





Topics in Analytic Philosophy

Skepticism

Lecture notes

Link on course web page

username "ge"

password "moore"

Assignment

Available by next Tuesday

Due Tuesday 3 October

Books on 1-day reserve

Stroud, *On the Significance of Philosophical Skepticism*

Moore, *Philosophical Papers*

Wittgenstein, *On Certainty*

Ludwig Wittgenstein (1889-1951)

Wittgenstein

born in Vienna 1889

England 1908 (to study engineering)

Cambridge 1911 (to study with Russell)

Austria/Norway/Italy 1914-

Cambridge 1929-

Died 1951

What we are not talking about

Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus (1922)

Philosophical Investigations (1953)

What we are talking about

On Certainty (1969)

Remarks on Wittgenstein's method

Notes

Questions

Themes

Some challenges

Not intended as a book

Wanders

Changes his mind


Controversy

c.1930

“Why is philosophy so complicated? It ought, after all, to be *completely simple*. Philosophy unties the knots in our thinking which we have tangled up in an absurd way; but to do that it must make movements which are just as complicated as the knots. Although the *result* of philosophy is simple, its methods for arriving there cannot be so.

The complexity of philosophy is not in its matter, but in our tangled understanding.” (*Philosophical Remarks*, 2, p 52)

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“Philosophy is a battle against the bewitchment
of our intelligence by means of language.”
(*Philosophical Investigations*, 109)

Our questions

What is Wittgenstein's response to skepticism in *On Certainty*?

Is this response successful?

Two interpretations

Two interpretations of Wittgenstein's response
skepticism in *On Certainty*

Framework view

Therapy view

Therapy view

Reveal source of skeptical problem (diagnosis)

Remove illusion (therapy)

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“But is it an adequate answer to the skepticism of the idealist, or the assurances of the realist, to say that ‘There are physical objects’ is nonsense? It would, however, be an answer to say: this assertion or its opposite is a misfiring attempt to express what can’t be expressed like that... ” (OC 37)

Misuse of "I know ..."

"Now, can one enumerate what one knows (like Moore)? Straight off like that, I believe not.— For otherwise the expression 'I know' gets misused. And through this misuse a queer and extremely important mental state seems to be revealed."
(OC 6)

Misuse of "I know ..."?

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(OC 6)

"We just do not see how very specialized our use of 'I know' is." (OC 11)

Use of 'know'

Wittgenstein examines the use of "know".
Examples:

"I know" \leftrightarrow "I am certain" (8)

If I say "I know it is so" then it is so, and if I say "He knows it is so" then it is so, but if he says "I know it is so" then it is so? No. (13)

Suggestion

If Moore says “I know that here is a hand” then “I know” is misused.

If a skeptic says “I don’t know that here is a hand” then “I don’t know” is misused.

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If Moore says “I know that here is a hand” then “I know” is misused.

If a skeptic says “I don’t know that here is a hand” then “I don’t know” is misused.

Why misused? And what would this show?

Doubt and "know"

“From its *seeming* to me—or to everyone—to be so, it doesn’t follow that it *is* so. What we can ask is whether it can make sense to doubt it.” (OC 2)

Doubt and "know"

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Doubt and "know"

1. Sometimes doubting makes sense, and sometimes doubting does not make sense.
2. "Know" is misused when doubting does not make sense.

When does doubting make sense?

“If e.g. someone says ‘I don’t know if there’s a hand here’ he might be told ‘Look closer’. This possibility of satisfying oneself is part of the language-game. Is one of its essential features. (OC 3)

When does doubting make sense?

“If I don’t know whether someone has two hands (say, whether they have been amputated or not) I shall believe his assurance that he has two hands if he is trustworthy. And if he says he *knows* it, that can only signify to me that he has been able to make sure, and hence that his arms are e.g. not still concealed by coverings and bandages, etc. etc. My believing the trustworthy man stems from my admitting that it is possible for him to make sure. But someone who says that perhaps there are no physical objects makes no such admission.” (OC 23)

Conclusions about doubt

1. Sometimes doubting makes sense, and sometimes doubting does not make sense.
2. "Know" is misused when doubting does not make sense.
3. When doubting makes sense, it is possible to make sure, possible to satisfy oneself.

Diagnosis

1. Sometimes doubting makes sense, and sometimes doubting does not make sense.
2. "Know" is misused when doubting does not make sense.
3. When doubting makes sense, it is possible to make sure, possible to satisfy oneself.
4. When Moore and the skeptic use "know" it is not possible to make sure. So they are both misusing "know".

Two kinds of doubt

“The statement ‘I know that here is a hand’ may then be continued: ‘for it’s *my* hand that I’m looking at.’ Then a reasonable man will not doubt that I know. — Nor will the idealist; rather he will say that he was not dealing with the practical doubt which is being dismissed, but there is a further doubt *behind* that one.— That this is an *illusion* has to be shown in a different way.” (OC 19)

Reply


1. Sometimes doubting makes sense, and sometimes doubting does not make sense.
2. "Know" is misused when doubting does not make sense.
3. When doubting makes sense, it is possible to make sure, possible to satisfy oneself.
4. When Moore and the skeptic use "know" it is not possible to make sure. So they are both misusing "know".

Reply by Moore or skeptic: 3 only applies to ordinary doubt. Philosophical doubt is different.

But what is philosophical doubt?

“The idealist’s question would be something like: ‘What right have I not to doubt the existence of my hands?’ (And to that the answer can’t be: I *know* that they exist.) But someone who asks such a question is overlooking the fact that doubt about existence only works in a language-game. Hence, that we should first have to ask: what would such a doubt be like? and don’t understand this straight off.” (OC 24)

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Diagnosis: "know" is being misused because
doubt does not make sense

Now what?

“But is it an adequate answer to the skepticism of the idealist, or the assurances of the realist, to say that ‘There are physical objects’ is nonsense? It would, however, be an answer to say: this assertion or its opposite is a misfiring attempt to express what can’t be expressed like that. And that it does misfire can be shown; but that isn’t the end of the matter. We need to realize that what presents itself to us as the first expression of a difficulty, or of its solution, may as yet not be correctly expressed at all. ” (OC 37)

Skepticism and calculation

“So is the *hypothesis* possible, that all the things around us don’t exist? Would that not be like the hypothesis of our having miscalculated in all our calculations?” (OC 55)