





Topics in Analytic Philosophy

Skepticism

Ludwig Wittgenstein (1889-1951)

Assignment

Available by next Tuesday

Due Tuesday 3 October

What we are talking about

On Certainty (1969)

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)

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".

Reply

Reply by Moore or skeptic:

That only applies to ordinary doubt.

Philosophical doubt is different.

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)

Two interpretations

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

Framework view

Therapy view

Framework

“I should like to say: Moore does not *know* what he asserts he knows, but it stands fast for him, as also for me; regarding it as absolutely solid is part of our *method* of doubt and enquiry.” (OC 151)

Framework

“I want to say: propositions of the form of empirical propositions, and not only propositions of logic, form the foundation of all operating with thoughts (with language).— This observation is not of the form "I know...". "I know ..." states what I know, and that is not of logical interest.” (OC 401)

Framework

the framework is something held firm

“foundation of all operating with thoughts (with language)”

“... regarding it as absolutely solid is part of our *method* of doubt and enquiry”

Framework

hinge

scaffolding

unused siding

axis of rotation

riverbed

Riverbed

“It might be imagined that some propositions, of the form of empirical propositions, were hardened and functioned as channels for such empirical propositions as were not hardened but fluid; and that this relation altered with time, in that fluid propositions hardened, and hard ones become fluid.” (OC 96)

Riverbed

“The mythology may change back into a state of flux, the river-bed of thoughts may shift. But I distinguish between the movement of the waters on the river-bed and the shift of the bed itself; though there is not a sharp division of the one from the other.” (OC 97)

Axis of rotation

“I do not explicitly learn the propositions that stand fast for me. I can *discover* them subsequently like the axis around which a body rotates. This axis is not fixed in the sense that anything holds it fast, but the movement around it determines its immobility.” (OC 152)

Siding

“Does my telephone call to New York strengthen my conviction that the earth exists? Much seems to be fixed, and it is removed from the traffic. It is so to speak shunted onto an unused siding.” (OC 210)

Scaffolding

“Now it gives our way of looking at things, and our researches, their form. Perhaps it was once disputed. But perhaps, for unthinkable ages, it has belonged to the *scaffolding* of our thoughts. (Every human being has parents.)” (OC 211)

Hinge

“That is to say, the *questions* that we raise and our *doubts* depend on the fact that some propositions are exempt from doubt, are as it were like hinges on which those turn.” (OC 341)

“That is to say, it belongs to the logic of our scientific investigations that certain things are *in deed* not doubted.” (OC 342)

Hinge

But it isn't that the situation is like this: We just *can't* investigate everything, and for that reason we are forced to rest content with assumption. If I want the door to turn, the hinges must stay put.”
(OC 343)

Example hinge propositions

I have two hands.

I have never been on the moon.

Hinge propositions

What properties do hinge propositions have?

"exempt from doubt" (OC 341)

“Why is it not possible for me to doubt that I have never been on the moon? And how could I try to doubt it?” (OC 117)

Beyond justification and doubt

“Why is it not possible for me to doubt that I have never been on the moon? And how could I try to doubt it?” (OC 117)

“But that means I want to conceive it as something that lies beyond being justified or unjustified; as it were, as something animal.” (OC 359)

The child learns by believing the adult. Doubt comes *after* belief. (OC 160)

Beyond justification and doubt

“The difficulty is to realize the groundlessness of our believing.” (OC 166)

“What would it be like to doubt now whether I have two hands? Why can't I imagine it at all? What would I believe if I didn't believe that? So far I have no system at all within which this doubt might exist.” (OC 247)

“At the foundation of well-founded belief lies belief that is not founded.” (OC 253)

Hinge propositions

Are not doubted or questioned

Make no sense to doubt or question

Neither justified nor unjustified

Role of hinge propositions

“I should like to say: Moore does not *know* what he asserts he knows, but it stands fast for him, as also for me; regarding it as absolutely solid is part of our *method* of doubt and enquiry.” (OC 151)

Role of hinge propositions

All testing, all confirmation and disconfirmation of a hypothesis takes place already within a system. And this system is not a more or less arbitrary and doubtful point of departure for all our arguments: no, it belongs to the essence of what we call an argument. The system is not so much the point of departure, as the element in which arguments have their life.” (OC 105)

Hinge propositions

Are not doubted or questioned

Make no sense to doubt or question

Neither justified nor unjustified

Essential to reasoning, argument, doubt, inquiry

Hinge propositions

Are not doubted or questioned

Make no sense to doubt or question

Neither justified nor unjustified

Essential to reasoning, argument, doubt, inquiry

Are they known? Do I know that I have two hands?

Important question

"If you do know that here is a hand we'll grant you all the rest."

Are hinge propositions known?

“I should like to say: Moore does not *know* what he asserts he knows, but it stands fast for him, as also for me; regarding it as absolutely solid is part of our *method* of doubt and enquiry.” (OC 151)

Are hinge propositions known?

“But on the other hand: how do I *know* that it is my hand? Do I even here know exactly what it means to say it is my hand?— When I say "how do I know?" I do not mean that I have the least *doubt* of it. What we have here is a foundation for all my action. But it seems to me that it is wrongly expressed by the words "I know". ” (OC 414)

Are hinge propositions known?

“To say of man, in Moore’s sense, that he *knows* something; that what he says is therefore unconditionally the truth, seems wrong to me.— It is the truth only inasmuch as it is an unmoving foundation of his language-games.” (OC 403)

Are hinge propositions known?

Yes (but it is wrong to say I know)

No (and skepticism is true)

No (but they support our knowledge anyway)

Questions

If hinge propositions known, then how?

If not, then how to avoid skepticism?