Moore is correct that the skeptic has inconsistent beliefs, then logic and rationality require us to have inconsistent beliefs.

### **Another Moorean point about skepticism**

In "Certainty" and "Four Forms of Skepticism", Moore makes a point like this:

I am more sure that I know that I have hands, than that some skeptical argument is sound. So it is more reasonable for me to believe that I know that I have hands, than to believe that I don't know that I have hands.

Putting the point in a different way, Moore compares two arguments:

Moore's argument:

- (M1) I know that I have hands.
- (M2) If I know that I have hands then I know that I am not dreaming.
- (MC) So, I know that I am not dreaming.

Skeptic's argument:

- (S1) I don't know that I am not dreaming .
- (S2) If I don't know that I am not dreaming, then I don't know that I have hands.
- (SC) So, I don't know that I have hands.

Notice that (M2) is true just in case (S2) is true, and the reasoning in the arguments is the same (A, and if A then B, therefore B). And, of course, only one of the arguments is sound, since the conclusion of each argument conflicts with a premise of the other.  
(Reminder: a *valid argument* is an argument where the conclusion follows from the premises.  
A *sound argument* is a valid argument with true premises.)

So Moore's point is this:

It is more reasonable for me to believe that my argument is sound than the skeptic's argument is sound.

Does this solve the problem of skepticism? Even if Moore is right, we still want to know both: (1) what is wrong with the skeptic's argument, and (2) why it looks convincing.