



BRILL

INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL FOR THE STUDY OF SKEPTICISM (2019) 1-

29



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The Point of Moore's Proof

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Abstract

The current standard interpretation of Moore's proof assumes he offers a solution to Kant's famously posed problem of an external world, which Moore quotes at the start of his 1939 lecture "Proof of an External World." As a solution to Kant's problem, Moore's proof would fail utterly. A second received interpretation imputes an aim of refuting metaphysical idealism that Moore's proof does not at all achieve. This study departs from received interpretations to credit the aim Moore announced for the proof Moore performed in his 1939 lecture. Moore's aim was to impose a counter-example to a stated presupposition of Kant's problem of an external world. Moore's lecture nevertheless neither endorses a replacement for Kant's problem nor acknowledges that an immediate implication of achieving his announced aim would subvert Kant's famously posed problem of an external world.

Keywords

epistemology – external world – skepticism – Moore – Kant – Wittgenstein

1 Introduction

Moore performed the proof of an external world, known as "Moore's proof," in his 1939 lecture "Proof of an External World." The opening of Moore's lecture quotes Kant's problem of an external world where the *Critique of Pure Reason* famously declares lack of a solution to Kant's external world problem a "scandal to philosophy" (Bxxxix). Subsequently, following his lecture's extended technical preliminary discussion (1939: 129–145), Moore introduced his performance of Moore's proof with an announcement of its aim. His

introduction cites a presupposition that Kant states together with the *Critique of Pure Reason's* previously quoted formulation of Kant's external world problem. Kant's problem presupposes that any proof that does not solve Kant's problem cannot provide a satisfactory proof of the existence of external things. The aim of his performance of Moore's proof was to impose a counter-example to Kant's problem's declared presupposition, as Moore announced:

Kant declares to be his opinion ... that there is only one possible proof of the existence of things outside of us, namely the one which he has given, I can now give a large number of different proofs, each of which is a perfectly rigorous proof. (1939: 145)

As Moore understood, and his rebuttal to an objection makes explicit, a proof that can solve Kant's problem must have premises sufficient to conclude that there is knowledge of external things or to conclude that skepticism is false about external things. To fulfill his announced aim for the performance of Moore's proof, Moore performed a proof that concludes there are external things from premises that do not suffice to imply that there is knowledge of external things or that skepticism is false about external things. The balance of Moore's 1939 lecture defends Moore's performance as a "perfectly rigorous" proof and, finally, rebuts two anticipated objections.

Unfortunately, received interpretations overlook Moore's stated aim. The standard interpretation evidently retains a presumption that the quotation of Kant's problem at its start devotes Moore's lecture to a goal of solving Kant's problem of an external world: "Moore sets himself the task of doing what Kant had earlier set himself to do" (Baldwin 2010). The fact that Moore's proof fails conspicuously as a solution to Kant's problem evidently has not led commentators generally to challenge the standard interpretation.¹ Influential current commentaries I discuss below offer diagnoses of the utter failure of Moore's proof "to marshal a response to skepticism" (Wright 2002: 337); or locate a specific failure of Moore's proof when "directed at a skeptic" (Pryor 2004: 369); or proceed from the standard interpretation to assess Moore's proof as philosophically irrelevant (Stroud 1984: 125–126).² The

¹ "Could Moore really imagine that he had refuted the radical sceptic with this argument?" (Maddy 2017: 164); "[Moore's proof] like Dr Johnson's before him—the episode of simple-minded *petitio* which it always seemed" (Wright 2002: 337).

² Thompson Clarke's hyperbole amplifies: "almost as though he [Moore] had had a

diagnosis by another current commentary is irony: "Would anyone who believed that a proof of the external world was needed be satisfied by Moore's Proof? No. ... [Moore intended] to show that there is no need for such a proof in the first place" (Soames 2003: 23). A second, less widely received interpretation that also overlooks Moore's proof's announced aim imputes an unattained metaphysical goal: "Moore's 'Proof' is not a refutation of scepticism, nor was it intended to be. It was intended to be a refutation of idealism: as such it is a total failure" (Baldwin 1990: 295).

Here, it may help to caution against a colloquial use of the expression "refutation of skepticism," which Moore's lecture does not employ. Colloquially, any proof we take to contribute knowledge of its conclusion may be said to be a generic refutation of skepticism. So a proof that concludes that there are external things and a starkly contrasting proof that has as its conclusion that skepticism is false about external things may each be said, using the colloquial expression, to be a "refutation of skepticism about external things." This caution recalls the distinction between a proof that concludes that some result is true and a proof that concludes that the result is known. Moore's performance fulfills the explicitly stated requirements he lists for a "perfectly rigorous" proof (1939: 146) by having premises that are known and that suffice to imply that Moore's proof's conclusion is true. Moore's proof can serve Moore's declared aim, because its premises do not suffice to imply that skepticism about external things is false or that the conclusion that does follow from Moore's proof is known. Any objection to Moore's Proof that depends on collapsing these distinctions is bound to miss the point of Moore's Proof.

Section 2 of this study reports Moore's generally neglected announcement of the aim of his performance of Moore's proof and supplies a full quotation of Kant's problem's presupposition, which Moore cites and explicitly targets. Section 3 sets out Moore's proof, including an often-overlooked key circumstance of its performance and Moore's defense of his performance as a "perfectly rigorous" proof. Section 4 locates Moore's proof solely in his 1939 lecture, by noting its absence from Moore's 1925 memoir "A Defense of Common Sense" and Moore's other famous published works. Sections 5 and 6 set out Moore's separate closing rebuttals to two contrasting anticipated objections. Section 7 considers three leading current commentaries that propose diagnoses for the failures they attribute to Moore's proof, followed

philosophical lobotomy" (Clarke 1972: 757).

by a brief conclusion.

2 Moore's Introduction

Moore opened his 1939 lecture "Proof of an External World" by reproducing Kant's famously posed problem of the existence of external things:

It still remains a scandal to philosophy...that the existence of things outside of us...must be accepted merely on *faith*, and that, if anyone thinks good to doubt their existence, we are unable to counter his doubts by any satisfactory proof.

KANT 1959: B xxxix³

Moore disclosed his aim for Kant's problem following his lecture's extended preliminary technical discussion (1939: 129–145). To introduce his performance of Moore's proof, Moore cited the presupposition Kant adds to the requirements Kant's problem sets. A proof that solves Kant's problem of an external world must be, not only a satisfactory or "strict" proof. The presupposition Kant explicitly includes together with the famous, previously quoted statement of his problem adds that a proof that solves Kant's problem must be:

... strict (also, as I [Kant] believe, the only possible) proof of the objective reality of outer intuition. (B xxxix)

Moore understood this presupposition, which is posed in a Kantian idiom, to specify that the only possible satisfactory proof that there are external things is the proof Kant sought to provide in his *Critique of Pure Reason*. The introduction Moore gave the performance of Moore's proof announced his aim to illustrate a satisfactory proof that violates the requirement Kant's famously posed problem presupposes:

It seems to me that, so far from its being true, as Kant declares to be his opinion, that there is only one possible proof of the existence of things outside of us, namely the one which he has given, I can now give a large



³ In addition to quoting Kemp Smith's English translation, Moore's note adds Kant's German.

number of different proofs, each of which is a perfectly rigorous proof.
(1939: 145)

Moore confirmed in the rebuttal that dispels the second of two objections at his lecture's close, as Section 5 discusses below, not only that Moore understood Kant's problem of an external world to presuppose that any satisfactory proof that there are external things must have premises sufficient to imply that skepticism is false about external things. Also, this rebuttal confirms that Moore's announced intention to offer a counter-example to Kant's problem's presupposition aims to illustrate a satisfactory, or "perfectly rigorous" proof of the conclusion that there are external things from premises that do not also imply that skepticism is false about external things.

Moore does not at all dispute that there could be a proof that solves Kant's problem by providing some satisfactory proof that concludes that skepticism is false about external things. His lecture declines to discuss Kant's solution even where his lecture divulges Moore's negative opinion of the solution that the *Critique of Pure Reason* offers: "But I [Moore] think it is by no means certain that Kant's proof is satisfactory" (1939: 128). In addition, the question Moore's 1939 lecture announces as his general topic asks:

[W]hat sort of proof, if any, can be given of "the existence of things outside of us"[?]?... [T]o discuss this question was my object when I began to write the present lecture. (1939: 127)

The whole of his lecture s confirm that Moore directs his argument, not its solution, but solely t's problem. Nevertheless Moore endorses no replacement for Kant's famously posed problem nor does he acknowledge the subversive result of achieving his announced aim for Kant's problem. Moore also disregards that related question of whether some proof could both conclude that skepticism about *a posteriori* knowledge is false and not imply that there are external things. Moore's attention exclusively to Kant's problem recalls his earlier Socratic caution against "the attempt to answer questions, without first discovering precisely *what* question it is which you desire to answer" (Moore 1903a: vii).

Moore devoted his 1939 lecture to imposing and defending the counter-example he performed to Kant's problem's presupposition.⁴

⁴ Needless to say, neither did Moore question Kant's command of the distinction between a

3 Performance

Moore's performance before his lecture audience follows this somewhat abridged script:

I can prove now, for instance, that two human hands exist. How? By 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'...by doing this I have proved *ipso facto* the existence of external things....(1939: 145–146)

Preliminaries that Moore settles in the extended passage that precedes his performance (1939: 129–145) adopt some Kantian distinctions that his lecture's extended preliminary passage introduces, in part, to avoid dispute about interpreting his proof's conclusion, in part, to discourage suggestion that the inference Moore's proof draws is enthymematic.

A manifest, but silent crucial preliminary to Moore's performance is the set-up that locates all subjects of Moore's proof in his lecture audience, within sight of his hand gestures. Moore allows it to go without saying that, unlike its premise, the conclusion of Moore's proof is not a result subjects can know just by visual sense perception. The set-up that confines Moore's subjects to the viewers of his performance excludes any hallway auditors who do not see Moore's performance, we readers of the lecture's published text, as well as anyone whose knowledge of Moore's performance rests second-hand on some subject's testimony. Props for Moore's performance are the hands he displays within sight of all subjects, but he could have used shoes, soap bubbles, prosthetic hands, or other external things his lecture mentions. Premise (H) does not imply that the hands subjects see are Moore's hands. So (H) cannot prompt the current "Brain in Vat" skeptical hypothesis that would picture Moore as an otherwise disembodied human brain.⁵ Aside from helping to direct his auditors' attention, Moore's narration is dispensable. We readers of "Proof of an External World" rely on Moore's narrative as testimony about the storied occasion, 22nd November 1939, when the premise of Moore's proof was true and subjects who viewed his

proof of some conclusion and a proof that the conclusion is known or a proof that skepticism is false about that conclusion.

⁵ Contrast the meditator in Descartes's *First Meditation*: "I am here, sitting by the fire ... holding this piece of paper in my hands...."

performance could gain perceptual knowledge of the premise of Moore's proof.

Moore is the one subject who has additional, non-perceptual knowledge of the premise and charge over its demonstration. These features that are peculiar to its performer make no contribution to Moore's proof; the lecturer himself participates just as another subject. Neither do the premises of Moore's proof record visual sense experiences that are peculiar to each subject. Moore's performance does provide the occasion for each of his subjects to gain visual perceptual knowledge that premise (H) of Moore's proof is true.

Moore initially states the premise without indexical terms that fix both the place and time of Moore's performance:

(H) Here is one hand, and here is another.

From (H) it follows that

(X) There are external things.

Subjects for Moore's proof are witnesses who see Moore's hand gestures on the occasion (H) records when they acquired visual perceptual knowledge that (H) is true and inferred from (H) that Moore's proof's conclusion (X) is true. Among them, Moore himself acquires visual perceptual knowledge of (H) and deduces (X). So Moore's performance offers a satisfactory proof of its conclusion, that there are external things. These premises that do not also imply that skepticism is false about external things. Consequently, as his introduction to the performance of his proof promised, Moore performed a satisfactory proof that there are external things that is a counter-example to Kant's problem's presupposition that only a solution to Kant's problem of an external world can be a satisfactory proof that there are external things.

Moore's defense of his performance endorses his proof in superlative terms: "the proof which I gave was a perfectly rigorous one; ... it is perhaps impossible to give a better or more rigorous proof of anything whatever" (1939: 145). To back his endorsement Moore credits his proof with satisfying a trio of requirements necessary for a proof to be satisfactory or "perfectly rigorous," and he adds a subordinate indicator of his proof's perfect rigor. Moore's lecture already defended his performance as fulfilling the

requirement that “the conclusion ... follow from the premiss,” that (X) follows from (H), where his lecture’s extended preliminary passage elicits from Kant a mutually agreeable interpretation of “things outside of us.”⁶ Hands, like the soap bubbles Moore cites as exemplary external things, are of a sort that can exist when not perceived, whether or not, like some soap bubbles, they ever do exist when not perceived:

I shall have proved that there are now “things outside of us”... if I can prove that there now exist two sheets of paper, or two human hands, or two shoes, or two socks, etc. (1939: 145)

Moore acknowledges Kant’s “transcendental” sense in which “external” means “existing *as a thing in itself* distinct from us.” Moore notes, “it is notorious that he [Kant] himself held that ... if ‘external’ be used in that [transcendental] sense, from the proposition [(H)]...it will *not* follow that there are external things” (1939: 139). As he passes over this sense of “external,” Moore comments: “What this supposed [transcendental] sense is I do not think that Kant himself ever succeeded in explaining clearly; nor do I know of any reason for supposing that [other] philosophers ever have used “external” in a sense, such that in *that* sense things that are to be met with in space are *not* external.” Without pause, Moore proceeds to a common understanding of “things outside us”: “But how about the other sense, in which, according to Kant, the word ‘external’ has been commonly used—that which he [Kant] calls ‘empirically external?’” (1939: 139).

For subjects of Moore’s Proof who acquire perceptual knowledge of (H) from Moore’s performance, Moore prompts an inference to the intermediate conclusion:

(H+) There are at least two human hands.

(H+) implies (X), since hands, rocks, soap bubbles are each “things outside us.” Here, since (H+) is so well known as to merit David Lewis’s label “Moorean Fact,” it may be questioned why Moore should not offer a proof of (X) that relies on (H+) as its sole premise. One answer Moore’s 1939 lecture



⁶ [L. J. B. \(2009: 6\)](#): “How he [Moore] knows ... that there is an external world ... is by combining the thing he knows by perception ... with something else that he knows by philosophical means”.

suggests would acknowledge the indexical ingredients in premise (H) and offer as disqualification of (H+) that it is reproducible and portable. A subject can know that (H+) is true from testimony, without current sense perception of any human hands.

Moore enlists (H+) in his explicit endorsement of his performance as satisfying one of the requirements necessary for a perfectly rigorous proof. Rather than recur to his prior defense of his proof's inference from (H) to (X), Moore adds that "the conclusion did follow from the premiss": "This is as certain, as it is that if there is one hand here and another here *now*, then it follows that [(H+)] there are two hands in existence *now*."(147)

Moore credits his performance with fulfilling a second requirement necessary for a perfectly rigorous proof by crediting subjects with gaining knowledge of premise (H). Moore's defense considers a gainsayer who would deny that the subjects who witness Moore's performance earn knowledge of premise (H). Moore rebuts, as follows:

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! (1939: 146–147)

For a veteran subject of Moore's proof, Moore's assertion can serve as reminder that during Moore's performance she acquired knowledge of Moore's proof's premise (H) by visual perception of gesturing human hands. Similarly, the lecturer currently knows, without advertised display, that he is standing up talking, as a subject in Moore's audience may know she is currently seated and silent. The reminder at last prompts Moore explicitly to supply to (H) its temporal index:

The first was a proof that two human hands existed at the time when I gave the proof....(1939: 148)

Moore issues no additional allegations of absurdity, as his lecture considers no additional gainsaying that merely denies, and offers no reasoned support for denying, that subjects gained knowledge of Moore's proof's premise (H). To dispel a reasoned objection at his lecture's close that also denies subjects of Moore's performance gain knowledge of its premise, Moore does not allege absurdity.

Unfortunately, some influential commentaries suppose that knowledge of

Moore's proof's premise rests on nothing other than Moore's mere dismissal of gainsaying. One commentator contends that Moore "...takes it to be a requirement ... that he should know the premisses of his proof to be true. How can he show this to be so? It is here that Moore makes the straightforward assertion of knowledge ... 'I [Moore] certainly did at the moment know...'"⁷ This comment evidently overlooks the circumstance of Moore's performance of his proof within sight of an attentive lecture audience and the occasion when Moore and the other subjects of Moore's proof gain knowledge of its premise (H) by visual perception.⁸ Further, if this use of the expression "an assertion of knowledge" implies that when Moore gains knowledge of (H), what he asserts is that he knows (H), it must be said that Moore's performance of his proof issues no such assertion.

Moore's use of "certain" assigns no superlative level to subjects' certainty of (H) above an epistemic level that matches his own certainty, as he says, "that I am now standing up and talking."

An objection from Wittgenstein turns from the question Moore anticipates of whether subjects gain knowledge of (H) to the separate question of how subjects gain knowledge of Moore's proof's premise. This objection supposes that the premise specifies Moore's own hands and questions how Moore himself knows that the premise is true. Wittgenstein denies that Moore's sight of his hands could be evidence for the premise: "My having two hands is, in normal circumstances, as certain as anything that I could produce in evidence for it. That is why I am not in a position to take the sight of my hand as evidence for it" (Wittgenstein 1969: Section 250). However, as noted above, premise (H) of Moore's proof does not imply that the hands its subjects see are Moore's hands. Also, since Moore does not grant that his proof yields a conclusion that is any less certain than its premise, Moore reveals no allegiance to the assumption of Wittgenstein's objection, that (H) must be less certain than evidence that confers certainty on (H).

Moore's "Proof of an External World" offers no positive answer to the separate epistemological questions of how subjects' sense experiences contribute to their earning perceptual knowledge or certainty of results such

⁷ Cf. Bonjour (2010: 77): "Moore simply asserted that we do have knowledge of such things ... hat he has hands..." See also Baldwin (1990: 291).

⁸ Cf. Nagel (2014: 18): "After shrugging off the sceptic's worries as absurd, Moore aims to explain why he won't produce a proof that he has hands, and why we should still accept him as having knowledge on this point."

as premise (H). The argument of his 1939 lecture commits Moore neither to endorse a nominally appropriate answer from “Moorean reasoning” that can credit some experiences as sufficient for perceptual knowledge of (H) nor to oppose Kantian answers that add epistemic prerequisites that are not themselves evidence for (H).⁹ A negative answer, discussed below, rebuts the first of two objections Moore anticipates at his lecture’s close. There, Moore argues that reports of subjects’ sense experiences could not suffice to imply that (H) is true or, consequently, imply that (X) is true. Moore’s defense of his performance answers questions of whether its premises are known without engaging questions of how subjects’ sense experience contributes to their visual sense perception.

Moore’s defense of his performance as having a premise that was “something I *knew* to be the case” and having a “conclusion [that] did really follow [from the premise]” fulfill two of the requirements he lists as necessary for a perfectly rigorous proof. The third requirement Moore’s performance satisfies just by having a conclusion that does not repeat its premise.

Moore adds a supplement to his lecture’s defense of his performance that adds neither a fourth necessary condition for perfectly rigorous proof nor a sufficient condition:

Are there any other conditions necessary for a rigorous proof...?
Perhaps there may be; I do not know; but I do want to emphasize that, so far as I can see, we all of us do constantly take proofs of this sort as absolutely conclusive proofs of certain conclusions—as finally settling certain questions as to which we previously were in doubt. (1939: 147)

Moore devotes the supplement to confirming that his performance includes a perfectly rigorous proof of (H+) that consequently provides knowledge of its premise (H). The supplement compares Moore’s performance with conduct of a proof of a sort that, Moore claims, “we all of us do constantly take” as relieving doubt about its conclusion. Moore adds that the example would not relieve doubt unless it were a perfectly rigorous proof that consequently, as he concludes, has premises that are known. Notably, Moore does not conclude that the exemplary proof relieves doubt about its conclusion or conclude that the similar proof that Moore performs relieves

⁹ Similarly, Moore’s 1939 argument abstains from related issues about closure. Cf. Klein (2015).

doubt or provides knowledge that there are external things. His reason, evidently, is just that this supplement begins conditionally, starting from Moore's claim that we do in fact take proofs such as the example illustrates to relieve doubt or provide knowledge of their conclusions.

The supplement's illustrative proof offers to relieve doubt about a number of misprints:

Suppose, for instance, it were a question whether there were as many as three misprints on a certain page in a certain book. A says there are, B is inclined to doubt it. How could A prove that he is right? Surely he *could* prove it by taking the book, turning to the page, and pointing to three separate places on it, saying 'There's one misprint here, another here, and another here': surely that is a method by which it *might* be proved! (1939: 147)

This proof that "we all of us do constantly take" as sufficient to relieve doubt or to supply knowledge of its conclusion can relieve doubt about its conclusion only if it is a perfectly rigorous proof that consequently has premises that are known or certain. Moore says: "[It] would not have proved ... that there were at least three misprints on the page in question unless it was certain there was a misprint in each of the places to which he pointed." The supplement can confirm similarly that subjects of Moore's proof earn certainty of its premise conditionally, provided we also take the proof Moore performs to be a proof of the sort that relieves doubt that its conclusion is true. Moore ventures a conditional conclusion: "if such a thing as that could ever be certain, then assuredly it was certain just now that there is one hand in one of the two places I indicated and another in the other [(H)]" (1939: 147).

Notably, Moore's lecture does not cast the illustrative proof as a supposed unexceptionable model of perfect rigor, which Moore's proof matches. The illustrative proof does match Moore's proof by deriving its conclusion, that there are at least three misprints, from premises that are known by visual sense perception and that do not also imply that its conclusion is known or that skepticism about its conclusion is false.

Following Moore's defense of his performance as a proof that fulfills three necessary conditions as well as a supplement, Moore is prepared to add a proof that concludes that there were in the past external things:

How then can I prove that there have been external objects in the past? Here is one proof. I can say: 'I held up two hands above this desk not

very long ago; therefore two hands existed not very long ago; therefore at least two external objects have existed at some time in the past, Q.E.D.' (1939: 147)

A subject's memory knowledge that (H) was true can suffice for her current knowledge that there were external things in the past. This proof is available just to the subjects of Moore's proof who previously knew (H) by visual perception.

Below, Sections 4 and 5 turn to two anticipated objections Moore rebutted at the close of "Proof of an External World." The next section contrasts Moore's 1939 lecture with each of six published works. The outcome cautions against objections Moore could not have anticipated that depend on mistakenly supposing that Moore's published work presents Moore's proof elsewhere than in "Proof of an External World."


4 Elsewhere


Among Moore's published works prior his 1939 lecture, Moore's 1925 memoir "A Defense of Common Sense" offers no place for performance of Moore's proof. The audience for Moore's 1925 memoir are readers who must take, or leave Moore's written word for it that he does know what he testifies to knowing: "In answer to this question ['But do I really know...?'], I think I have nothing better to say than that it seems to me that I *do* know them, with certainty" (Moore 1925: 44). Such testimony makes no contribution to the visual perceptual knowledge that the audience in "Proof of an External World" gains of Moore's proof's premise (H). Unfortunately, conflation of Moore's 1939 lecture with his 1925 memoir has prompted some to assume the subjects of Moore's proof owe their knowledge of its premise, not to visual sense perception, but somehow to common sense: "Even philosophers who are receptive to Moore's suggestion that there is something wrong with the sceptic's reasoning may feel unsatisfied with Moore's plain and stubborn insistence on his common-sense knowledge" (Nagel 2014: 20); "Proof of an External World... [issues] an appeal to common sense (though he [Moore] does not actually use the phrase) in order to provide a refutation of idealist doubts about the existence of the external world" (Baldwin 1993: viii; cf. Soames 2014: 225). A current objection to Moore's proof also overlooks the visual perceptual knowledge Moore's performance of his proof provides of premise (H) to his lecture audience's subjects. This objection supposes there is needed testimony that Moore fails to provide: "Moore doesn't seem ready

or able to offer any considerations at all in favor of the claim that he has a hand.... This is why Moore's 'proof strikes us as so unsatisfactory" (Pryor 2000: 518). Conflation of his 1939 lecture's argument with Moore's 1925 memoir that prompts disregard for the contribution of visual sense perception in Moore's proof may help account for Wittgenstein's evidently misdirected objection: "The wrong use made by Moore of the proposition 'I know ...' lies in his regarding it as an utterance as little subject to doubt as 'I am in pain'..." (Wittgenstein 1969: Section 178).

Moore later commented on his 1939 lecture. His 1942 "A Reply to My Critics" uses the expression "refutation of p" to mean "proof of the conclusion that not-p," where Moore corrects a critic's comment about the already famous proof in his 1939 "Proof of an External World." The critic says "wrongly...that my refutation was intended to be a refutation of 'Nobody knows that there are external objects,' whereas it was only intended to be a refutation of 'There are no external objects'..." (Moore 1968: 673–674). Moore's correction declines to add that this critic also overlooks his 1939 lecture's stated aim and accomplishment. Using the terminology of Moore's 1942 "Reply," a restatement of Moore's proof's offering "a refutation of 'Nobody knows that there are external objects'" would credit Moore's proof as a counter-example to Kant's problem's presupposition that only a "refutation of 'Nobody knows that there are external objects'" can be a satisfactory "refutation of 'There are no external objects'."

The argument of Moore's later "Four Forms of Skepticism" is foreign to Moore's 1939 lecture that eschews both claims to second-order knowledge and claims of comparative levels of certainty.¹⁰ This often-cited passage from "Four Forms of Skepticism" lists four assumptions that together imply it is false that "I do know that this is a pencil." In "Four Forms of Skepticism" Moore reports this comparison: "It seems to me *more* certain that I *do* know that this is a pencil...than that any single one of these four assumptions is true, let alone all four" (Moore 1940–1944: 226). Not so often cited is Moore's emphatic reservation that closes "Four Forms of Skepticism":

And how on earth is it to be decided which of two things it is *rational* to be most certain of? 


MOORE 1940–1944: 226 


¹⁰ Pace Lycan (2007) and Weatheral (2015).

Moore abides by this reservation throughout "Proof of an External World," where he abstains from second-order epistemic claims throughout. Further, the same reservation would add a bar to interpolating into Moore's 1939 lecture an application of his 1940–1944 argument that re-purposes Moore's proof to treat as a false skeptical hypothesis the negation of its conclusion, $\sim(X)$, and to contend on Moore's behalf that it is *more* certain that I *do* know that (H) than that $\sim(X)$ is true, that there are no external things.

Moore's 1941 lecture "Certainty" also departs notably from the argument in "Proof of an External World." Moore's 1939 lecture duly bars any current dreamer from service as a subject of Moore's proof because (a) a subject who gains perceptual knowledge of premise (H) cannot also be dreaming. Moore adds that he himself "has conclusive evidence that I am awake," but in 1939 Moore does not grant that (b) having knowledge or conclusive evidence that he is not dreaming is necessary for a subject to gain perceptual knowledge of Moore's proof's premise (H). In "Certainty" Moore reaffirms (a): "From the hypothesis that I am dreaming, it would, I think, certainly follow that I don't *know* for certain that I am standing up....," but does grant (b): "I agree...that if I don't know that I'm not dreaming, it follows that I don't know that I am standing up" (Moore 1941: 247). This endorsement of (b) in "Certainty" departs from his 1939 lecture. I note both the editorial caution by Casimir Lewy (Moore 1959: 251), and, in Moore's "Preface" dated September 1958, Moore's reference to "bad mistakes ... [in "Certainty"] which I cannot yet see how to put right" (Moore 1959: unnumbered page). Whether granting (b) is among these "bad mistakes," Moore did not say.

Thirty years earlier, in "Hume's Philosophy," Moore's argument anticipated neither the task of subverting Kant's problem in "Proof of an External World" nor his performance of Moore's proof. In 1909, Moore implied rather that second-order knowledge is indispensable:

How is the skeptic to prove to himself that he does know any external facts? He can only do it by bringing forward some instance of an external fact, which he does know; and in assuming that he does know this one, he is, of course, begging the question...The skeptic can, with perfect internal consistency, deny that he does know y. But it can, I think, be shown that he has no reason for denying it.

MOORE 1909: 159–160 

The specimen Moore "brings forward" in 1909 exhibits a subject's having knowledge of an "external fact." By conceding that he is begging the question

by “assuming that he does know,” Moore declines to offer any defense against gainsaying that would dispute his claim that what he does “bring forward” is knowledge of an external fact. Evidently, in 1909 Moore was not prepared either separately to defend, or to avoid issuing second-order knowledge claims on behalf of a specimen of his knowledge of an “external fact.” In contrast, the specimens Moore’s performance in his 1939 lecture may be said to “bring forward” for the lecturer and for the other subjects of Moore’s proof to see are gesturing hands.¹¹

Moore’s 1903 “The Refutation of Idealism” aims its argument to refute the thesis, “whatever is experienced is necessarily so,” that he treats as a version of the characteristic idealist metaphysical doctrine that anything known to exist is also necessarily known (Moore 1903b: 12). In contrast with this 1903 article, Moore’s 1939 lecture aimed to refute the stated epistemic doctrine that the *Critique of Pure Reason* included as a presupposition of Kant’s problem of an external world, that any satisfactory proof that external things exist is necessarily a proof that concludes skepticism is false about external things or that concludes that it is known that external things exist.

A result of this survey helps confirm generally that Moore’s published work includes Moore’s proof only in his 1939 lecture “Proof of an External World.”

5 Premise Known by Visual Perception

Moore devoted the close of “Proof of an External World” to two objections that stem from opposed traditions in epistemology. The two objections issue contrasting demands for some additional proof of Moore’s proof’s premise, which Moore’s responses separately rebut.¹² Neither of Moore’s rebuttals merely reminds that a proof can have premises that are not themselves proven. Each objection does protest that there is some “point in question” Moore’s proof fails to resolve:

¹¹ Cf. Neta (2007: 83): “By Moore’s lights, his Proof is not intended to give us knowledge that we might not already have, but rather to display to us the knowledge that we already have...” Cf. also Baldwin (1990: 291): “[Moore gives] an exhibition of knowledge [that proceeds] by means of an appeal to the audience’s beliefs concerning what is known.”

¹² Cf. Weatherall (2015: 14): “As Moore acknowledges there, he cannot *prove* his premises...”; and Pryor (2000: 518): “Moore says that his proof is perfectly satisfactory ... even though, as he admits, he is not able to ‘prove [its premise].’”

... I am perfectly well aware that, in spite of all that I have said, many philosophers will still feel that I have not given any satisfactory proof of the point in question. (1939: 148)

Moore's rebuttals treat the two objections entirely separately.

The first objectors condemn Moore's proof generally for superficiality and consequent philosophical ineffectuality. These objectors grant that Moore's proof is faultless so far as it goes; they do not dispute that Moore's subjects gain knowledge of premise (H) or deny that an outcome provides a satisfactory proof of its conclusion (X). Moore specifies the supplement these objectors demand:

I can make an approach to explaining what ... [these first objectors] want by saying that if I had proved the propositions which I used as *premises* in my two proofs, then they would perhaps admit that I had proved the existence of external things, but, in the absence of such a proof (which, of course, I have neither given nor attempted to give), they will say that I have not given what they mean by a proof of the existence of external things. (1939: 149)

Moore states this objection in terms of what "some people mean by a proof of an external world." However, these objectors do not differ from Moore about the requirements for a satisfactory proof. Their objection aims rather at the reliance by Moore's proof on subjects' visual sense perception to provide knowledge of its premise. The first objectors insist that a proof that derives Moore's conclusion that there are external things have premises that are anchored more profoundly than in knowledge a subject can gain by visual sense perception. Moore's rebuttal does not dispute that his proof should be dismissed as superficial and his performance could be omitted as superfluous, in case there were a proof of the sort these objectors demand. Further, Moore's rebuttal does not at all discourage theorizing and experimenting on questions of how sensory experience contributes to a subject's gaining perceptual knowledge of results such as premise (H) of Moore's proof. Moore's rebuttal argues, rather, that the result of imposing a supplement that would satisfy these objectors yields an effort to prove the conclusion (X) of Moore's proof that is irremediably flawed.

Moore first contrasts this objection with a demand for proof of Moore's proof's premise (H) that fails to raise any objection at all:

If one of you [subjects of Moore's proof] suspected that one of my

hands was artificial he might be said to get a proof of ...[(H)], by coming up and examining the suspected hand close up, perhaps touching and pressing it and so establishing that it really was a human hand. (1939: 149)

By “establishing that it really was a human hand,” Moore means supplying a proof of (H). He should not be taken to say merely that those among Moore’s Proof’s subjects who are myopic or suspicious can supplement their earlier viewing by scrutinizing Moore’s hands from a closer vantage, perhaps adding exploratory pokes that further confirm (H). A subject could supply a proof of (H) rather by closer scrutiny that allows the subject first to gain knowledge of some result that implies (H), for example:

(H”) Here are two gloveless human hands.

Of course, a result such as (H”) can imply (H), only if (H”) alone implies (X). So such an unqualified demand for some proof or other of premise (H) is one that is met by merely multiplying examples that differ insignificantly from Moore’s proof.

Moore understands that the supplement the first objectors would add to relieve Moore’s proof’s superficiality would be rather a proof of (H) from premises (S) that are not known by sense perception but are known rather by introspection. (S) may include premises such as: “It appears that (H)” or “It is to me as if (H).” Consequently, since (H) implies (X), the first objectors require that (S) suffices to imply (X). Moore rebuts:

If this is what is meant by proof of the existence of external things, I do not believe that any proof of the existence of external things is possible. (1939: 149)

Moore’s rebuttal argues that from premises (S) it does not follow that (H); so the proof of (H) the first objectors would add yields a result that also fails to imply (X). His argument credits Descartes:

How am I to prove...[(H)]? I do not believe I can do it. In order to do it, I should need to prove for one thing, as Descartes pointed out, that I am not now dreaming. But how can I prove that I am not? I have, no doubt, conclusive reasons for asserting that I am not now dreaming; I have conclusive evidence that I am awake: but that is a very different thing from being able to prove it. (1939: 149)

There is something Descartes “pointed out” that both exempts Moore’s proof, and burdens a subject of the first objectors’ proposed proof with a futile task of proving that (not-D), that I am not now dreaming. Moore’s rebuttal leaves implicit his answer to a question of just what Descartes pointed out that sets the first objectors this task of proving (not-D). The answer is not that dreaming excludes the objector’s proposed proof from having premises that imply that (H) is true. Moore’s well known quip about some Duke of Devonshire discourages taking his rebuttal to overlook a result of its punch line: “He once dreamt that he was speaking in the House of Lords and, when he woke up, found that he was speaking in the House of Lords” (Moore 1940–1944: 245). What is excluded when a member of Moore’s audience dreams that (H) is not that (H) is true; it is rather that she gains visual perceptual knowledge that (H). So a dozing member of Moore’s audience would miss her opportunity to serve as a subject of Moore’s proof, in case she was dreaming during Moore’s performance. Further, she would miss her opportunity, even in the utterly unlikely event that, synchronously with Moore’s exhibition, she dreamt of Moore performing Moore’s Proof just as he did. Evidently, Moore credits Descartes with having “pointed out” a general principle, which Moore explicitly instances elsewhere: “From the hypothesis that I am dreaming, it would, I think, certainly follow that I don’t *know* that I am standing up...” (Moore 1941: 245).

(D-Prin) A subject’s dreaming excludes the subject from currently gaining visual perceptual knowledge of results such as (H).

Any current dreamer is disqualified from service as subject of Moore’s proof by (D-Prin). In contrast, a subject is not barred while dreaming, or as a result of what she dreams, from acquiring knowledge of results such as (S). Consequently, as Moore’s rebuttal can conclude, the objectors who demand proof of Moore’s proof’s premise (H) just from premises such as (S) are saddled with a task of proving (not-D) from premises that are known as (S) can be known, just by introspection. The outcome burdens the first objectors with an impossible task.

Moore puts this outcome indirectly by confiding, for his own part, that he cannot prove (not-D), and he leaves implicit, though unmistakable, that neither can these objectors derive (not-D) just from premises known by introspection. Here, Moore's rebuttal emphasizes the stark contrast his 1939 lecture observes between the proof Moore performed that concludes (X), that there are external things, on one side, and, on the other, any similar proof aimed to conclude that (not-D) is true. No variant of Moore's Proof can conclude that the subject is not dreaming. Also, Moore's disavowal of any proof that concludes that (not-D) helps confirm that his lecture does not require that subjects for Moore's proof have second-order knowledge of the perceptual knowledge they gain of premise (H). Such second-order knowledge could be enlisted in an argument for not-(D) that offers to supply knowledge that not-(D).

It must be said nevertheless that the answer is unhelpful that Moore volunteers to the question, Why, despite having "conclusive evidence" that (not-D), can he not prove (not-D)? Moore answers: "I could not tell you what all my evidence is; and I should require to do this at least, in order to give you a proof" (1939: 149). If by "all my evidence" Moore includes all evidence that would suffice for a proof, Moore's answer amounts to a mere restatement that he cannot prove (not-D). If construed more widely, then the task of mobilizing "all my evidence" imposes an unwanted demand on proofs generally that Moore's proof, in particular, fails to satisfy.

Moore's acknowledgement of his own inability to prove (not-D), because it applies as well to the first objectors, serves to deny that the first objectors' premises (S), which can be known by introspection, can provide any satisfactory proof of (not-D). Consequently, the first objectors' proposed repair for the superficiality their objection alleges in Moore's proof is defenseless against Moore's rebuttal: if introspective knowledge cannot suffice for a proof of (not-D), and a subject's gaining perceptual knowledge of (H) implies (not-D), then introspective knowledge cannot provide premises for a proof of (X). Moore's rebuttal rejects the supplement to Moore's proof the first objectors demand, in short, because of their objection's implicit ludicrous consequence that a satisfactory proof of an external world could have subjects all of whom are dreaming.

Moore's rebuttal to the first objectors' allegation of superficiality confirms that subjects' perceptual knowledge of Moore's proof's premise (H) is not dispensable.

Moore closed his 1939 lecture by anticipating, and rebutting a second objection that he contrasts with the first. Although both of these anticipated objections demand some proof of the premise (H), Moore contrasts the

different proofs that each demands. The first objectors demand replacement of Moore's proof's premise with premises that subjects known by introspection. As noted above, Moore's rebuttal denies that any such demand can be satisfied. The second objectors demand an "extra proof" that would condemn Moore's proof as unsatisfactory and replace its conclusion.

6 Conclusion: There Are External Things

The second objectors Moore anticipated, unlike the first, "want a proof of something I [Moore] have not proven." Also unlike the first objectors, the second objectors' demands do not merely promote their own preferred supplement to Moore's proof. These objectors contend rather, because Moore offers no "extra proof," that Moore's performance fails to provide a satisfactory proof of its conclusion (X) that there are external things:

[T]hey think that, if I cannot give such extra proofs, then the proofs that I have given are not conclusive proofs at all. And this, I think, is a definite mistake. (1939: 149)

The "definite mistake" Moore rejects is that any such "extra proofs" are necessary for Moore's performance to be a conclusive proof of Moore proof's conclusion (X), that there exist external things. Silently, Moore credits these objectors with granting that the reasoning of Moore's Proof is valid. So the second objectors contend that, for lack of an "extra proof" of its premise (H), Moore's performance fails to provide a satisfactory proof of its conclusion because the proof's premise (H) is not known.

It is specifically "extra proof" that Moore's rebuttal denies is needed for subjects who witnessed his performance to know premise (H):

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 premises of my two proofs. (1939: 150)

Moore's rebuttal to the second objection both identifies the "extra proofs" these objectors hold necessary for subjects of Moore's proof to know premise (H) and confirms that the presupposition Kant confided belongs to the *Critique of Pure Reason's* previously quoted external world problem:

[T]his view that, if I cannot prove such things as these, I do not know

them, is, I think, the view that Kant was expressing in the sentence which I quoted at the beginning of this lecture, when he implies that so long as we have no proof of the existence of external things, their existence must be accepted merely on faith. He means to say, I think, that if I cannot prove that there is a hand here, I must accept it merely as a matter of faith—I cannot know it. (1939: 150)

Since “this view” denies that subjects can know premise (H) without an “extra proof” of the existence of external things, the objection contends that Moore’s performance fails to prove its conclusion (X). The “extra proof” of (H) the second objectors demand would be a proof that suffices to solve Kant’s external world problem by concluding that (H) is known and, consequently, by concluding that skepticism is false about (X). Moore’s summary of this objection abbreviates “extra proof”: “if I cannot prove such things as these, I do not know them.” The objection contends that without an “extra proof” that suffices to conclude that skepticism is false about (X), Moore and the other subjects do not know Moore’s proof’s premise (H). Similarly, Moore adds a gloss on the famous statement of Kant’s external world problem: “so long as we have no proof of the existence of external things, their existence must be accepted merely on faith.” That is: without an “extra proof” of the existence of external things that suffices to conclude that skepticism is false about external things, such as a proof that concludes that (H) is known, there can be no knowledge of (H) and consequently no satisfactory proof of Moore’s proof’s conclusion (X). This further confirms that Moore understands that Kant’s famously posed problem in “the sentence which I quoted at the beginning of this lecture” includes its presupposition that only a proof that solves Kant’s problem of an external world is a proof of the existence of external things that can be satisfactory.

Duly, the defense Moore gives his rebuttal that traces the second objection to Kant’s problem’s presupposition has no need to add any claim to have second-order knowledge of premise (H); neither does Moore weigh the comparative level of certainty of (H) against the certainty level of the second objectors’ requirement that only a proof with premises that imply that skepticism is false about external things can be a satisfactory proof that there are external things. He issues no “neo-Moorean” claim that the Kantian requirement on which the second objectors rely amounts to a skeptical hypothesis that he knows to be false. Moore does not support his rebuttal by disparaging the second objectors’ own prospects of successfully fulfilling their demand for some “extra proof” that would suffice to imply that skepticism is false and to solve Kant’s problem of an external world. Still less

does Moore invoke the fact that, for proof of a conclusion to be satisfactory, it is generally not necessary that there be any additional proof that the conclusion is known or additional proof that skepticism is false about the conclusion. Rather, Moore adds just this deeply understated rationale:

Such a view, though it has been very common among philosophers, can, I think, be shown to be wrong—though shown only by use of premisses which are not known to be true, unless we [Moore and his lecture audience] do know of the existence of external things. (1939: 150)

Moore acknowledges that he lacks any non-question begging good reason for contradicting the second objectors claim that Moore's performance is an unsatisfactory proof of (X) absent additional "extra proofs." Immediately, Moore makes clear that this acknowledgement issues no belated concession. On the contrary, Moore credits his rebuttal to the second objectors with safely rejecting their objection that denies Moore's subjects know (H):

I [Moore] should say, therefore, that those, if any, who are dissatisfied with these proofs merely on the ground that I did not know their premisses, have no good reason for their dissatisfaction. (1939: 150)

Moore's rebuttal requires no non-question begging support, because the second objectors, for their part, "have no good reason" for denying that subjects can gain knowledge of Moore's proof's premise. As Moore observed, their objection rests on the presupposition he cited earlier in Kant's famously posed problem of an external world. Since the objection depends on the very presupposition Kant confides, and Moore's performance of his proof imposes a counterexample to Kant's presupposition, Moore duly concludes that the objectors advance no good reason for dissatisfaction with crediting Moore's performance as a satisfactory proof or with acknowledging that subjects gained perceptual knowledge of the premise of Moore's proof.

Moore did not suggest that the objections his lecture anticipates and dispels are exhaustive. There are objections Moore did not anticipate from some leading current commentaries that allege failures, and propose diagnoses. Unfortunately, the objections that the next section surveys overlook Moore's proof's stated aim.

7 Current Objections

Crispin Wright offers as a datum this report of uniform reactions to Moore's proof:

Everyone on first reading feels [that Moore's proof] blatantly begs the question. (Wright 2002: 330)¹³

As explanation of just how Moore's Proof begs the question, Wright presents his widely discussed transmission failure diagnosis: "transmission may fail in a case where there is warrant for the premises in the first place only because the conclusion is *antecedently* warranted." Wright diagnoses that Moore's Proof suffers from transmission failure because its subjects' experiences cannot provide them warrant for (H) unless some hypotheses are antecedently "in place." Wright's argument specifies, "among the hypotheses that need to be in place in order for ... Moore's experience—to have the evidential force that Moore assumes [is]...the hypothesis that there is indeed a material world.... So the 'Proof begs the question" (Wright 2002: 337).

The issue I raise here does not concern Wright's widely discussed diagnostic explanation of transmission failure or dispute his ascription to Moore's proof of premises that record subjects' experiences. I do question Wright's reported datum that proceeds from his stated assumption that Moore's proof aims "to marshal a response to skepticism" (Wright 2002: 337). Evidently, a survey question that could elicit Wright's datum would ask, "Does Moore's performance of his proof successfully marshal a response to skepticism about external things?" Unfortunately, however, the expression "a response to skepticism" fails to distinguish, on one side, a proof that would solve Kant's problem by concluding that skepticism is false about external things from, on the other, the satisfactory proof Moore aimed to subvert Kant's problem that concludes that there exist external things. A question noted above that Moore's 1939 lecture introduced at its start could serve as replacement for a question posed by Wright's reported survey. Moore's question asks: "[W]hat sort of proof, if any, can be given of 'the existence of things outside of us'["?]" (1939: 127). Imagine replacing a survey that yields

¹³ John McDowell concurs only conditionally: "[Moore's Proof] at least if taken at face value—is as unimpressive as nearly everyone finds it that is, an argument that directly responds to the sceptic's questioning whether there is an external world" (2009: 233, 235), also, with this qualification: "Moore may intend something more subtle" (2009: 233 n. 14).

Wright's reported datum with a survey that asks instead: "Is Moore's proof one sort of proof of the existence of external things that is satisfactory?" Participants' responses to this question, predictably, would leave Wright's explanation of why "Everyone on first reading feels [that Moore's proof] blatantly begs the question" deprived of its *explanandum*.

James Pryor starts from the datum presupposed by his question that asks, "why Moore's argument sounds so unconvincing." Pryor's answer would explain that "what's wrong with Moore's argument" is just that "anyone who had doubts about its conclusion couldn't *use* the argument to rationally overcome those doubts" (Pryor 2004: 351 emphasis in original; see Pryor 2012: 283–288). Without further discussion of Pryor's contribution, it must be said that the assessment by Pryor's question that supposes Moore's proof "so unconvincing" relies on Pryor's stated assumption that "Moore's argument is directed at a skeptic" (Pryor 2004: 369). Moore could agree that as directed at skepticism with regard to external things, the proof he performed would be as ineffectual dialectically as an unexceptionable proof of the Pythagorean theorem would be ineffectual if directed at skepticism with regard to mathematics. When Moore's proof is understood, as he announced, as directed at Kant's external world problem and its stated presupposition, Moore's effort may appear more convincing.

Barry Stroud's standard interpretation of Moore's "Proof of an External World" assumes Moore's proof aims to solve Kant's problem. Stroud says:

[Moore] takes [Kant's problem] to...express the complaint that a proof of the existence of things outside us has never been given. Whether that is what Kant complains of is open to question, but Moore thinks there is no doubt that he can meet the challenge.

STROUD 1984: 84

Stroud objects, not that Moore's Proof fails to provide an unexceptionable proof of its conclusion, nor that it falls short of achieving a goal of dispelling skepticism about external things. Stroud contends rather that Moore's proof offers no response at all to a philosophical problem. Stroud's objection explains this irrelevance with a distinction that credits Moore's proof with answering a non-philosophical question. Stroud protests that Moore is oblivious to this distinction, which Stroud says "we recognize," that contrasts philosophical with non-philosophical questions of "whether I know there are external things":

We can ask whether Moore's proof is a good one – whether he knows what he claims to know and legitimately establishes his conclusion on that basis. If so, he has proved that there are external things. We can also ask whether Moore refutes philosophical skepticism and answers affirmatively the philosophical problem of the external world. I think we do immediately feel that the answer to this second question is 'No'.

STROUD 1984: 86

Stroud finds unexceptionable the answer from Moore's proof to Stroud's non-philosophical question. To the second, philosophical question of whether Moore's proof "refutes philosophical skepticism and answers affirmatively the philosophical problem of the external world," and whether Moore even acknowledges a goal of dispelling philosophical skepticism, Stroud contends that Moore's proof is "completely irrelevant." Since Stroud maintains that his distinction between the non-philosophical and philosophical questions of "whether I know there are external things" is one that "we recognize," he duly acknowledges that the distinction could not fail to be available to Moore himself. Stroud ends with a view of Moore as "an extremely puzzling philosophical phenomenon," and with no answer to his residual question, "How could Moore show no signs of acknowledging [Stroud's philosophical question of whether we know there are external things]? ... That is the question about the mind of Moore that I [Stroud] cannot answer" (Stroud 1984: 125–126). Stroud's puzzlement depends on his standard interpretation that supposes Moore's proof aims to solve Kant's problem and that overlooks Moore's announced aim for Moore's proof.

8 Conclusion

This study has argued that the point of Moore's proof is the aim Moore declared for his performance of Moore's proof. In his 1939 lecture "Proof of an External World" Moore aimed his famous performance to impose a counter-example to a stated presupposition of Kant's problem of an external world. Moore nevertheless endorsed no replacement for Kant's problem, and he omitted acknowledging that his announced aim could not be achieved without subverting the problem of an external world Kant posed for his *Critique of Pure Reason*. More generally, the philosophical problem Moore's 1939 lecture address, of interpreting and assessing Kant's famously posed problem of an external world, falls squarely within the sort of philosophical

problems Moore's autobiography characterized as the problems "I [Moore] have been trying to solve ... all my life":

What has suggested philosophical problems to me [Moore] are things which other philosophers have said ... the problem of discovering what really satisfactory reasons there are for supposing that what ... ['a given philosopher'] meant was true, or alternatively, was false. I think I have been trying to solve problems of this sort all my life...

MOORE 1968: 14

The philosophical motivation Moore confides here has elicited criticism. Also, however, a current endorsement aptly associates Moore's "main stimulus to philosophise" with painters' and musicians' works that are dependent on, "and not fully intelligible apart from" the paintings of artists who precede them: "What he [Moore] reports about himself is something I [Barry Stroud] believe to be true of philosophy in general. I find it interesting that many philosophers would deny it, and would regard it as demeaning or indicative of shallowness to acknowledge that it is true of them" (Stroud 2018: 15).¹⁴

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¹⁴ I would like to thank an anonymous reviewer for helpful comments on an earlier version of this paper.

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