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MOORE'S ARGUMENTS AGAINST EPISTEMOLOGICAL SCEPTICISM

City University of New York

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MOORE'S ARGUMENTS AGAINST EPISTEMOLOGICAL SCEPTICISM

by

PAUL SITA

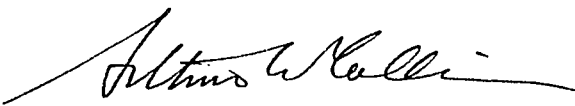
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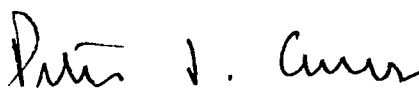
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Chairman of Examining Committee


Executive Officer

Professor Gerald Myers

Professor H. L. Finch

Professor H. S. Thayer
Supervisory Committee

The City University of New York

ABSTRACT

MOORE'S ARGUMENTS AGAINST EPISTEMOLOGICAL SCEPTICISM

by

Paul Sita

Adviser: Professor Gerald E. Myers

This work has two objectives: 1) to present a study of G. E. Moore's arguments against Epistemological Scepticism; 2) to assess the contribution of Moore's arguments to the literature of scepticism.

Beginning with his early rejection of the Idealist tradition (*The Refutation of Idealism* 1903) Moore is intrigued by the fact that numerous philosophers have been able to arrive at philosophical views which flatly contradict our ordinary view of the world. It is only in contrast to philosophers who hold such views that Moore labels his position as a common sense position. He devotes a good deal of his philosophical career in an effort to understand and refute the views of philosophers who are "sceptical" of our common sense beliefs, or our ability to know the very basic kinds of perceptual propositions which support those common sense beliefs.

Moore's position is developed and presented through

a close and careful analysis of some of his key essays, such as "A Defence of Common Sense," "Proof of an External World," and "Certainty." That position is seen to consist of four distinct components: a) the thesis that some propositions must be accepted without proof; b) the appeal to common sense to establish that the propositions of common sense are the most likely candidates for this role; c) the appeal to ordinary language; d) the technique of analysis, which is designed to delineate the role of philosophers in a context in which the truth of the propositions of common sense is accepted.

One of the major conclusions of the work is that Moore's attempt to refute scepticism ultimately fails, because Moore cannot shake free from some fundamental conceptions of the position he is trying to refute, such as the dependence on sense-data, the search for absolute certainty, and the presupposition that ordinary experience stands in need of philosophical proof. Still, Moore's accomplishments are many. He does provide additional insight into the problem of scepticism, and shows its implications for the beliefs of common sense. He argues for a position in which the foundations of empirical knowledge are not necessarily established through proof but through inspection and the scrutiny of reasons.

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Lastly, I offer my deepest gratitude to my wife, Maryann. Her helpful criticisms and contributions to our frequent lengthy discussions were an important factor in the final thesis. Most importantly, her constant encouragement and support were a source of comfort through the many difficult months of concentrated effort that this work required.

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INTRODUCTION

G. E. Moore's epistemology and his method are linked. Together they represent a distinctive philosophical approach which is still worthy of consideration. Moore's position developed over a period of almost forty years, beginning from an essentially negative rejection of Idealism and leading to the affirmation of common sense knowledge for which he is most famous. Although Moore's emphasis varied from time to time, there are common themes throughout his work.

Beginning with "The Refutation of Idealism in 1903," we find a theme which plays a significant role in Moore's later work on scepticism. Moore's "Refutation" focuses on the notion that *esse is percipi*, the notion that to be is to be perceived. He attempts to show that "in all the sense ever given to it, it is false."¹ Moore believes that by showing this, he has undermined " . . . one argument, which, to the best of my belief, is considered necessary to their position by all Idealists."² Moore tries to show that any

¹G. E. Moore, "The Refutation of Idealism," *Mind* XII, pp. 433-453; reprinted in Philosophical Studies (New Jersey: Littlefield, Adams & Co., 1968), p. 5.

²*Ibid.*, p. 3.

act of consciousness, for example the sensation of blue, consists of two elements, which for want of better terms, he labels object and consciousness, e.g., blue and consciousness of blue. Now although Idealists may have analyzed immediate experience into these elements, they have all, according to Moore, asserted a necessary connection between consciousness and its content. The effect of this is that the contents of consciousness, sensations, ideas, etc., are inseparable, logically speaking, from the corresponding acts of consciousness and, therefore, the existence of a material world, existing apart from our experience of it, becomes questionable. The essence of reality, as revealed to us through consciousness, is mental or spiritual.

Moore's arguments address just this point. He argues that consciousness and its content are distinct elements. Consciousness, i.e., immediate experience of sensations and ideas, is already a relationship between a conscious entity and a real world which can and does exist apart from any consciousness of it. As Moore says, "There is, therefore, no question of how we are to 'get outside the circle of our own ideas and sensations.' Merely to have a sensation is already to be outside that circle. It is to know something which is as truly and really not a part of my experience as anything which I can ever know."¹ Thus as early as 1903, Moore rejects the view that whatever we are immediately

¹Ibid., p. 27.

aware of is only an aspect of our own experience. He rejects the notion of 'immediate,' in which there is a necessary connection between consciousness and its object. Moore specifically says that merely to have a sensation is to "know" something; even if consciousness is always consciousness of some object, this only shows a strong connection between the two. It goes no way toward establishing that the two are really one, i.e., that the existence of one (the material world) is impossible without the other (consciousness). The relationship is a two termed relationship.

Now at this early stage, although Moore is not putting forward positively any views of his own regarding the existence of the world and our knowledge of it, it is apparent that by rejecting the Idealist perspective, he is endorsing a view by which, through experience, we become acquainted with and may obtain knowledge of the material world.

In his "A Defence of Common Sense" in 1925, Moore outlines his own position and attempts to identify the chief areas of difference between his position and positions held by other philosophers. Moore begins by enumerating a long list of propositions, all of which in his "common sense" view, he knows with certainty to be true. He is not at all sceptical as to the truth of these propositions. But what strikes Moore as significant about this is that,

. . . my position, therefore on this first

point differs from that of philosophers belonging to group A not in that I hold anything which they don't hold, but only in that I don't hold, as part of my philosophical creed, things which they do hold as part of theirs--that is to say, propositions inconsistent with some which they and I both hold in common. But this difference seems to me to be an important one.¹

Moore thinks that philosophers, even those who hold views which go against ordinary beliefs, somehow also subscribe to those ordinary beliefs.

The effect of this is that common sense beliefs turn out to be the focal point for Moore's philosophy. Moore defends common sense beliefs, claiming that they are both true and known by him to be true, as opposed to philosophers who claim that they are false, or those who admit that they may be true, but that in any case we cannot know them to be true.

The theme from "The Refutation of Idealism" is important to Moore's defense of common sense and appears in the following form. Moore explains his position further, saying, "I hold, namely that there is no good reason to suppose either (A) that every physical fact is logically dependent upon some mental fact or (B) that every physical fact is causally dependent upon some mental fact."²

¹G. E. Moore, "A Defence of Common Sense," Contemporary British Philosophy, ed. J. H. Muirhead (London: Allen Unwin, 1925); reprinted in Philosophical Papers (New York: Collier Books, 1962), p. 41.

²Ibid., p. 45.

Therefore, central to Moore's defense of common sense propositions, i.e., his main difference with other philosophers, is his view that consciousness and its object are not necessarily linked. True, Moore has expanded the position further here, but the basic point remains the same. Moore refuses to entertain the notion that the world (as we experience it) is dependent upon our consciousness of it for its very existence. Certainly our only access with the world is through our experiences of it, i.e., through consciousness, but this and this alone is not sufficient to establish that the two elements are really one.

Clearly Moore defends a common sense point of view and rejects the views of any philosophers which go against the beliefs of common sense. But in what sense does he argue against scepticism? Moore sometimes argues against specific philosophers, such as Bradley, in "The Conception of Reality." In other important essays such as "Proof of an External World," "Four Forms of Scepticism," and "Certainty," he merely discusses 'sceptics' and 'scepticism.' In these discussions Moore brackets many philosophers as "sceptics." He includes true sceptics such as Hume, philosophers such as Russell who have held some sceptical views, and others such as Berkeley and the absolute Idealists, Bradley and McTaggart, who are not sceptics in the traditional sense at all.

Moore takes the propositions made by philosophers

literally. He does not insist that their statements need be so taken; in fact he admits that a view such as that held by Berkeley doesn't come in direct conflict with his own views. He says, "Some philosophers have so used the expression 'material thing' that if 'phenomenalism' (in one of its senses) is true . . . then these objects are not 'material things' and have used 'there are no material things' merely to mean that phenomenalism, in this sense, is true."¹ He goes on, saying, ". . . But I think it is also the case that some philosophers have used 'material thing' in such a sense that from 'There are no material things' there does follow 'There are no human hands'; and it was only of this usage of 'There are no material things' that I meant to say that the proposition then expressed by these words can be proved false in the way I gave."²

For example, concerning space and time, Bradley says, "It will explain why we deny that in the character which they exhibit, they either have or belong to reality."³ McTaggart echoes similar themes in The Nature of Existence: "I believe that nothing that exists can be temporal and that therefore

¹G. E. Moore, "A Reply to My Critics," The Philosophy of G. E. Moore, ed. Paul Arthur Schilpp (3rd ed. La Salle, Illinois: Open Court, 1968), p. 669.

²Ibid., p. 670.

³F. H. Bradley, Appearance and Reality, (2nd ed. London: University Press, 1897), p. 30.

time is unreal."¹ Moore interprets both philosophers as holding that ordinary statements involving time are always at least partially false, which is enough for him to classify them as sceptics though not in the usual sense of agnostics, those who claim that seeking knowledge is vain or futile. They are not men full of doubts, and "sceptical" of our ability to resolve those doubts. On the contrary, Berkeley for example, although he holds that matter does not exist, is not at all sceptical about this. Similarly Bradley, within his work, is not at all doubtful about the reality of time. He is certain that it is not real.

However, these philosophers are sceptics, in another sense, a sense which, I think, is a proper use of the word and which Moore explicitly elaborates in his essay "Four Forms of Scepticism." In its most commonly accepted usage, doubt is considered essential to scepticism. With regard to a particular position attention is given primarily to how that view is held, i.e., with absolute dogmatism, with certainty, or with unresolvable doubts, that position may be called a sceptical position (and its adherent a sceptic) if what is maintained is that certain kinds of things are always in fact doubtful.

Moore puts it this way: "I am so using the term

¹J. T. E. McTaggart, The Nature of Existence, (2 vols., Cambridge: University Press, 1921), p. 9.

'scepticism' that anybody who denies that we ever know for certain 'things' of a certain sort, can be said to be 'sceptical' about our knowledge of 'things' of that sort."¹

A man who, like Bertrand Russell, believes with the utmost confidence that he never knows for certain such a thing as that he is sitting down, may nevertheless feel perfectly sure, without a shadow of doubt, on thousands of occasions, that he is sitting down. And yet his view that we never do know for certain things of that sort can, I think, be obviously quite rightly called a form of scepticism.²

Finally Moore identifies the reason why his view differs from the ordinary view. "I think that 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 to be certainly not the case."³ Thus Moore brackets the Idealists, Empiricists, and Russell, because their philosophical positions result in a judgement that many commonly held beliefs are always doubtful. Some of them hold stronger positions, not only suspending judgement regarding ordinary beliefs, but in fact repudiating those beliefs. Still in Moore's view they may properly be said to be

¹G. E. Moore, "Four Forms of Scepticism," Philosophical Papers (New York: Collier Books, 1962), p. 195.

²Ibid.

³Ibid., p. 196.

said to be sceptical of our knowledge of ordinary things.

Furthermore, Moore wants to label these philosophers not just as sceptics, in the sense outlined above, but as epistemological sceptics. This is so for a variety of reasons. First and foremost, Moore, in his "Defence of Common Sense," is not simply claiming that certain ordinary beliefs are true, but that he knows them to be true. ". . . they are in fact, a set of propositions, every one of which (in my own opinion) I know, with certainty, to be true."¹ And what he asserts of other philosophers, is that they know similar things as well. Thus Moore is making claims about the possibility of knowledge in addition to defending the truth of ordinary propositions.

There is another, broader, more fundamental sense, in which the scepticism which Moore is attempting to refute is Epistemological Scepticism. It has its roots in the Cartesian Philosophy of Mind, which is the common bond which links Idealists, Empiricists, and Rationalists. Its central thesis is the primary role accorded to immediate experience, which is the essence of mentality. Mental objects, thoughts, sensations, and the like, are the only 'objects' which can therefore be apprehended with absolute certainty. All other objects in the universe, particularly

¹Moore, "A Defence of Common Sense," p. 32.

ordinary material objects, such as books and tables, are relegated to a position which leaves their existence less than certain. All claims to know objects other than immediate objects of consciousness must be based on the immediate data of consciousness, which is all mental. Now the philosophers Moore addresses deal with this problem in very different ways, but the net result is that many 'common sense' beliefs, understood in their ordinary sense, remain subject to doubt or at least partially false.

Beginning with Descartes, epistemology has been the cornerstone of philosophy. Philosophers have had to address the problem of how to get outside the realm of our own experiences before they could proceed with any other inquiry. It is interesting to note that Moore was not the first philosopher to trace the connection between Cartesianism and philosophical views which conflict with common sense. Thomas Reid, the Scottish Common Sense philosopher responded to the Cartesian philosophy of mind because its conclusions, as developed in the philosophy of Berkeley and Hume, were shocking to common sense. Reid attacks the theory of ideas, claiming that if the mind only has access to its own ideas, then it is impossible to know what those ideas are supposed to represent. Reid also defends common sense beliefs for some of the same reasons as Moore. For example, he claims that to attempt to deny or refute them necessarily involves us in absurdity; as Moore says, no philosopher has ever been

able to maintain a sceptical position consistently. In addition, Reid talks about how the principles of common sense are imbedded in our language and rules of conduct. Thus much of Moore's attempts to refute scepticism arising from the Cartesian perspective had a logical precursor in the figure of Reid.

The study of Moore's arguments is therefore important for a number of reasons. Moore provides additional insights into the role of epistemology as established by the Cartesian Philosophy of Mind. He attempts to reconcile more closely than ever before the conflicts with common sense generated by that theory. His approach is a transition to more contemporary linguistically oriented philosophers, such as Ryle, Wittgenstein and Austin. Lastly, the kinds of conflicts with common sense with which Moore struggled are still present in philosophy, many of them generated by the pervasive influence of the Cartesian Philosophy of Mind. Moore's approach to scepticism emphasizes very strongly certain basics of which philosophers must be reminded: the need to explain their use of key terms; the contradictions with common sense beliefs to which certain theories give rise; the consequences of holding sceptical views, i.e., no philosopher has ever been able to hold such views consistently. Despite their problems, Moore's arguments against Epistemological Scepticism are an important contribution to modern philosophy.

CHAPTER I

MOORE'S ARGUMENTS AGAINST SCEPTICISM

General Themes of Moore's Work

Although it has been said before I think it bears repeating that Moore did not choose the issue of Epistemological Scepticism because the sciences or everyday experience brought him face to face with it. To quote Moore: "I do not think that the world or the sciences would ever have suggested to me any philosophical problems."¹ Rather it was the words of philosophers themselves which brought the issue to Moore's attention. Again in Moore's words, "What has suggested philosophical problems to me is things which other philosophers have said about the world or the sciences."² In his sincere effort to understand exactly what other philosophers were saying about perception, the existence of the external world, etc., Moore encountered two sorts of difficulties; he describes them as follows: "First, the problem of trying to get really clear as to

¹G. E. Moore, "An Autobiography," The Philosophy of G. E. Moore, ed. Paul Arthur Schilpp (3rd ed.: La Salle: Open Court, 1968), p. 14.

²Ibid.

what on earth a given philosopher meant by something which he said, and secondly, the problem of discovering what really satisfactory reasons there are for supposing that what he meant was true, or alternatively, was false."¹

These points are important. A number of features characteristic of Moore's work emerge from this perspective. For example, Moore's pattern of argument in a number of his works has the form mentioned above. That is, (1) Moore brings forward a position held by another (normally sceptical) philosopher which he finds characteristic of that philosopher's position; (2) Moore makes every possible attempt to discuss what, if anything, the position means; (3) Moore discusses not only what the philosopher is saying but also what he intends to say; then (4) Moore analyzes what reasons can be brought forward to determine if the position as now understood is true or false.

Good examples of this pattern of argument are easy to find. In his "Proof of an External World" Moore addresses Kant's view from the Critique of Pure Reason that, "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 things good to doubt their existence, we are unable to counter his doubts by any satisfactory proof."²

¹Ibid.

²G. E. Moore, "Proof of an External World," British Academy Proceedings vol. 25, 1939; reprinted in Philosophical

In "The Conception of Reality" Moore attempts to determine how Bradley's position that 'Time is not real' is to be understood, and then argues that Bradley's position, so understood, is incorrect. It is important to note that in both these instances Moore devotes the majority of his discussion to the meaning of these statements. He is genuinely surprised by the conclusions to which some philosophers are led. Two of the methods and techniques for which Moore is famous, i.e., analysis and his technique of translation into the concrete, are developed in response to this problem. Moore admits this, saying, ". . . and I only adopted certain particular methods (so far as I have adopted them) because they seemed to me suitable for those kinds of questions."¹

A number of commentators have pointed to a quality of freshness or naivete in Moore's work. For example, Wisdom says, "And what a pleasure was the simple, direct, childlike quality of what followed in Principia Ethica."² Part of this freshness is the fact that Moore writes as one who remains unconvinced by the arguments of philosophers. Says Ambrose, "His reply is like that of the ordinary man who does not allow himself to become entangled in a philosophical dispute,

Papers (New York: Collier Books, 1962), p. 126.

¹Moore, "A Reply to My Critics," p. 676.

²John Wisdom, "Moore's Technique," The Philosophy of G. E. Moore, ed. Paul Arthur Schilpp (3rd ed.; La Salle, Illinois: Open Court, 1968), p. 421.

it dismisses the sceptic's conclusion by contradicting it but without countering his argument."¹ Moore's reactions are to some degree the reactions of a newcomer to philosophical discussion. This, too, is traceable to the fact that Moore was led to the problem of scepticism by what other philosophers said and not by his own doubts as to the truth of the various kinds of things the sceptics doubted. Moore's affirmation of our ordinary knowledge claims is only a reaction to the fact that other philosophers have been able to contradict these claims. This first point can't be emphasized too strongly. Moore doesn't come to the philosophical arena as an agnostic seeking to be swayed one way or the other. He comes trying to understand the sceptic, but believing all the while that the sceptic cannot be right. Moore not only acknowledges but affirms that his position is best described in contrast to the views maintained by some other philosophers, saying,

If this first point in my philosophical position, namely my belief in (2), is to be given any name, which has actually been used by philosophers in classifying the positions of other philosophers, it would have, I think to be expressed by saying that I am one of those philosophers who have held that the 'Common Sense view of the world' is, in certain fundamental features, wholly true."²

¹Alice Ambrose, "Moore's 'Proof of an External World,'" The Philosophy of G. E. Moore, ed. Paul Arthur Schilpp (3rd ed.; La Salle, Illinois: Open Court, 1968), p. 416).

²Moore, "A Defence of Common Sense," p. 44.

What struck Moore immediately and made a lasting impression was not just that some philosophers were sincerely sceptical of the kinds of things we all claim to know, but that at the same time they also seemed to hold what we all hold, i.e., that we do know the very things their philosophical positions claim we can't or don't know. Moore tried to resolve this; in his efforts he encountered the difficulties mentioned above, namely determining what the philosopher really meant, and how to go about determining whether what he meant was true or false.

An important component in the position of those philosophers whose scepticism develops out of an empiricist perspective in the Representative Theory of Perception. Steadfast adherence to this theory is one of the chief causes of scepticism. One of the major problems with Moore's work is that he too remains tied to the Representative Theory himself, while attempting to refute sceptical positions which are grounded in that theory. The unusual position in which Moore finds himself is nowhere so evident as in those places where he tries to explain the relationship between sense-data and material objects, as he understands it.

I think it certain, therefore, that the analysis of the proposition 'This is a human hand' is, roughly at least, of the form 'There is a thing, and only one thing, of which it is true both that it is a human hand and that this surface is a part of its surface.' In other words, to put my view in terms of the phrase 'theory of representative perception,' I hold it to be quite certain that I do not directly perceive my hand; and that when I am said (as I may be

correctly said) to 'perceive' it, that I 'perceive' it means that I perceive (in a different and more fundamental sense) something which is (in a suitable sense) representative of it, namely, a certain part of its surface.

This is all that I hold to be certain about the analysis of the proposition 'This is a human hand.' We have seen that it includes in its analysis a proposition of the form 'This is part of the surface of a human hand' (where 'This,' of course, has a different meaning from that which it has in the original proposition which has now been analysed). But this proposition also is undoubtedly a proposition about the sense-datum, which I am seeing, which is a sense-datum of my hand. And hence the further question arises: What, when I know 'This is part of the surface of a human hand,' am I knowing about the sense-datum in question?¹

Moore continues with further attempts to close in directly on the relationship of sense-data to material objects, yet unlike other philosophers who discuss the same issues, he is looking for a theory which will allow room for knowledge of the common sense claims of which he is so certain. Emphasis on analysis and the meaning of philosophical statements could only arise from a perspective in which the certainty and knowledge of our common sense assertions is already established. This is because Moore ties together philosophical statements and ordinary beliefs, claiming that the former have implications for the latter. Thus, given the truth of common sense beliefs as a platform, Moore proceeds with analyzing philosophical views, attempting to show how those views impact our common sense beliefs. This is why Moore's acceptance of common sense is so important to his

¹Moore, "A Defence of Common Sense," p. 54.

arguments against Epistemological Scepticism.

Historically, one of the factors in philosophy which has enabled us to reject the Representative Theory of Perception as a philosophical view has been the increased attention paid to the meaning of the language of perception. Because of this the representative theory is seen to offer an explanation which is inadequate to the variety and complexity of the phenomena of perception. The breakdown of the simple dichotomy between sense-data and material objects is the all important step in this process.

Moore did not perceive this. Nor could he be expected to. Moore led himself into a dilemma by accepting, to a large degree, the representative theory, while (because of his attention to and sensitivity to language) he rejected the scepticism to which the theory invariably leads. It should be noted that Moore does reject the conclusions of the theory which marks the first great step toward rejecting the theory. His reasons for doing this did point out the direction which was to be followed by others.

Two very prominent features of Moore's method are his defense of common sense and his emphasis on analysis. It has been sometimes said that Moore's method was totally one of analysis. This is wrong. The defense of common sense is the key ingredient in Moore's work. It cannot be considered merely a subsidiary component, for it establishes a

platform from which he employs analysis and his other techniques. Moore himself says, "By practicing analysis I may have implied that it is one of the proper businesses of philosophy. But I certainly cannot have implied more than that. And, in fact, analysis is by no means the only thing I have tried to do."¹ It is Moore's acceptance and defense of common sense that allows him to reject the question of scepticism. But this would be no good if he left us here. Turning points in philosophy frequently lead us away from an apparent dead end. It is Moore's emphasis on analysis as he practices it which picks up philosophically where his defense of common sense leaves off.

Moore's defense of common sense, that is, his taking as a starting point the truth of the various kinds of propositions he discusses, is prior, logically speaking, to his use of the method of analysis. Most commentators including White, Klemke and Malcolm, make no distinction here and talk of the two as simply two substantial elements in Moore's method. This is wrong. These two elements are related in a very definite way. This point is important to understanding Moore's arguments. It is not analysis which leads Moore to accept the propositions of common sense, rather it is the arguments of other philosophers, their inconsistencies and contradictions with common sense. However, once Moore adopts

¹Moore, "A Reply to My Critics," p. 676.

his common sense perspective, then he is led into analysis as a means of focusing in on the philosophical issues which remain.

In accepting and defending common sense, Moore thus rejects Epistemological Scepticism without having discussed it as an issue per se. His discussions of the issue of scepticism and his arguments all arise in the course of treating other issues and questions, namely perception, certainty, the existence of the external world, etc.

Moore has another reason for defending common sense first. In his words, "If the propositions you choose to analyze are true contingent propositions, they can only be true because they tell you something about reality, and, if so, then I think the analysis of them will tell you something about reality too."¹ The primacy of the propositions of common sense is necessary in order to make our philosophical efforts meaningful. Interestingly enough Moore has at times been criticized for missing the philosophical point when his whole approach is geared toward providing philosophers with a platform from which philosophical arguments can proceed legitimately. One of the fundamental questions Moore tries to address is the degree of seriousness we can attach to questions about the truth of our ordinary beliefs. To what degree must these questions be resolved and our

¹Ibid.

beliefs justified before we may proceed with our inquiries.

Sceptical philosophers, on the other hand, use philosophical arguments to undermine the very foundation which is necessary to add legitimacy to their claims, namely the claims of common sense. Moore perceives that in this complex fashion scepticism undermines itself.

Moore had a keen sensitivity to language and the ways in which words were used. He was constantly on guard against philosophers who used words in ways which were different from their ordinary uses, without explaining their meaning beforehand, or those who simply misused certain expressions. His determined effort to discuss every possible meaning of a philosopher's statement often seems laborious. However, this sensitivity to words and their uses as an integral part of resolving philosophical problems signaled a turning point in philosophy.

As an example, take Moore's essay "Proof of an External World." There he begins by quoting Kant on the necessity for philosophy to prove the existence of things outside of us. Most of what follows is an attempt by Moore to determine exactly what it is that is required to be proved. This need for pinpointing exactly what is at issue is one of the most pronounced features of Moore's method. There is no sure way to do it except by discussing all of the various possibilities. Thus in the pages that follow, Moore discusses in detail, the differences and relationships between the notions:

things outside of us, external things, things external to our minds, things external to our bodies, things to be met with in space, physical objects, and objects presented in space. Kant's conceptions of empirically external and empirically real are also discussed. How very complicated this task is can easily be seen from the following remark:

But now, if to say of anything, e.g. my body, that it is external to my mind, means merely that from a proposition to the effect that it existed at a specified time, there in no case follows the further proposition that I was having an experience at the time in question, then to say of anything that it is external to our minds, will mean similarly that from a proposition to the effect that it existed at a specified time, it in no case follows that any of us were having experiences at the time in question. And if, by our minds be meant . . . "1

This type of dissection by Moore has one immediate effect: Sceptical positions very often seem to force themselves upon us; that is, they can be stated simply, seem perfectly clear, and may be argued for in relatively short fashion. Because of this it is difficult to avoid them and further, even more difficult to argue against them. Every step of the sceptic's argument seems impeccable. Moore was the first to argue against Epistemological Scepticism by focusing not on the sceptic's line of argument but on the language in which their position is expressed.

The beauty of this type of approach lies with the

1Moore, "Proof of an External World," p. 142.

fact that if Moore is successful in showing that the meaning of the sceptic's position is not sufficiently clear, it is then doubtful (or at least open to doubt) whether the subsequent arguments support the point in question or not. A case in point is Moore's "Defence"; there we find him saying,

And hence the further question arises: What, when I know this is part of the surface of a human hand am I knowing about the sense-datum in question?

.....

This is the question to which, as it seems to me, no philosopher has hitherto suggested an answer which comes anywhere near to being certainly true.¹

Similarly in his reply to his critics, writing about Alice Ambrose's essay critical of his "Proof of an External World," Moore says,

I cannot understand what argument can be given to show that, owing to these differences, whereas producing a dime can prove that at least one coin exists, it cannot prove that at least one external object exists. It seems to me that Miss Ambrose not only has not given, but has not even attempted to give, an argument directed to proving precisely this point.²

In both these examples Moore's technique is the same. First, he attempts to show that the position in question ultimately rests upon some precise question or set of questions. He then tries to show that the philosopher does not address this exact question or questions. In many cases by narrowing

¹Moore, "A Defence of Common Sense," p. 55.

²Moore, "A Reply to My Critics," p. 671.

in on the precise point on which a position hinges, Moore shows how a sceptic may, in effect, misrepresent the issue, or not meet it head on. This of course does not prove the truth of Moore's position, or even support it.

This emphasizes just how much Moore's undertaking is a negative one; he has only (he believes) to show that the sceptic's argument is inadequate, and not that he can offer stronger arguments for his (the common sense) position. Some philosophers question this. However, Moore considers this one of the peculiar features of the common sense view of the world, as we shall discuss later.

Moore's Arguments Against Epistemological Scepticism

It is widely accepted that Moore made two significant appeals, to common sense, and to ordinary language. Yet exactly how Moore uses these two appeals to argue against scepticism, and exactly what the relationship between the two is, is often confused. In addition however, there is a third equally important element in Moore's arguments against Epistemological Scepticism. This is his acceptance of the thesis that some proposition(s) must be known immediately, i.e., without proof, if any are to be known mediately, i.e., by means of proof. Indeed this is the first step in Moore's approach.

Moore's arguments depend upon these three elements. They build upon each other in the following way:

- 1) Acceptance of the thesis that some proposition(s) must be known immediately;
- 2) The appeal to common sense, establishing that of all the candidates for propositions known immediately, certain common sense beliefs are the obvious choice, i.e., the most reasonable choice;
- 3) The appeal to ordinary language. Having established via 1) and 2) certain propositions as true and known to be true, Moore then uses the appeal to ordinary language to show how and when the views of philosophers conflict with these true propositions. When they do so conflict, these views may be rejected.

Neglecting any of these elements must yield an incomplete account of Moore's position and a distorted view of the role of the other elements. For example, it is by neglecting the first element, the thesis that some propositions must be known immediately, that some commentators have been led to interpret Moore's defense of common sense claims as resting solely upon introspection or some intuitive faculty. Similarly if we neglect Moore's appeal to common sense we might be led to interpret Moore as dismissing the views of other philosophers simply because they go against ordinary linguistic usage. In fact, in Moore's position, the conflict is much more powerful, i.e., they conflict with other propositions which we know to be true. It is this combination of elements, together with the extra-ordinary language sense which overrides all facets of his work, which characterizes Moore's arguments against Epistemological Scepticism and forms the basis for his unique perspective.

Descartes' principle, which has its roots in Aristotle,

that at least one point of certainty is necessary to begin any system of knowledge has been generally accepted by Moore and other philosophers as well; in one form or another it has appeared numerous times in philosophy. Wittgenstein's dictum that certainty is essential for doubt, i.e., for doubt to be possible it is necessary that there be something we do not doubt, is a form of this principle. However we should not take too narrow a view of this principle. Moore does not think that what we require is a single fact. What we require is a perspective, a foundation, a standard of reference against which we measure the results of our philosophical inquiries. For Moore the beliefs of common sense, or the common sense view of the world, serves just this purpose.

Moore frequently talks about the requirements for a good proof. And for him the role of common sense beliefs is not that of postulates but of premises, and premises must not just be assumed to be true, but must be true, and known to be true. One of Moore's most powerful arguments in favor of the position that many common sense statements are true and known to be true stems from this point. That is, he points out that both his arguments and the sceptic's arguments depend upon some premise which is known immediately. Moore put it this way, "It is certain, then, that if any proposition whatever is known by us mediately, or because some other proposition is known from which it follows, some

one proposition at least, must also be known by us immediately or not merely because some other proposition is known from which it follows."¹ Moore held this view throughout his philosophical career and expressed it in a number of ways. Early in his career he says, "We must make assumptions as to what facts we do know, before we can proceed to discuss whether or not all of the former are based on experience; and none of these assumptions can, in the last resort, be conclusively proved."² This statement comes in the course of discussing Hume's view concerning our knowledge of external facts. Then later, in 1939, "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 in my two proofs."³ Here Moore is talking about his claim to know simple propositions such as "here is a hand," which he used as premises in his proof. The point is exactly the same one he makes in 1953. Propositions such as "here is a hand" are known by us immediately, that is to say, not merely because of some other proposition from which it follows. They are more certain than any proposition which could be used to disprove them. Our knowledge of them is an

¹G. E. Moore, Some Main Problems of Philosophy (London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd., 1958), p. 124.

²G. E. Moore, "Hume's Philosophy," The New Quarterly Nov. 1909; reprinted in Philosophical Studies (New Jersey: Littlefield, Adams & Co., 1968), p. 165.

³Moore, "Proof of an External World," p. 148.

assumption, but not an arbitrary one, in Moore's view, and our inability to conclusively prove them in no way weakens our knowledge claim.

It is easy to misinterpret Moore here. The term 'immediate' has had a long and stormy history in epistemological discussions. A good deal of the plausibility of scepticism rests on the difficulty of reconciling any sort of propositional knowledge (considered mediate) with the certainty accorded to immediate experience. I think that Moore's theories, particularly regarding sense-data, run into some difficulty here. But for the present point, it is most important to put aside the standard immediate-mediate distinction, and focus instead on Moore's last sentence, i.e., his equation of immediate with " . . . not merely because some other proposition is known from which it follows."¹ At the most basic epistemological level, Moore's model puts propositions which are more certain than any arguments which could attempt to overturn them, regardless of the experiences which support those arguments. It will turn out of course that this is precisely the role which certain common sense statements serve.

Moore tries to separate the question of the immediacy of experiences from the question of the immediacy of our knowledge of certain propositions. He does this by pointing

¹Moore, Some Main Problems of Philosophy, p. 124.

out that even the generally accepted view which labels some propositions as known mediately must have its basis in propositions which are known immediately, not in the sense of experienced, but in the sense of--true by themselves alone, true apart from any other proposition, self evident. If one denies this, then one is committed to an infinite regress, i.e., one proposition known by means of another from which it follows, then another from which that proposition follows, and so on. It is at this stage that Moore appeals to common sense, in the sense of what we are prepared to assert prior to any other considerations. Moore asks us to simply look and see which propositions are in fact accorded such status. He contends that all systems begin at this level. As an example, take the following argument from Some Main Problems of Philosophy. Moore's argument is the following: "I do know that this pencil exists; therefore Hume's principles are false."¹ His opponents' argument: "Hume's principles are true; therefore you do not know that this pencil exists."² Moore first shows that each argument satisfies the condition that the conclusion must follow from the premises. Then he turns to the condition we are concerned with here, namely that the premise should be known to be true. He says, "The only way, then,

¹Ibid., p. 120.

²Ibid.

of deciding between my opponent's argument and mine as to which is the better, is by deciding which premiss is known to be true."¹ This is an example of another technique frequently used by Moore. He tries to show that both his position and the sceptic's position depend upon some assumption or set of assumptions. He is quick to bring to our attention that common sense statements just are such that they are much more certain than any premise which could be used to prove that they are false; and also much more certain than any other premise which could be used to prove that they are true. Moore also uses this argument in his essay, "Four Forms of Scepticism." There the issue comes down to "Russell's view that I do not know for certain that this is a pencil or that you are conscious rests, if I am right, on no less than four distinct assumptions . . ."² Moore's reply is, "It seems to me more certain that I do know that this is a pencil and that you are conscious, than that any single one of these four assumptions is true, let alone all four."³ Thus in condensed fashion Moore's argument is that regardless which conclusion we wish to support, the sceptical or the common sense, some proposition must be taken as a premise, i.e., true and known immediately. He thinks

¹Ibid., p. 121.

²Moore, "Four Forms of Scepticism," p. 222.

³Ibid.

that the common sense premise, an instance such as "I know that this is a pencil," "I know that you are conscious," is much more certain than any other premise which could be used for the sceptical position. But notice that these types of instances are also much more certain, Moore contends, than any other premise which could be brought forward to show that they are true also. Put bluntly, in Moore's view, nothing is more certain, or could be more certain, than these types of premises. Speaking of our knowledge claims of ordinary material objects, Moore says, "And I think we may safely challenge any philosopher to bring forward any argument in favor either of the proposition that we do not know it, or of the proposition that it is not true, which does not, at some point, rest upon some premiss which is beyond comparison, less certain than is the proposition which it is designed to attack."¹ At some point in our chain of questioning, some proposition must go unquestioned; at this level the best we can attain to are good reasons, not proofs. This process of scrutinizing reasons is essentially a form of inspection.

A key point in Moore's argument is his claim that these ordinary propositions are known immediately. Philosophers have rarely admitted that propositions like 'This is a pencil' are known immediately, if at all. The sceptic would

¹Ibid., p. 226.

claim that this is the point at issue regardless of how Moore attempts to circumvent the issue, i.e., if our only form of direct knowledge is of our own experience, then no such statement as 'This is a pencil' is ever known with certainty. If this is so then Moore's argument as to the existence of material things and his claim to refute the sceptic also fails. The sceptic claims that any statement like 'This is a pencil,' that is, a statement about a material thing, is always less than certain. Regardless of the degree of certainty which we attain in a specific instance, the sceptic says, the statement about a material thing is always subject to some degree of doubt.

Much of the criticism given Moore and much discussion in epistemology concerns the status of these "basic" propositions. Note that above I referred to something we do not doubt, and not, something which we know. This distinction is also one of the points of difference between Moore and the sceptics. Many sceptics have argued that in order for an inquiry to proceed we must accept something or make some set of assumptions; however, this does not make those assumptions immune from doubt, particularly in the case of an epistemological investigation, the point of which is to discover the sorts of things upon which we can rely absolutely. It is possible that our inquiry may show that the kind of assumptions we made do not in fact fall into this most reliable category. This, the sceptics claim, is the

case with common sense statements. Yes they provide our ordinary frame of reference, but our philosophical inquiry shows that they in fact do not stand up when scrutinized. The Idealist may claim that this is so because of the inconsistencies which arise when the necessary criteria for reality are applied to ordinary experiences. The empiricist, on the other hand, may claim that all of our experiences are perfectly compatible with the thesis that no material world exists at all, and that the connection between our experiences and a material world is not a necessary one.

However, Moore sees our common sense beliefs as much more basic than this. He argues forcefully that their status is not arbitrary. It is not the case that if this set does not work we simply choose another one. This is evidenced by the fact that no philosopher has ever been able to deny the beliefs of common sense consistently. As Moore says, "It is, of course, the case that all philosophers who have held such views have repeatedly, even in their philosophical works, expressed other views inconsistent with them: i.e. no philosopher has ever been able to hold such views consistently."¹

Even at this early juncture the absolute split between Moore and the sceptics becomes apparent. It becomes obvious that if this first point of Moore's is denied then (in a

¹Moore, "A Defence of Common Sense," p. 40.

certain sense) scepticism is inevitable. Moore realizes this; he paraphrases the sceptic as saying "If you cannot prove your premise that here is one hand and here is another, then you do not know it. But you yourself have admitted that, if you did not know it, then your proof was not conclusive. Therefore your proof was not, as you say it was, a conclusive proof."¹ Moore stands firm upon his claim that some proposition(s) must be known without proof, and the premises he uses in his proof are such propositions. Therefore he can only show the sceptic to be wrong on the basis of other propositions which he knows but cannot prove.

I happen to think that at this point some sceptics betray a curious inconsistency. They hold that we should reserve the term "knowledge" to what can be adduced from some investigative process, that is, no proposition can be known directly without proof. However, if this is so, then they beg the question because what the position proves is that common sense propositions cannot be known in the same sense that sense-data propositions or a priori propositions can be known; but by their very definition, this is so of common sense propositions. That is to say, the very question at issue is whether, in the situations in which we assert ordinary knowledge claims, those claims are reasonable claims.

This absolute divergence occurs at every step of the

¹Moore, "Proof of an External World," p. 148.

argument. Ultimately we just adopt one perspective and reject the other, both of which are knowledge claims. In light of this, Moore's reminder that we ask ourselves which of the opposing views it is more reasonable to accept sounds all the more plausible.

Next we need to examine thoroughly Moore's conception of "The Common Sense Point of View," or the "Common Sense View of the World," or alternatively, common sense beliefs; it is this conception which shapes and drives his thought. The first point which is in need of clarification is exactly what Moore was defending when he professed to be defending common sense.

In his "A Defence of Common Sense," Moore contrasts his position with positions adopted by other philosophers. He does this in an unusual fashion, by:

- 1) Enumerating a long list of propositions which he considers truisms, and which he claims to know with certainty. These have mainly to do with the existence of material things and the existence of other human beings. For example "There exists at present a living human body, which is my body."¹ Also, "I have often perceived both my own body and other things which formed part of its environment, including other human bodies."²
- then 2) Asserting a proposition to the effect that each of us--the group of human beings which exists if 1) is correct, has frequently known about himself or his body what Moore claims to know about himself or his body in 1).

¹Moore, "A Defence of Common Sense," p. 33.

²Ibid.

One point which is often overlooked is that Moore introduces the common sense view of the world not in the course of asserting what he knows but in the course of discussing what some philosophers have claimed we cannot or do not know. This is important because it is by overlooking this that some philosophers have been led to think that Moore started out attempting to outline a common sense position. Rather it is by way of philosophers who hold views different from Moore that he characterizes his own position as a common sense position. Thus in relation to 1) and 2) we find Moore describing the views of some other philosophers, "Some of them have spoken of such beliefs as 'Beliefs of Common Sense.'"¹ Moore specifically equates his common sense position with his belief in 2). Therefore Moore's truism 2) is worth a closer look. Moore goes on, saying:

In other words what 2) asserts is only (what seems an obvious enough truism) that each of us (meaning by 'us, very many human beings of the class defined) 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, . . .²

In clarifying his assertion 2), Moore makes two further points. The first is that his position conflicts directly with the position maintained by some philosophers that

¹Ibid., p. 34.

²Ibid.

propositions which are true may be partially false, particularly with regard to the kinds of propositions Moore lists in 1). Moore's position is "that all the propositions in 1), and also many propositions corresponding to each of these, are wholly true."¹

Moore's second point has more to do with ordinary meaning. Philosophers have sometimes maintained that some other set of propositions, related in a certain way to Moore's list of propositions, may be true, but that Moore's propositions, understood in their ordinary sense, are always at least partially false. This is also in direct conflict with Moore's position. Both these points are aimed at the Idealists, who have maintained that ordinary propositions can be understood and defended as "true" in an ordinary context but that their truth is not absolute in a philosophical sense.

In defending his two general claims 1) and 2), Moore is defending a whole range of knowledge claims. It is important to notice that these are not general claims about the world. Rather these are a group of individual knowledge claims. Moore then proceeds to argue from these individual knowledge claims to the fact that what is known is true, and therefore to conclusions about the world. At this point it is apparent why Moore's defense of common sense propositions has been criticized for its highly subjective

¹Ibid., p. 35.

perspective. What is required is a general proof showing how such propositions may be known. In the absence of such a proof Moore's claims to know things about himself are philosophically uninteresting.

Moore's position could be a stronger one if he argued that he knew various things and then went on to present a strong argument showing how he knows what he claims to know. In this case, were his argument sufficiently general, it could easily be applied to others as well and therefore amount to a general proof of how such things may be known. Moore argues persuasively that he knows. But this is a very different thing from establishing that Moore is justified in saying that he knows.

Moore's defense of common sense is not just a defense of ordinary beliefs about the world; nor is it a direct defense of the kinds of propositions the ordinary man would assert. Rather it is a defense of a variety of things Moore claims to know about himself and/or his body, and a general claim about other human beings as well. It amounts to a perspective out of which ordinary beliefs about the world are supported and implied. It is a defense of some of the fundamental beliefs which underly specific common sense propositions, such as the belief in other selves, and the existence of the material world.

Moore begins with the thesis that some propositions must be accepted as known without proof if any are to be

known by means of proof. This level is prior to proof, both logically and empirically. The question of a proof simply has no bearing here. What does have bearing are considerations and reasons which support and reinforce a position. This is the level from which epistemology begins, regardless of the type of position one wishes to defend.

The defense of common sense constitutes the next step, that of arguing that the propositions which are most reasonable to accept and defend are the propositions which lay the foundations for the kinds of things we all do ordinarily believe. It is common sense in the sense of--most reasonable, making the most sense to accept, and also happening to support and reinforce the ordinary claims of the plain man. Moore's defense is philosophical because it supports ordinary knowledge claims from their fundamental epistemological base, not from their appeal in particular circumstances. His technique proceeds from the philosophical platform he believes he has established to the beliefs of common sense, and not vice versa; therefore, it is not simply a defense of what the plain man believes, which may in many cases be mistaken. Moore says,

. . . there may be many propositions which may be properly called features in 'the common sense view of the world' or 'Common Sense Beliefs' which are not true and which deserve to be mentioned with the contempt with which some philosophers speak of 'Common Sense Beliefs'; but to speak with contempt of those 'Common Sense Beliefs' which I have mentioned

is quite certainly the height of absurdity.¹

This should make it clear that Moore supports the plain man's knowledge claims, or common sense beliefs, only insofar as they proceed from this philosophical platform.

Moore does not simply equate his defense of common sense with the beliefs of the plain man. There are propositions which we may properly say are common sense beliefs which may be utterly without foundation; he is defending only a certain subset of what may be called common sense beliefs, namely 1) and 2). And he does this in response to the views of other philosophers, and the kinds of things which they have been able to doubt. Of course, Moore's claims themselves, 1) and 2), would not be included by the plain man among the things he would claim to know. Nevertheless by focusing in on the kinds of propositions which are crucial to the arguments of sceptical philosophers, Moore is able to defend the entire foundation of ordinary knowledge. For if sceptical views regarding the existence of material objects and other selves can be maintained, then the remainder of the common sense view of the world is jeopardized equally.

But why, we may ask, is Moore sure that his platform is the most reasonable one? The reasons Moore mentions in his "Defence" and elsewhere, are: 1) they are universally

¹Ibid., p. 44.

held; 2) they are compulsively held; 3) inconsistencies arise from any attempt to deny them; 4) they are simply and quite evidently true; 5) they are more certain than any premise which could be used to refute them.

These criteria are drawn from many sources. Moore never set them out definitively or explained how the criteria were meant to be used. Considering how crucial the appeal to Common Sense is to his arguments, he is due criticism for this. Clearly it is not intended as a philosophical definition, or as a set of necessary and sufficient conditions by which to delineate an exact set of true, common sense propositions. No such absolute definition, nor set of propositions, exists. Rather the criteria are a loose form of definition; they point to a class of propositions which, roughly speaking, coincides to what Moore says we already would term the common sense view of the world. What is especially important is that the propositions Moore enumerates in his Defence, the kind of propositions which serve as good a test case for scepticism as any, are singled out by these criteria.

That the propositions of common sense are universally held, Moore says, "But it seems to me that we do, in ordinary life, constantly talk of seeing such things, and that, when we do so, we are neither using language incorrectly, nor making any mistake about the facts . . . " ¹ And also,

¹G. E. Moore, "Some Judgements of Perception,"

"In the case of some kinds of assertions, and under some circumstances, a man can be justly accused of dogmatism for asserting something positively. But in the case of assertions such as I made, made under the circumstances under which I made them, the charge would be absurd."¹ The criterion of universality primarily helps determine if a statement can be considered a statement of common sense, but does not go any way toward determining the truth of that statement. The remaining criteria are the ones Moore uses for this.

That the propositions of common sense are compulsively held, i.e., that in some sense we cannot avoid adhering to them, is Moore's first criteria which points at their truth. "The philosopher may believe, when he is philosophizing, that no man knows of the existence of any other man or of any material object; but at other times he will inevitably believe, as we all do, that he does know of the existence of this man and of that, and even of this and that material object."² This criterion is related to the role of common sense propositions in ordinary language. That is to say,

Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society vol. 19; reprinted in Philosophical Studies (New Jersey: Littlefield, Adams & Co., 1968), p. 226.

¹G. E. Moore, "Certainty," Philosophical Papers (New York: Collier Books, 1962), p. 223.

²Moore, "Hume's Philosophy," p. 157.

they cannot be separated from the ordinary situations in which they are correctly applied. This helps contribute to their compulsive character. Their truth forms the basis for much of what is accepted as correct linguistic usage. Therefore, through the acceptance of ordinary language the truth of the common sense view of the world is reinforced.

Moore continues with the fact that common sense propositions are simply and quite evidently true. Often he talks as if this were simply a matter of inspection. ". . . I have, I think, no better argument than simply this--namely, that all the propositions in 1) are, in fact, true."¹ As I touched upon earlier remarks such as this have led to some confusion. It has sometimes been claimed that Moore depended upon an intuitive faculty in order to perceive the truth of common sense statements. This conveys an incorrect picture of what is going on here. For Moore there is nothing mysterious, elusive, or ethereal about perceiving the truth of common sense statements. It is simply a matter of accepting them for what they are; part of this is their status, both logical and practical, which guarantees their certainty in most circumstances. Moore was not referring to any sort of intuitive faculty. He was only pointing to the fact that our knowing these things is not a matter of proof. And part of the reason why they are simply and quite evidently true

¹Moore, "A Defence of Common Sense," p. 42.

is the fact that they cohere with everything that we experience, believe and know. Moore says, "I only know them because, in the past, I have known to be true, other propositions which were evidenced for them."¹ In his "Proof of an External World," he echoes a similar theme; "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."² This coherence with everything else which we experience, believe and know is also the prime consideration in favor of 5), that common sense statements are "much more certain than any premiss which could be used to prove that they are false; and also much more certain than any other premiss which could be used to prove that they are true."³ As Wittgenstein said in On Certainty, "Everything speaks for (them) and nothing against."⁴ Even our immediate sense experiences, which philosophers have almost universally agreed we can know with certainty, depends to some extent on these common sense statements. Moore makes this point in his essay, "Certainty"; "If therefore, they are right, [that

¹Ibid., p. 43.

²Moore, "Proof of an External World," p. 148.

³Moore, Some Main Problems of Philosophy, p. 125.

⁴Ludwig Wittgenstein, On Certainty, ed. G. E. M. Anscombe and G. H. Von Wright, trans. Denis Paul and G. E. M. Anscombe (New York: Harper & Row, 1972), p. 18.

it is possible I am only dreaming I am standing up] it follows that it is not certain even that I have the evidence of my senses for anything at all."¹

Here we find Moore hinting at a position which is only fully elaborated later by Wittgenstein. It involves pointing out the peculiar role played by the kinds of common sense assertions Moore defends. It is by them that we measure not only the truth but the meaning of other assertions. We use them as conceptual anchors and landmarks in order to give meaning and sense to our other assertions and inquiries. Wittgenstein says, "If I don't know that, how do I know if my words mean what I believe they mean?"² If our common sense assertions can be overturned then even a notion so basic as what we mean by saying that we have the evidence of our senses for anything is doubtful. This example is a particularly crucial one, for many sceptics have accepted the validity of immediate experience while rejecting common sense claims which are based on them. This argument shows that if our common sense claims can be doubted then even our immediate experiences and perceptions are invalidated. Not that the act of experience is rendered fallible; rather the interpretation of those experiences as being sense experiences at all also becomes suspect. This is only the

¹Moore, "Certainty," p. 241.

²Wittgenstein, On Certainty, p. 66.

beginning; all sorts of other critical foundation points are invalidated if the assertions of common sense are doubtful, the meaning of our words for one. Thus the sceptic's position involves us in denying a great many things, all of which make the position less certain than the position it is attempting to dislodge.

The third criteria, the inconsistencies which arise in attempting to deny the claims of common sense, interested and intrigued Moore the most, and was crucial in the refutation of scepticism. In his arguments, not his discussions, he used these reasons as reasons for rejecting the sceptic's position. I say his arguments, and not his discussions, because Moore himself required no argument to reject scepticism. For him, common sense statements were quite obviously true, and therefore, any philosophical position which conflicted with them could just be rejected. He put it this way: "If the proposition 'This is a thumb' could be shown to be inconsistent with the Sensum Theory, I should say that the Sensum Theory was certainly false."¹ However, in his arguments used to convince others to reject scepticism he most often uses the criteria of inconsistency: "It is, of course, the case that all philosophers who have held such sceptical views have repeatedly, even in their

¹G. E. Moore, "The Nature of Sensible Appearances," Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society, Supplementary vol. 6, 1926, p. 186.

philosophical works, expressed other views inconsistent with them: i.e. no philosopher has ever been able to hold such views consistently."¹

As an example, Moore examines the sceptical view that we can be certain only of our own present experiences. Of propositions which assert the existence of material things, or other selves, things external to our minds, we can only believe, or know them to be probable, but not ever know them for certain. This position grants that propositions which assert the existence of material things, are not self contradictory, and therefore may be known, i.e., it is logically possible to know them; but they deny that they are ever in fact known for certain. Moore points out that some of these philosophers have spoken of these beliefs as "Beliefs of Common Sense,"² by this phrase expressing that somehow these beliefs are in all cases mistaken. This is the type of philosopher who, as Austin put it, likes to argue that the plain man, "In some sense or some way he is wrong all the time."³ Moore thinks this position involves an internal inconsistency or contradiction. The reason he gives is that one who holds it is "Making an assertion about 'us'--

¹Moore, "A Defence of Common Sense," p. 40.

²Ibid., p. 42.

³J. L. Austin, Sense and Sensibilia (New York: Oxford University Press, 1964), p. 10.

that is to say, not merely about himself, but about many other human beings as well."¹ To illustrate the argument in a specific instance, Moore translates: no human being has ever known of the existence of other human beings--into--there have been many other human beings beside myself, and none of them (including myself) has ever known of the existence of other human beings. The force of the sceptic's argument is that it is a claim about human knowledge; that is why the sceptic's position must be contended with. But it is just this point which Moore believes involves the sceptic in inconsistencies.

At this point the paradoxical nature of the sceptic's position shows itself, because on the interpretation which is necessary for it to carry substantial force, i.e., that it is a statement about human knowledge in general, it turns out to be contradictory. However, if we interpret the sceptic's position differently, it turns out not to be contradictory, but merely uninteresting. For example, if we take the sceptic as saying--it is possible that other human beings have existed, and if they have, they could not know of the existence of any other human beings, is it not obvious that the position loses most of its importance? Moore tried to use these types of paradoxical considerations to support his appeal to common sense.

¹Moore, "A Defence of Common Sense," p. 42.

Consequently, the thrust of Moore's appeal to common sense is to establish that there are better reasons for asserting the common sense premise, that is, accepting common sense propositions as true, than the sceptical premise, or any other premise. Notice that Moore's argument from his "Refutation of Idealism" really doesn't come into play here. In his later philosophy, he is concerned with identifying his position as a common sense position, more so than rejecting alternative views of the world. That these alternative views of the world render ordinary experience full of contradictions and inconsistencies is sufficient for Moore to reject them. His goal and his claim in his appeal to common sense is to establish the truth of the assertion that we all do often know the sorts of things he enumerates in list 1) of his "A Defence of Common Sense."

Keeping this in mind as the nub of the matter, Moore proceeds with his argument. Any view incompatible with his general claim 2), "can only be true, on the hypothesis that no philosopher has ever held any such view."¹ Why? Precisely because part, at least, of what 2) asserts is that there have been many human beings, . . . As Moore says, "For when I speak of 'Philosophers,' I mean of course (as we all do), exclusively philosophers who have been human beings, with human bodies, that have lived upon the earth,

¹Ibid., p. 40

and who have at different times had many different experiences."¹ Thus Moore phrases the issue as--Which is the more reasonable of the two premises?--that some philosophers have existed, regardless of the view they have held, or that 2) is false? The peculiarity which he points to is the peculiarity that the sceptic's arguments are really irrelevant, no matter how persuasive they seem, since "If I know that they have held such views, I am, ipso facto, knowing that they were mistaken."² Here again it is the inconsistency criterion which Moore applies in order to dismiss the view of the sceptic. This relates closely to what I pointed out earlier, namely the role of common sense statements as conceptual anchors or focal points which, by necessity, if they are overturned, overturn much else with them. Part of what tumbles is the claim that the sceptic (or any other philosopher) exists at all. Moore finishes his argument by noting the further peculiarity that even if it is the case that he has no support whatever in favor of his premise 2), it still is more certain than the premise that 2) is false:

And if I have no reason to believe that the proposition in question is true, I have still less reason to believe that they have held views incompatible with it, since I am more certain that they have existed and held some views; that the proposition in question

¹Ibid.

²Ibid.

is true, than that they have held any views incompatible with it."¹

Moore's next argument is based upon the point that even those philosophers who have disagreed with him and held views incompatible with 2) of his platform have constantly betrayed the fact that they also hold 2). His reasoning by now is obvious enough; by referring to "we," and by alluding to the existence of other philosophers, these philosophers were holding views incompatible with their own views. That is, by referring to "we" they have been referring to the class of human beings which exists only if Moore's claim is true. Any attempt to deny 1) and 2) involves the assumption that 1) and 2) are true. Now although this does not show 1) and 2) to be true, it does render the question of their truth as less than an open question. This fact, that philosophers compulsively hold the common sense platform 1) and 2), as Moore outlined it, is evidence, says Moore, for the obvious conclusion: 1) and 2) are simply true.

The appeal to ordinary language is a secondary technique in Moore's method. It is not crucial to his arguments in support of his claims that common sense propositions are true and known to be true. But it is an important ingredient in his attempted refutations of sceptical positions. Much has been made of the claim that Moore defended

¹Ibid., p. 39.

ordinary language, as opposed to common sense. We have touched upon this earlier. Moore did not believe that ordinary language required defending. The correctness of ordinary language is evidence of the truth of our ordinary knowledge claims. But for Moore the truth of those knowledge claims is primary.

Central to Moore's position is the view that there is some ordinary meaning of words and expressions. This is as simple a way of stating Moore's appeal to ordinary language as any. Yet as reasonable as this sounds, even this has been doubted by some philosophers. Moore says that "In what I have just said, I have assumed that there is some meaning which is the ordinary or popular meaning of such expressions as 'The earth has existed for many years past.' And this, I am afraid, is an assumption which some philosophers are capable of disputing."¹ Moore thought that any philosopher who did dispute the point must "Be confusing the question whether we understand its meaning (which we all certainly do) with the entirely different question whether we know what it means, in the sense that we are able to give a correct analysis of its meaning."² This point is so obvious to Moore that he really does not attempt to argue it. Although some of the propositions Moore defends

¹Ibid., p. 36.

²Ibid.

are not the kind of propositions the plain man would ordinarily claim to know, or utter in conversation, yet in defending them he "Meant by each of them precisely what every reader, in reading them, will have understood me to mean."¹ His only purpose here is to achieve a sharp division between those philosophers who truly hold views incompatible with his own and those who do not.

Moore does not think that his common sense point of view is based on any particular theory of meaning or any philosophical view about language. Rather it is based on acceptance of a simple fact, that words and expressions do have ordinarily understood and accepted meanings.

Moore is not interested in changing or improving upon ordinary language. His attempts at analyzing the statements made by other philosophers are attempts to make clear exactly what their position amounts to--in terms we all understand. This is the criterion of ordinary language. Moore's interest is never in cataloguing all the uses of a word; as a philosophical task, he does not think this is important or relevant. He is interested in ascertaining exactly how a philosopher is using certain key words and determining if those uses are in accordance with general usage. Moore does not frown upon the introduction of technical terms by philosophers, except when ordinary language would serve just

¹Ibid.

as well. He does require philosophers to identify and explain such terms and on those occasions when he used technical terms he went to great lengths to explain them.

The appeal to ordinary language is inextricably connected with two techniques of Moore's which have received a good deal of attention in the literature, that of analysis and translation into the concrete. The translation into the concrete involves translating a general statement, which philosophers typically make, like "time is unreal," or "Material things do not exist," etc., into specific concrete instances. If this is done correctly it enables us to see at what points, if any, philosophical views conflict with our common sense views. Moore thought that certain philosophical positions appear to be a good deal more plausible than they really, i.e., logically, are. This is because they are couched in extremely general terms. Thus Moore attempts to show what holding a given position entails, not in the strictly logical sense, but in the sense in which, for example, we would say--If time is unreal, then what sorts of things follow from this? What kinds of things which we normally assert would we not assert if time is unreal? Again, if this is successful it will enable us to see at what points, if any, a philosophical view conflicts with some other views which we hold. This ties into Moore's appeal to ordinary language because of his difficulty in trying to understand exactly what philosophers were asserting

in espousing their views. And of course the easiest way of doing this is to: 1) relate it to something we are all familiar with, i.e., the appeal to ordinary language; 2) examine a general view by looking at specific instances which it entails, i.e., translation into the concrete.

What Moore meant by analysis is itself the subject of much written work. But we can get a good idea of the kind of thing he means from the following remark:

It seems to me a surprising thing that so few philosophers, while saying a great deal as to what material things are and as to what it is to perceive them, have attempted to give a clear account as to what precisely they suppose themselves to know (or judge, in case they have held that we don't know any such propositions to be true, or even that no such propositions are true) when they know or judge such things as 'this is a hand,' 'that is the sun,' 'this is a dog,' etc. etc.¹

Again, in Moore's words, "It is the analysis of propositions of the latter kind which seems to me to present such great difficulties, while nevertheless the whole question as to the nature of material things obviously depends upon their analysis."²

For Moore the analysis of concepts shows the relationship between various ideas which may themselves be complex rather than simple. For example, the analysis of the concept of a material object may show us the relationship between the concept of "perception" and the concept of

¹Moore, "A Defence of Common Sense," p. 53.

²Ibid.

"object." Analysis may show the implications of holding certain philosophical views, the kinds of propositions to which one is also committed by virtue of holding such views. This is the sense in which analysis shows what a view "ultimately" means. Analysis is also important in revealing contradictions to which holding a certain position may give rise. Lastly, analysis has almost a metaphysical role for Moore. It takes us beyond the mere meanings of words or expressions, to the nature of things. Analysis provides a more unified view of the world by revealing connections among things (concepts) which were previously not seen. In this way, analysis helps provide "a description of the whole of the universe,"¹ a task which Moore has said rightly belongs to philosophers.

Understanding Moore's philosophy depends upon a clear understanding of the relationship among its key elements. It must be noted that Moore never presented his views in this way. The key elements I have identified have been taken from numerous essays, for it was in the course of discussing specific issues that Moore utilized these elements. However the interpretation I offer is, I believe, consistent with both Moore's stated remarks and the character of his work as a whole.

¹Moore, Some Main Problems of Philosophy, p. 202.

Thus we have seen that Moore tries to establish the truth of the propositions of common sense by combining the thesis that some propositions must be accepted without proof with the appeal to common sense. These are the two most fundamental elements in Moore's common sense point of view. The appeal to ordinary language and translation into the concrete are next in order of importance. Through them Moore shows where the views of philosophers go against the views of common sense. When they do, Moore rejects those philosophical views. At the same time he argues for a much more general view. Having argued that many common sense beliefs are true, and that they are to be understood in their ordinary sense, Moore believes he has shown that there is no good reason for accepting any philosophical view which requires changing our ordinary language. This clearly leads to a dilemma. On the one hand, philosophers cannot hold views which run counter to our common sense beliefs; these must be rejected because they contradict propositions which are true, and known to be true. On the other hand, Moore has shown the difficulties inherent in philosophical views which ask us to reject our ordinary views or revise our language in such a way as to eliminate the resultant conflict with common sense. What task remains for the philosopher if he can neither contradict the views of common sense nor alter those views? This brings us to the role of analysis, the last key element which is crucial to Moore's

work on scepticism.

One of the criticisms which has been leveled at Moore is that his work often misses the philosophical point at hand. It is fairly simple to understand how this charge has arisen. As we discussed earlier, there is a distinct character of naiveté in Moore's work; he frequently sounds like a newcomer to philosophical discussion. Couple this with the fact that Moore ultimately defends what the plain man claims to know and it becomes tempting to claim that Moore's philosophy consists simply of repeating what the plain man says when confronted by the arguments of philosophers. C. A. Mace has said "But what is more important than this is the fact that Moore's doubts would be resolved in the plain man's way."¹ "The 'Defence of Common Sense' is accordingly a defence of common sense procedures as well as common sense results."² Though this is a tempting position, it is the incorrect position to take. I have tried to show the ways in which Moore's defense of common sense propositions is a philosophical defense. Still, had Moore's work gone no further than the defense of common sense, then the criticism leveled at him would have been to some degree justified. But he did not.

¹C. A. Mace, "On How We Know That Material Things Exist," The Philosophy of G. E. Moore, ed. Paul Arthur Schilpp (3rd ed. La Salle, Illinois: Open Court, 1968), p. 298.

²Ibid.

The platform of common sense serves as a foundation for Moore. It is a yardstick by which the results of philosophical investigation are to be measured. Reconciling the results of our philosophical inquiries against the platform of common sense results in philosophical views which are meaningful, as opposed to strained and ridiculous. For Moore the importance of this cannot be overemphasized.

Analysis of ordinary propositions serves more than one role for Moore. First, it adds legitimacy to his common sense point of view because it differentiates Moore's claims from the claims of the plain man. It shows that Moore's views go beyond what the plain man is asserting. Secondly, it provides an alternative for philosophers, in which their views need not force us to abandon our ordinary beliefs or ways of speaking.

We need not apologize for the inaccuracies or lack of depth displayed by our ordinary ways of speaking. We may defend the truth of common sense beliefs wholeheartedly while at the same time we question what is the correct philosophical analysis of those views. The separation which Moore effects between the truth of ordinary propositions and their analysis is considered an important contribution by many commentators. In the words of Arthur Murphy:

What he shows is that it is quite possible to understand statements about observed material objects and other selves, in their ordinary or popular meaning, and to know their truth for certain, without knowing what their correct

analysis is or which among competing epistemologies gives the right account of what it is that we are 'ultimately' knowing when we know them.¹

This move is important. It addresses a critical problem, namely, the reconciliation of our ordinary view of the world with the insight into the "ultimate" nature of the world provided by epistemology.

Many commentators believe that Moore cannot reject the views of philosophers simply because his translation into the concrete shows their views to be in conflict with common sense. They claim that the sceptic's position, for example, that material things do not exist, may not have the translation "this table does not exist," that Moore seems to think it has. Further they argue that it is impossible for philosophers to ignore ordinary facts, and that therefore neither Moore nor the sceptics are arguing about an empirical issue. However, Moore rejected this. Moore argues that, if our ordinary beliefs are understood in their ordinary sense, then the sceptic's view is in conflict with those ordinary beliefs. In such a situation the appeal to ordinary language in combination with the translation into the concrete is designed to clarify the options available to the philosopher.

The philosopher may attempt to maintain both a sceptical

¹Arthur E. Murphy, "Moore's 'Defence of Common Sense,'" The Philosophy of G. E. Moore, ed. Paul Arthur Schilpp (3rd ed. La Salle, Illinois: Open Court, 1968), p. 310.

view and our common sense beliefs, as understood in their ordinary sense, i.e., as implying the reality of material things, space, time, etc. However unless the philosopher can show that his philosophical position does not have the translation into the concrete that Moore says it does, the two views are contradictory and cannot both be maintained. One way philosophers have taken this approach is by holding some form of phenomenalism. In this case the sceptic may retain both his philosophical view and our common sense beliefs because the conflict between the two has been eliminated. Moore addresses this, saying,

Some philosophers have sometimes so used the expression 'material thing' that if 'phenomenalism' (in one of its sense) is true, i.e. if the sun and the moon and the earth and human bodies etc. etc. are all merely 'logical fictions' or 'logical constructions out of Sense-data' or 'permanent possibilities of sensation,' then these objects are not 'material things'; and have used 'there are no material things' merely to mean that phenomenalism, in this sense, is true.¹

And against philosophers who have held such views, Moore does not think that his arguments can be applied. "Some philosophers, at all events sometimes, have meant to deny this. They have meant to assert that no such proposition as that pants exist is true; and it was only against this assertion that I supposed my proof to be a proof."² The reason here

¹Moore, "A Reply to My Critics," p. 669.

²Ibid., p. 670.

should be apparent enough; Moore and his opponent are not disagreeing over the truth of common sense propositions. They are simply providing alternative analyses of the concept "Material thing."

The second approach the sceptic may take is to retain his philosophical views and reject our ordinary beliefs; against this Moore tries to establish a prima facie case for the absolute absurdity and untenability of such views. As Ambrose points out, "Moore in doing philosophy constantly holds ordinary language before one, so that one is made to feel, not only upon returning to one's views, but while philosophizing, that they are 'strain'd and ridiculous.'"¹ Moore constantly points out that no philosopher has ever been able to maintain such a position consistently. Therefore he rejects this approach.

Lastly the sceptic may try to resolve the conflict between his philosophical views and our ordinary beliefs by subtly revising our ordinary language in such a way that our ordinary beliefs are no longer understood in their ordinary sense. That is to say, they may no longer imply the reality of material things, space, time, etc. Moore is perfectly willing to entertain this suggestion but claims that the philosophers who have attempted to do this have not explained or even attempted to explain their views.

¹Ambrose, "Moore's 'Proof of an External World,'" p. 417.

Regarding the proposition that material things do not exist, he says, "Perhaps the truth is that most have confused several different meanings with one another, and have passed from asserting it in one sense to asserting it in another, without noticing that it was different things they were asserting."¹ Subsequently, Moore concludes that this position is a weak one, while his position remains a strong one; the sceptic's position goes against propositions which are true and known to be true, and therefore must be rejected.

Some philosophers, most notably Malcolm, have claimed that "Moore was not defending Common Sense at all."² The reason given is that the kinds of statements Moore brings forward as examples of the kinds of statements he wants to defend in 1) are not statements which would normally be included by the plain man among the kinds of things he knows. They would not ordinarily be asserted, primarily because situations do not present themselves in which they would be doubted.

I believe that Malcolm misinterprets Moore here through an obliteration of the distinction between Moore's appeal to common sense and his appeal to ordinary language. The

¹Moore, "A Reply to My Critics," p. 670.

²Norman Malcolm, "Defending Common Sense," The Philosophical Review LVIII; reprinted in Studies in the Philosophy of G. E. Moore, ed. E. D. Klemke (Chicago: Quadrangle, 1969), p. 218.

blurring of this distinction has been common and is a definite mistake. In addition to Malcolm those philosophers who have confused these two appeals include Morris Lazerowitz and Alice Ambrose. It is not a matter of disagreement with Moore's general point of view, since, on the whole, all of these philosophers are to at least to some degree sympathetic. In particular, Malcolm and Lazerowitz are highly sympathetic to Moore's point of view.

The nature of the confusion has been similar and can be illustrated fairly easily. These commentators believe that although Moore thought he was defending common sense he was really defending ordinary language. For example, Malcolm says, "The essence of Moore's technique of refuting philosophical statements consists in pointing out that these statements go against ordinary language."¹ And Lazerowitz echoing the same theme says, "Moore's Defence of Common Sense is to be construed as a defence of the language of common sense."² Also, "His refutations [Moore's] are simply counterproposals to be understood as recommendations not to follow academic wishes to alter it [the language of common sense] ."³ Finally Ambrose's comment: "Moore's argument constitutes an insistence on retaining present usage--

¹Norman Malcolm, "Moore and Ordinary Language," The Philosophy of G. E. Moore, ed. Paul Arthur Schilpp (3rd ed. La Salle, Illinois: Open Court, 1968), p. 349.

²Lazerowitz, "Moore's Paradox," p. 387.

³Ibid., p. 393.

on retaining 'know' as well as 'believe' to preface statements about physical objects."¹ These three distinguished commentators agree that the essence of Moore's technique lies in showing that ordinary language, i.e., the language in which we all constantly talk of the existence of material things, other selves, etc., is correct language. And in showing that it is correct language, Moore is showing that our ordinary way of speaking is more reasonable, that is, makes more sense, than any of the sceptic's proposals.

In his reply to his critics, Moore himself strongly disclaims any such interpretation of his method. In a famous remark, he says:

Mr. Lazerowitz concludes that when, for instance, I tried to show that Time is not unreal, all that I was doing was to recommend that we should not use certain expressions in a different way from that in which we do. If this is all I was doing, I was certainly making a huge mistake, for I certainly did not think it was all. And I do not think so now.²

Of course Moore's simply disclaiming this interpretation does not make it incorrect. It is possible that he could think he was doing one thing when in fact he was doing something else. However I do think there are good reasons for siding with Moore.

First of all, if we are to accept this interpretation of Moore, then we must also accept a similar view of the

¹Ambrose, "Moore's 'Proof of an External World,'" p. 411.

²Moore, "A Reply to My Critics," p. 675.

sceptic. That is to say, we must see the sceptic as not arguing for any empirical theory, but as making a disguised linguistic proposal. Clearly for Moore to refute the sceptic, as at least Malcolm and Lazerowitz give him credit for doing, they must be making opposing claims about the same thing. And if Moore was making proposals that we retain ordinary language or retain our present ways of speaking about material things, or time, then the sceptic must be seen as making proposals to change our ways of speaking. But there is little if any evidence of this. I cannot find any evidence that Bradley, in arguing that "time is unreal," was urging that we modify our ordinary ways of speaking about time, even if this would be a result of his views about time. Moore takes up this theme also in his reply, "But I see no reason to accept Miss Ambrose's view . . . that those who have said 'there are no external objects' were merely making a recommendation as to how 'external object' ought to be used."¹

The reason, I think, why these commentators have been lead to interpret Moore in this vein is that Moore's refutations have not generally been seen as refutations by the sceptics. If Moore and the sceptic were arguing on empirical, that is, not linguistic, grounds, then this should not occur. If Moore's refutations are good refutations, as

¹Ibid., p. 674.

these commentators seem to think, then how could they fail to convince the sceptic?

There are a couple of ways, only one of which I think the commentators have paid attention to. They have settled the matter by saying that both the sceptic and Moore were doing something other than what they thought they were doing; that both were arguing on a different plane than they supposed, i.e., that they were issuing linguistic proposals and not making empirical claims. But there is another alternative, namely that Moore's refutations were not fully understood, not in the simple sense, but in the sense of how his three fundamental appeals are connected.

In fact, I think this is the major reason his refutations were not seen as such. As I have tried to point out, the divergence between Moore and the sceptics begins at the earliest points of discussion. Their epistemological theories start out from entirely different perspectives rather than starting from a common point of view and later diverging at some point.

It seems to me that it is by ignoring the first two elements I outlined, that one would be led to interpret Moore in this linguistic fashion. And in light of Moore's constant detailed examination of the meaning of certain terms, expressions and questions, it is easy to ignore those two elements; yet it is a mistake to do so.

The mistake which Malcolm and the others have made is

the mistake of thinking that linguistic facts have some sort of logical priority over empirical facts; they constantly treat the two spheres as completely independent when in fact they are closely related. They argue in the following way: Moore's refutations fail to convince the sceptics, therefore Moore and the sceptic cannot be disputing over facts; then they offer the interpretation that Moore and the sceptics are making opposing linguistic proposals, i.e., proposals about what it makes sense to say. And since Moore and the sceptic both possess the same evidence, i.e., the same access to ordinary usage, it is obvious that Moore is correct as to what it makes sense to say. For example, Lazerowitz says, "A railroad train has wheels while it is going and no one sees them."¹ Moore would not disagree that it makes sense to say this. This is the ordinary and correct way of speaking. But what is left unsaid here is--why? The obvious reason why it makes sense to say a railroad train has wheels while it is going and no one sees them is because they exist. For Moore the connection between common sense and ordinary language is clear cut. His appeal is first of all to the truth of common sense propositions, not as examples of good linguistic usage, or examples of propositions which have a legitimate use, but as examples of the kinds of things which we all do know,

¹Lazerowitz, "Moore's Paradox," p. 387.

without proof. It is precisely because we know these kinds of things that propositions like "this is a hand" have a legitimate role in ordinary language.

There is a tremendous difference between saying that retaining present linguistic usage is a consequence of Moore's position, and saying, as Ambrose does, that "Moore's argument constitutes an insistence on retaining present usage."¹ [*Italics mine.*] I cannot emphasize too strongly that nowhere does Moore argue from the fact that certain propositions or expressions have an ordinary and correct use to the establishment of the kinds of things that the common sense point of view supports. On the contrary, he talks about things which, in his view, we all know. The strongest argument I can offer on Moore's behalf is that Moore was attempting to refute the arguments of sceptics, philosophers whose views are that we do not know or cannot know certain sorts of things, and none of these philosophers thought they were making linguistic proposals. They are not sceptical of the language we use, but of the kinds of things our language implies exist.

Malcolm, in his essay, quotes a passage from Ayer's The Foundations of Empirical Knowledge; his interpretation of this passage is that when a philosopher maintains that no material thing statement can be certain "He is not making

¹Ambrose, "Moore's 'Proof of an External World,'" p. 411.

an empirical judgement, but is condemning a certain form of expression as improper."¹ Here again, Malcolm is partly right, and partly wrong. He goes wrong by failing to pay sufficient attention to the connection between views about knowledge and views about forms of speech. Malcolm draws a sharp distinction, saying he is not making an empirical judgement, therefore he is condemning a certain form of expression. However, a philosopher, like Ayer, would only condemn the form of expression as improper if he did in fact hold the logically prior view that no material thing statement can be known, whether this be an empirical judgement or not. I say that this view is logically prior because I do not know of any philosopher who holds that material thing statements can be known, yet holds that the form of expression regarding material things is improper. That is to say, I take it that the only reason for asserting the impropriety of the form of expression is a prior view about knowledge, a sceptical view.

Malcolm, like Ambrose, ignores Moore's prior move, i.e., his appeal to common sense, and talks as if Moore's view is simply a view about language. Just as with Ambrose's remark, I think it would be acceptable to assert that on Moore's view it is proper to say that "we know for certain . . . ," but that this is an incorrect portrayal of the

¹Malcolm, "Moore and Ordinary Language," p. 353.

whole of Moore's view. It is only acceptable to say this because Moore holds that we do in reality know these things for certain.

For Moore inspection, not introspection, is relevant to establishing the truth of common sense statements. In this also he differs from the vast majority of philosophers. When Moore discusses sense-data he does utilize introspection; his interest there is to analyze our experience, i.e., our knowledge, not to justify or legitimize it. The difference between inspection and introspection and their place in philosophical argument is important to Moore's contention that common sense propositions are known immediately. The plausibility of his claim is based on the model of inspection, not introspection, as the vehicle for establishing the truth of basic empirical propositions.

Moore's arguments against Epistemological Scepticism therefore utilize the same basic ingredients as do the arguments of the sceptics, but start from a different perspective. Of course this must be so; yet the plausibility of any epistemological theory can only be truly evaluated by carefully seeing these ingredients woven together into a whole. I think Moore's work suffers a bit in this respect, not ever having laid his arguments out in one place as I have attempted to do in this section.

CHAPTER II

WITTGENSTEIN'S ON CERTAINTY

Wittgenstein's Criticisms of Moore

In order to place Moore's work on Epistemological Scepticism in a proper context we must treat in some depth the work by Wittgenstein, On Certainty. Wittgenstein approaches the problems of scepticism and the justification of our ordinary beliefs from a different perspective. He attempts to replace the "I know" with "forms of life" as the starting point of philosophy, and redefine the relationships between the concepts of certainty, knowledge, belief, etc.

In On Certainty, Wittgenstein discusses Moore's work on scepticism, particularly Moore's "Defence of Common Sense" and his "Proof of an External World." This is highly unusual for Wittgenstein. Occasionally in his works he alludes to the works of other philosophers, or the context makes it clear that he is discussing the work of Kant, Russell, or Plato for example, but he never actually says so. Yet, in On Certainty he discusses Moore's position in great detail.

Wittgenstein very often agrees with Moore's conclusions;

yet this is at best only a superficial agreement. They are attacking similar questions from entirely different perspectives. Their conclusions are supported in far different ways. However, similarities between Wittgenstein's and Moore's approach exist at a very basic level. For example, one of Wittgenstein's major points is that certainty is prior to doubt; that doubting requires a general framework of non-doubting. Every system requires some propositions which are fixed points of certainty around which our doubts may grab hold and function as genuine doubts. On this point, Wittgenstein is not far from the first element in Moore's epistemology, that some propositions must be accepted without proof if any are to be known by means of proof. It must be admitted that Wittgenstein, in his characteristic style, treats this point through a much greater variety of examples than Moore; he creates pictures of conceptual geography which he then examines from every angle. And by doing this, he lends plausibility to his argument. Moore, on the other hand, is much more austere in terms of providing us with examples. Rather he strikes us as a man who stands by himself repeating--"this is how it must be . . . this is how it must be."

Wittgenstein and Moore both agree that we begin not at a level of sense-data, not on an experiential level, but at the level at which certain ordinary types of propositions and judgements are accepted. Wittgenstein expresses this

in a much more concept oriented way; Moore expresses it much more so from the point of view of someone who tries never to enter the circle drawn by philosophers, as the plain man might do.

Furthermore, there is a strong similarity in their reasoning. Wittgenstein talks of our system collapsing if there are no fixed points; our concepts cannot get a foothold, the dependence of even the smallest of activities upon a "given" of some sort. Moore similarly talks of propositions which are universally held, i.e., that are held simply because we do have a "system," they are compulsively held, i.e., they are so embedded in our thought and language that it is impossible to get outside of them. These propositions possess the curious property that any attempt to deny them involves one in tremendous inconsistencies. Wittgenstein's grammatical impossibility is paralleled in Moore's view by the reductio argument wherein he talks of these inconsistencies. Thus, Moore says, any such theory (sceptical theory) can only be true on the premise that no philosopher exists or has ever existed, etc.

Another similarity, at least in terms of the basic thrust, is Moore's point that the propositions of common sense are more certain than any proposition which could be brought forward to show that they are false, or true for that matter. Any attempt to deny them involves the use of propositions much less certain than they themselves are. Compare

that Wittgenstein and Moore have to say on this point: Moore, "it seems to me more certain that I do know that this is a pencil and that you are conscious, than that any single one of these four assumptions is true, let alone all four";¹ Wittgenstein: "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."² Both seem to have a hold on the same point. Yet, Moore points this out but does not extend its implications fully. In Wittgenstein's terms this exemplifies how it is by means of our framework facts that our other concepts are given life. Their entrenchment is of an entirely different order than that of any other proposition or set of propositions. For Moore this again is just so. It is an obvious truism. And although Moore's uttering truisms does not seem like any great advance in philosophy, it is significant if those truisms state very basic truths about our conceptual systems.

Still throughout all this Moore's arguments are always on a more simplistic, direct empirical plane, while Wittgenstein's are of a more conceptual and far-reaching nature. Moore is preoccupied with telling us how things are, Wittgenstein with telling us why things are this way. Moore

¹Moore, "Four Forms of Scepticism," p. 222.

²Wittgenstein, On Certainty, p. 33.

argues more from within our conceptual system, and of course from within it is more difficult to get a view of the whole. So Moore spends a great deal of time trying to get us to accept what he perceives as certain facts about our world view. Wittgenstein argues as if from a place outside the system. As such, he maintains a better perspective on the whole, and can transmit a better sense of the inter-relationships which help to make the system what it is.

Nevertheless this field of similarity between Wittgenstein and Moore contains also the kernel for their disagreements and Wittgenstein's extensive criticisms of Moore as well. Those criticisms may be summed up as follows:

- 1) Moore's knowledge claims are subjective claims;
- 2) Moore fails to explain how he knows what he claims to know;
- 3) Moore is incorrect in thinking that the concept of knowing applies to the propositions of common sense.

The first major criticism which Wittgenstein makes of Moore is that Moore's justification for the things he claimed to know, i.e., the propositions of common sense, is a subjective justification. That is to say, he believes that Moore thinks he knows these things simply because he feels very strongly that he knows them. He says, "Moore's mistake lies in this--countering the assertion that one cannot know that by saying 'I do know it.'"¹ Wittgenstein thinks that

¹Ibid., p. 68.

Moore would like to argue from his feeling of certainty (subjective) to the conclusion that "here is a hand" for example, is objectively certain, i.e., true. Wittgenstein judges that this argument fails because no matter how strong Moore's feelings of certainty are, he may still be wrong.

Wittgenstein perceives Moore's argument to be: if it is true that I know A, then it follows that A; but I do know A (I assure you I know A), therefore A. And since scepticism holds that A cannot be known or A cannot be true, scepticism is wrong. Wittgenstein agrees with the logic of this argument but takes issue with Moore's claim to know A which of course is the crux of the argument.

Wittgenstein continues with the following remark: "If Moore is attacking those who say that one cannot really know such a thing, he can't do it by assuring them that he knows this and that. For one need not believe him. If his opponents had asserted that one could not believe this and that, then he could have replied: 'I believe it.'¹ Before we agree too hastily with Wittgenstein in this criticism, I think we should try to get clear about how Moore did proceed in his argument. Moore does realize that things which are known require grounds; in fact he would like to be able to enumerate exactly what his grounds are. He is unable to do this. Yet the grounds are important only if my claim of knowledge is challenged. Moore's position is that if we

¹Ibid.

really think about it, then we will find it impossible to doubt the kinds of knowledge claims he makes; we will acknowledge that if we ever know anything, then these are certainly things which we know.

Moore's constant assurances that he knows should be interpreted more along the lines of providing persuasive force, than as an attempt to establish that which he claims to know. His argument is very much a psychological one. Moore finds in himself an absolute inability to doubt certain kinds of propositions coupled with very good evidence that such propositions are in fact true. This helps generate the force which gives his arguments their psychological tone. In his "Proof" Moore tries to prove the existence of things external to us by pointing out two instances of such things. And as regards common sense propositions, Moore is merely using his own instance of knowing them to prove that such things can and very frequently are known for certain. Of course if it is true that Moore knows one of these things then two of the 'sceptics' arguments immediately fall, namely that no such thing is ever true, and that even if true, no one can ever know it to be true.

The reason, I think, why Moore downplays objective certainty is related to the kinds of things he wants to claim he knows. The very special role that Wittgenstein acknowledges is played by very basic propositions like the propositions of common sense is part of the reason why Moore

cannot seem to explain how he knows them. Furthermore, it is also part of the reason why Moore ultimately ends up just asking us if we can really doubt these propositions. Moore tries to temper the psychological tone of his argument by pointing out that his feelings are not as important as might seem, because if his argument holds for him, it also holds for everyone else. "Of course, if I am right in thinking that I have [known things], I think it is quite certain that other people, including Russell himself, often have too--that all of you, for instance, have very, very often known for certain things of each of these sorts with regard to which he asserts that no human being has ever known whatever of that sort."¹ And about this Wittgenstein is in total agreement with Moore; he says, "The truths which Moore says he knows, are such as, roughly speaking, all of us know, if he knows them."²

On this first point, it must be said that Wittgenstein is correct to a large degree. Moore's defense of his knowledge claims is very subjective. However, as we discussed in the previous section, the single most important factor in Moore's general defense of the common sense view of the world is the tremendous inconsistencies which arise from any view which asserts the contrary, and this is far

¹Moore, "Four Forms of Scepticism," p. 197.

²Wittgenstein, On Certainty, p. 15.

more important than defending his particular personal knowledge claims.

Wittgenstein's first criticism of Moore, that his knowledge claims are subjectively based, forms the basis for his second criticism, that Moore fails to explain how he knows what he claims to know. We can see Wittgenstein's position quite clearly in the following two remarks:

Moore's view really comes down to this: the concept 'know' is analogous to the concepts 'believe,' 'surmise,' 'doubt,' 'be convinced' in that the statement 'I know' . . . can't be a mistake.¹

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,' and since from 'I know it is so' there follows 'It is so,' then the latter can't be doubted either.²

According to Wittgenstein, it is not the case that Moore attempts to show how he knows, but that his attempts fail. Rather it is that Moore doesn't believe it necessary to show how he knows. The reason is that Moore likens the concept "know" to the concepts "believe," "surmise," "doubt," in that the statement "I know" expresses an attitude or disposition on my part, rather than an objective state of affairs.

Wittgenstein correctly says that if it was shown that Moore does know that here is a hand, then it would be true

¹Ibid., p. 5.

²Ibid., p. 25.

to say that at least one hand exists. That is to say, it makes no sense to say that A truly knows that B but that B is not so. "One can say 'He believes it, but it isn't so,' but not 'He knows it, but it isn't so.'"¹ Thus it is commonly accepted that in a genuine instance of knowledge the thing which the object of the knowing is so. So the question of certainty then hinges very clearly on whether or not Moore does know what he claims to know, i.e., is this a valid instance of knowledge? And on this question Wittgenstein takes Moore to be saying that his (Moore's) assurance is sufficient to guarantee this as an instance of knowledge; that is to say, that when I say "I know . . ." it is analogous to saying, "I believe . . ." in that what follows must be so. Wittgenstein says that this simply isn't so; that Moore knows must be shown. It must be objectively established. "That he [Moore] does know takes some showing."² Wittgenstein emphasizes that Moore thought his feeling of absolute certainty, his state of being absolutely convinced, is enough to certify the claim to knowledge in such circumstances. Wittgenstein is right. The question is not--Does Moore think he knows? He obviously thinks he does. The question is--Does Moore know what he claims to know?

If Moore's argument is simply that I think I know therefore I know, then this is no answer to the sceptic or

¹Ibid., p. 8.

²Ibid., p. 4.

the Idealist whose claim is not just that Moore does not know what he claims to know in this particular instance, but that such things cannot be known at all. Moore finds himself in the difficult position of realizing that it makes no sense to say it is not certain that here is a hand, or that I am now standing up, or to say that here is probably a hand, that such a thoroughgoing scepticism gets one nowhere. If scepticism is permitted into our discussions at this level then there are no further levels. Yet at the same time Moore is unable to bring forward any satisfying account of how we know things such as these. He says, "We are all, I think, in this strange position, that we do know many things, with regard to which we know further that we must have had evidence for them, and yet we do not know how we know them, i.e., we do not know what the evidence was."¹

Moore's position can be summarized in the following fashion: 1) Moore believes that statements like "here is a hand" are just like any other empirical statement; 2) It is possible to know empirical statements, i.e., that the possibility of empirical propositions being false does not rule out the possibility of their being true and known to be true; 3) The propositions of common sense cannot be doubted. Any attempt to doubt them inevitably gives rise to

¹Moore, "A Defence of Common Sense," p. 44.

inconsistencies; 4) Although in many cases not being able to say how we know something is fatal to our knowledge claim, Moore feels that in the case of statements like "here is a hand" (and many of the other claims he makes in his "Defence") this objection cannot displace the overwhelming inclination we have to assert our knowledge and depend upon these statements.

Wittgenstein focuses on the last two points, and interprets Moore's argument as psychological, that is, as the argument that in instances where I feel very strongly that such and such is the case, then such and such must be the case, and from this analysis comes his conclusion that Moore likens the concept 'know' to the concepts 'believe,' 'surmise,' etc.

Wittgenstein says, "One says 'I know' when one is ready to give compelling grounds. 'I know' relates to the possibility of demonstrating the truth."¹ I must be able to indicate either what my evidence is, or to point out the truths from which my assertion follows. Moore realizes and acknowledges that he cannot say specifically how it is that he (and everyone else too, if he knows them) knows the propositions of common sense to be true. Yet his conclusion is not that these things are not known, but that we can know things without being able to prove them, without being able

¹Wittgenstein, On Certainty, p. 32.

to say exactly how we know them. Thus Wittgenstein criticizes Moore for not realizing that if placed within the context of 'knowing' then he must be able to show how he knows the propositions of common sense. This is strictly a function of how the concept 'know' works. Wittgenstein of course, does not believe that Moore could have done this, i.e., simply merely failed; rather, that Moore cannot show how he knows the propositions of common sense is evidence, Wittgenstein believes, for his own position, that the certainty of the propositions of common sense is not related to how well they are known. They possess a special status within our conceptual system, one which takes them outside the logic of knowing.

Wittgenstein's final and major criticism of Moore is that Moore is incorrect in attempting to apply the concept of knowledge to the propositions of common sense. That is, Wittgenstein claims that Moore misconstrues completely the status of our basic or framework propositions.

In ordinary circumstances we just do not doubt the certainty of some types of propositions at all. That this is so is an empirical fact about our conceptual framework. And this being so, it makes no sense to speak of these things as being known, or for that matter, now known. Wittgenstein sees "knowing" in its proper use, as an achievement word, to use Ryle's phrase, and one of the

requisites for applying "I know" properly is that one must put oneself in the proper position to claim "I know." One must either gather evidence or analyze facts, whatever; but the end result is that the claim "I know" acts as an announcement. I adopt a position vis a vis what I claim to know, and part of what I claim is that I am prepared to say how it is that I know what I claim to know. Another important requisite is the implication that it is the presence of certain conditions, which are themselves contingent conditions, which opens up the possibility of knowing in this instance; "'I know' often means: I have the proper grounds for my statement."¹ Conversely the implication is that in neutral circumstances, i.e., where none of the relevant conditions are present, then "I know" is not allowable, precisely because in the neutral circumstances, "I don't know" is the proper claim.

For example, take the claim that I know what time it is. It is possible that I know what time it is, but also perfectly possible that I don't. This is as it should be, and identifies this as a contingent proposition. However, it is also only the presence of certain conditions, e.g., I am wearing a watch, or I am in a position to see a clock, or hear a radio; regardless, it is only through the presence of one or more conditions that I may in fact legitimately make

¹Ibid., p. 4.

my claim to know what time it is. I may of course be quite wrong about the time. Still it is the conditions which permit me to make the claim, i.e., make it a logically correct claim, a permissible claim. In the absence of any of these conditions what we say is that I don't know what time it is. This is the proposition which performs the bulk of the work, the proposition which wears the trousers, so to speak. Thus the point is that the kinds of propositions which Moore is constantly defending and assuring us that he knows don't meet this criterion. They are not propositions which require the presence of any set of conditions in order to be established as certain. Rather they are just the opposite. They are those propositions which unless special circumstances lead us to suspect them as being mistaken, are otherwise treated as absolutely certain. They are those propositions whose uncertainty takes some showing. Moore once again instinctively realizes that the propositions of common sense are special. They are not participants in our ordinary games of knowing. Yet Moore merely concludes that this property is due to their being the most certain, i.e., in his terms, the most easily known of all propositions.

Another argument which Wittgenstein uses to establish his point is that knowing is possible only where doubt is also possible. In the instances in which Moore claims to know that "here is ahead" for example, no doubt is possible. This removes the proposition from the realm of knowing and

denies it the status of a true contingent proposition. The essential point is that "knowing" has grounds, knowing requires that some conditions be met, and this being so, in any instance where knowing is possible, not knowing, i.e., the lack of grounds, must necessarily be possible. Any propositions which are unconditionally accepted and treated as certain, such as Moore's truisms, cannot properly be said to be known. Wittgenstein's point about the possibility of doubt is directed at telling us something about the structure of knowledge. He is aiming at the difference between propositions which function as part of the framework and those which would normally be called contingent. Any proposition which can properly be said to be known can also be doubted. And Wittgenstein doesn't mean an ideal or simply imaginable doubt, but a practical, actual doubt. If a proposition requires grounds for it to be known, then in any particular instance, the presence of those grounds may be questioned and this is what doubt amounts to. Thus in Wittgenstein's view, knowing and doubting are opposite sides of the same conceptual game and apply to the same propositions. Any proposition which is truly contingent and a candidate for knowing carries with it the possibility of doubt. For Wittgenstein the signal that Moore is mistaken in claiming to know the propositions of common sense is the very point which Moore seizes upon, the absolute and very fundamental inconsistencies which arise from any attempt to

doubt them.

The final argument offered by Wittgenstein to support the point that the certainty of our basic propositions is not a matter of "knowing them" is that the concept "I know" only makes sense, i.e., only has application, in instances where "I don't know" also makes sense. This feature is also lacking in the situations in which Moore asserts "I know." Wittgenstein's point is that the concept of knowing must demarcate some line of difference for it to possess a legitimate role. And normally, about things which are contingent, sometimes known, sometimes not, the concept does effect just such a demarcation. It serves to note that what follows is not merely believed, or suspected, but known. I warrant what follows and I must be ready to defend it.

Except for highly unusual circumstances, in which unusual types of doubts are raised such as delusions, hallucinations, etc., the certainty of a proposition like "here is a hand," "I am a human being," is just not questionable. It is interesting to note that a philosophical doubt is not even included among those unusual doubts, for philosophical doubts do not get a foothold, do not spring out of our ordinary range of concepts at all. The sceptic tries to circumvent this by claiming the philosophical doubts certainly do apply to propositions, even at this level. However, Wittgenstein takes ordinary circumstances as being somewhat sacrosanct and he has a good reason for this. It

is from ordinary circumstances that these concepts get their life. If we remove them from their natural habitat, so to speak, the results are at best a bit suspect. Therefore it is within ordinary circumstances that we must look at the kinds of propositions which Moore asserts; within those circumstances there is no question of not knowing them.

Since Moore cannot doubt propositions like the propositions of common sense, he concludes that this proves: 1) that they are known; 2) that they are more certain than any other proposition(s) which might be used to disprove them. He is right in 2) but wrong in 1) in Wittgenstein's view.

To sum up, Wittgenstein's primary disagreement with Moore is that Moore is wrong in claiming to know the propositions of common sense. This is not meant to imply that they aren't certain but only to point out that imbedded in Moore's view is an incorrect model of knowledge, a model which permits only two options; either they are certain and also known, or they are not known at all.

Wittgenstein holds that Moore claimed to know these propositions because of his subjective certainty rather than any objective certainty which these propositions possess. Moore fails to show how, in general, such propositions may be known, and further, in the case of the particular propositions he claims to know, how they are certain, i.e., how they are supported apart from Moore's inability to doubt them. Moore would like to show how they are known but admits

that he cannot do so. Yet he fails to see that it is the weight of impartial evidence which is the single most critical element in the establishment of knowledge claims for the kinds of propositions in question.

Still, Moore does recognize the peculiar role played by our basic proposition or framework facts as they have been called. He recognizes our inability to doubt them, through the fact that if we do, the rest of our system falls by the wayside.

Moore though, is unable to shake the model he has inherited. He wants to establish these propositions as true and known to be true; he feels that if he cannot do so, then the only alternative is scepticism, i.e., the conclusion that they aren't certain at all. As has been the case many times before in philosophy, an absolute dichotomy such as this one, between knowing the propositions of common sense and scepticism, can be the cause of further philosophical problems. Thus Moore tries, through pointing out psychological facts, constant reassurances, and resultant inconsistencies, to fit within the context of "knowing," those propositions whose role is to help define what knowing is, and as such are not subject to the examinations of propositions within that context.

Wittgenstein's Perspective Provides Greater
Insight Into Moore's Position

In On Certainty, Wittgenstein returns to some conceptions time and again. I speak here, for example, of the ideas that some propositions must stand fast for us if doubting is to make sense at all, that certainty is not a form of super-knowledge, that certainty is not grounded in logic or perception but in certain language-games, certain forms of life which are simply given. These are not all, but simply some of the themes to which Wittgenstein returns throughout the work.

It is very clear that Wittgenstein did not perceive himself as doing traditional philosophy, be it epistemology or logic. And chief among his objections was his view that philosophers should not advance theses. Wittgenstein is repelled by the idea that philosophers can or ought to work like scientists. Rather, philosophers are in a certain sense pointing to things which we already know, facts about the use of certain concepts and terms which give us false ideas about the way things really are. It is these false pictures which give rise to philosophical questions which seem to permit of no satisfactory answer.

In holding that the kinds of propositions which Moore says he knows are really certain, Wittgenstein carefully avoids falling into the same philosophical fray as both Moore and the sceptics. This is because On Certainty is an attempt

to redefine the nature of the issues which had traditionally fallen under the title of epistemology. Much of what used to fall within the scope of epistemology really belongs, according to Wittgenstein, to a subject which we might now call philosophy of language. Questions such as: How do we test the validity of a calculation? Wittgenstein says: "This is how one calculates. Calculating is this. What we learn at school, for example. Forget this transcendent certainty, which is connected with your concept of spirit."¹ Also: "What counts as its test--'But is this an adequate test? And if so, must it not be recognizable as such in logic?'--As if giving grounds did not come to an end sometime. But the end is not an ungrounded presupposition: it is an ungrounded way of acting."²

In holding that Moore's common sense propositions are certain, Wittgenstein is not making an epistemological point. They are not ungrounded presuppositions; they are not the much sought after incorrigible propositions or first principles which make knowledge possible. Talk like this belongs to the traditional theory of epistemology in which knowledge needs to be grounded. Wittgenstein neither attempts to delimit them, nor to define them: They are a given. They represent ungrounded ways of acting. In supporting common sense propositions as certain, Wittgenstein

¹Ibid., p. 8.

²Ibid., p. 17.

is not providing a ground for knowledge, nor a justification for our belief in these kinds of propositions. Nor is he adopting a realist perspective and maintaining that they are simply true. In pointing out the certainty which these basic propositions have, Wittgenstein is not trying to enumerate a class of propositions as would a traditional philosopher. Rather, Wittgenstein removes the question of the possibility of knowledge, i.e., certainty, from epistemology itself. Therefore the need is eliminated to posit either incorrigible sense-data or a priori principles as fixed points of certainty from which knowledge is grounded.

Wittgenstein never seriously entertains the possibility of scepticism, or any view which maintains that our basic kinds of empirical propositions are always doubtful or mistaken. Scepticism is not a matter of what we say, and neither is certainty. One of Wittgenstein's central themes is that certainty is not something which is established, nor the kind of thing which "attaches to" and is carried around by a proposition. Certainty is not a characteristic of propositions. Rather it is a function of the role that some propositions play; certain propositions are part of the framework, or logic (grammar) which define human activities. Moreover I use the phrase human activity very carefully because for Wittgenstein this is the level from which philosophy begins; this is the substrate for all our questioning, human activities and the conventions of meaning

which make those activities (or forms of life) possible. The certainty of some basic kinds of propositions, be they empirical or otherwise, is necessary in order for human activities, qua activities, to exist at all. Wittgenstein says, "I really want to say that a language is only possible if one trusts something (I did not say 'can trust something')." ¹ This aside reveals that he is not addressing the question of the justification of our acceptance of certain propositions at all. If we ask to justify the grounding of our knowledge then with this question we are already going round in a circle; yet this is what the sceptics do. The grounding of our knowledge takes place at a level which is not philosophical or analytic at all. He says, "Any logic good enough for a primitive means of communication needs no apology from us. Language did not emerge from some kind of ratiocination." ² For Wittgenstein it is human activities and language games which function at the primary level. It is impossible to separate the two. That some propositions are certain and treated as such is a function of their role, and that role is as part of the given in a particular activity. These "forms of life," basic human activities and patterns of behavior, are inherently connected with basic language conventions or "language games"

¹Ibid., p. 66.

²Ibid., p. 62.

as he calls them. Wittgenstein accepts the existence of forms of life and their implications as a pre-requisite for all philosophical discussion. This given, which acts as a substrate for all which follows, has a very special status for Wittgenstein. It is neither known nor not known. Thus Wittgenstein's model precludes absolute scepticism without positing anything which is known or certain in an epistemological sense.

Following Wittgenstein's line of thought, in every activity there is something which counts as given, something which itself forms part of the background of the activity; take those given propositions away and a) that activity ceases to exist as such, and b) any concepts developed within that activity also lose their meaning. A couple of examples might serve us well here:

1) In a game of chess we can question whether a player's move was sanctioned by the rules, or where the Queen is on the board, but we cannot question whether the rules change in such a way that any move whatsoever might be sanctioned. That the rules do not change between moves is part of the given in the game of chess. If this were not so then the concept of a rule as well as that of a game itself would be in jeopardy. Does this mean that we know that the rules do not change indiscriminately, that we have somehow found this out? No, and yet it is absolutely certain;

2) Very often we might conduct an experiment to measure the growth of a plant. And we do this by measuring it with a stick at various stages of its growth. Part of the given here is that our measuring device, for example our stick or ruler, itself does not change its size between measurings. That is, assuming that no one touches the ruler, we assume it to be the same length today as it was yesterday. Is this something which we have come to know? Wittgenstein answers no. In his words:

We check the story of Napoleon, but not whether all the reports about him are based on sense-deception, forgery and the like. For whenever we test anything, we are already presupposing something that is not tested. Now am I to say that the experiment which perhaps I make in order to test the truth of a proposition presupposes the truth of the proposition that the apparatus I believe I see is really there and the like?¹

The proposition that the ruler does not change its size is absolutely certain. If it were not we could not legitimately be said to be measuring anything at all. Our activity would be meaningless.

Wittgenstein makes the point that certainty is prior to doubt, and is a prerequisite for the existence of human activities. For any system to develop requires some fixed points. These points are those propositions which we take as certain, treat as certain, etc. It is only against a background of certainty, of a general non-doubting of

¹Ibid., p. 24.

propositions that the essence of doubting makes sense. He says, "If you tried to doubt everything you would not get as far as doubting anything. The game of doubting itself presupposes certainty."¹ To ask Wittgenstein to imagine a system just like our present one except that propositions like "here is a hand" are doubtful, is to make a request which he considers a conceptual impossibility. Wittgenstein says, "If you are not certain of any fact, you cannot be certain of the meaning of your words either."² If we admit that framework facts such as Moore's truisms are not certain, our system will collapse. Our concepts derive their meaning from the role they play within a particular system. That system is anchored by and partly defined by a set of framework facts, a certain core of propositions which we treat as certain. Once we begin to tamper with our core propositions we are in effect tampering with the meaning of all of these our key concepts. Therefore any epistemology which conjoins a denial or questioning of any of our core propositions with an attempt to continue to use our key concepts as before, is doomed to failure. Those concepts simply cannot function as before. This, of course, is exactly what the sceptics do.

There is no way to simply explain the transition to Wittgenstein; that is because Wittgenstein's position is not

¹Ibid., p. 18.

²Ibid., p. 17.

a transition at all. It represents a break from the Cartesian tradition. In a succinct fashion, let me say that Wittgenstein attempts to uproot epistemology from its pre-eminent role in philosophy by removing the requirement to justify ordinary experience. The question of certainty is separated from the realm of epistemology, which in turn is left looking like quite a different endeavor; in Wittgenstein's terms it simply comes down to an investigation of the ways in which the word "know" is used and the kinds of things to which it is properly applied, rather than an attempt to justify our belief in the existence of a material world or other selves. Of course this is to be expected for on the Cartesian model epistemology is synonymous with the question of certainty. When we are talking about the grounding of philosophy we are talking about the concept of certainty and vice versa. Epistemology has traditionally expressed its questions in terms of the kinds of things of which we may be certain. For Wittgenstein, the concept of certainty is not part of epistemology per se, at all.

One could easily see and explain the transition from the epistemological theory of the rationalists to the empiricists, and from the empiricists to Moore and his brand of realism. These transitions are explained in terms of emphasizing one element or another in a similar model of epistemology. On this model there is no difference in kind

between certainty and knowledge. That is, certainty is seen as a subset of knowledge, the form of knowledge which is least subject to doubt. So certainty is at one extreme of the knowledge continuum, the end at which those propositions are not at all subject to doubt. Although there are great differences between the a priori truths of the rationalists and the certainties of immediate experience of the empiricists, the role played within their respective epistemologies is the same. Both are descriptive of reality. They tell us something at a very basic level about the world, and are used to deduce other propositions. Ordinary experience must be justified, must somehow be derived in either case.

In Wittgenstein's view, knowledge and certainty are not opposite sides of the same coin. They do not belong to the same range of concepts. He expresses this in a variety of ways:

'Knowledge' and 'Certainty' belong to different categories.¹

If the true is what is grounded, then the ground is not true, nor yet false.²

When Moore says he knows such and such, he is really enumerating a lot of empirical propositions which we affirm without special testing; propositions, that is, which have a peculiar logical role in the system of our empirical propositions.³

¹Ibid., p. 39

²Ibid., p. 28.

³Ibid., p. 20.

Wittgenstein's thrust is clear. The true, that to which "know" may properly be applied, is that which is grounded. They are those things which belong to this game of giving grounds, accumulating evidence, showing how, etc. The propositions of common sense don't have this role. Rather they are part of the ground itself, part of the given which helps us to delimit our system. It is within that system relative to the given that other things may be known, doubted, etc. The given for Wittgenstein is itself neither true nor false, neither known nor not known. A sceptic would press Wittgenstein, asking him--Well do these propositions agree with reality or don't they? Wittgenstein's reply is "at the very best it shows us what 'agreement' means."¹

For Wittgenstein the special role of the propositions of common sense removes them from the rules of knowing. Even their certainty is not a matter of knowing, which is why Wittgenstein takes Moore to task for asserting "I know" with regard to them. Neither "I know" nor "I don't know" is applicable in ordinary circumstances. Without them the entire logic of the concept of knowing dissipates (as does virtually all of our other concepts). The paradoxical nature of the situation is that these kinds of propositions which serve as paradigms of the level of certainty to which other contingent propositions aspire, are themselves

¹Ibid., p. 28.

paradigms of certainty, but not of knowledge.

For Wittgenstein forms of life and meaning are primary. In the Cartesian tradition, all prior epistemologies, including Moore's of course, really don't draw a distinction in kind between propositions which are certain and those which are known. They are thrown into the same epistemological pot. Wittgenstein does not attempt to define the two, but does want to emphasize that there exists this spider's web of propositions which anchor our conceptual framework and are certain but not known, in the sense that the ordinary concept of knowledge simply doesn't apply to them. Therefore a paradox emerges: knowledge is itself grounded in and made possible by propositions which are themselves not known, but are instead absolutely certain.

In Wittgenstein's view, this is entirely as it should be. We should not expect epistemology to be able to establish itself. This is the mistake inherent in all epistemological systems which attempt to develop the concepts of knowledge and certainty from within. Any such system is doomed from the start. This is why a thoroughgoing empiricism, such as Hume's, ultimately fails. Philosophers have recognized that the possibility of knowledge is really based upon the possibility of certainty; virtually all epistemologies start by attempting to delimit those things which are certain, indubitable, and/or necessarily true. However, Wittgenstein perceives that certainty and knowledge cannot

be two sides of the same coin. They can't both be developed within the context of epistemology.

In Wittgenstein's view, even the sceptics were wrong in claiming that basic propositions such as "here is a hand," in the circumstances in which Moore utters them, cannot be known, or are not known. But their mistake is much more serious than Moore's, because from I know B it follows that B. Thus at least in Moore's position we retain B. But the sceptics are arguing either that B is not the case, or like Hume, that even if B is the case, it cannot be known with absolute certainty. And the point of saying that B cannot be known is that B cannot be relied upon. All of these run counter to the true status (in Wittgenstein's view) of these basic kinds of propositions. Moore, on the other hand, does realize that they can be relied upon and are more certain than anything else, yet his mistake lies in the status he attributes to them.

In Moore's view anything certain is known. Anything which is a candidate for certainty is a candidate for knowledge, and vice versa. If Moore is going to establish knowledge from the certainty of empirical propositions then the question which must be asked is--What is required to show the certainty of an empirical proposition? This is the point, I think, at which Moore lets his subjective feelings into his argument. It is not only how strongly he feels, it is rather, that all his epistemological investigations

indicate that propositions like "here is a hand" are simply much more certain than any proposition that may be used to try to disprove them. If "here is a hand" can be doubted then so can even the notion of perceiving itself. Then based upon these types of considerations Moore concludes in his own mind that propositions like "here is a hand" are absolutely certain, they can be relied upon more than anything else. Given this, in Moore's view, we must be prepared to say that yes indeed, "here is a hand" is known. There is no room for any other conclusion. Yet as we saw, Moore was bothered by the fact that he is unable to say exactly how he knows these things.

Wittgenstein grants that Moore is making at least one extremely valuable point against the sceptics. "So one might grant that Moore was right, if he is interpreted like this: a proposition saying that here is a physical object may have the same logical status as one saying that here is a red patch."¹ Moore perceives a correctness about this position but never really articulates it. Wittgenstein assimilates it into his own position in which the certainty of propositions has more to do with their role and logical status than their content or origin. Thus the empiricists conclude that only propositions which originate in immediate experience can be absolutely certain, not realizing that what

¹Ibid., p. 9.

renders those propositions certain may not be their immediacy but their role or function. If this is so then it is possible that other kinds of propositions may also be certain. The structure of the epistemologies in conflict here is important. The sceptics begin with sense experiences as primary, e.g., a red patch, and physical objects are constructed out of, or inferred from these sense experiences. Thus physical objects end up being in a logically different category. Moore begins to shift the foundation of epistemology to the logical role of certain propositions rather than their immediacy. Therefore in his system propositions about physical objects and red patches may be treated similarly vis a vis the question of knowledge. Once again Moore, because he is a transitional figure, does not himself perceive this shift in his own work.

Wittgenstein grants that Moore is correct: the propositions of common sense are absolutely certain; nothing could be more certain. The absolute certainty possessed by the propositions of common sense points to their role as being the source of their certainty. In form they appear to be like any other empirical proposition. Yet in fact they function as part of the river bed against which the water of empirical propositions is tested for those which are either known or not known. They themselves are neither. We must separate the surface grammar of these propositions from their depth grammar, their apparent role from their

philosophical role. They are propositions of logic, the logic of our conceptual system, the underpinnings of many of our ways of acting, thinking and speaking. They cannot be assimilated to ordinary empirical propositions. Doing so is one of the reasons why we are led to puzzling and often sceptical conclusions. Moore does try to treat them as similar. That is, Moore would like to treat the question of the knowledge of these basic propositions as similar to the question of the knowledge of any other contingent proposition.

Moore just does not see the point as clearly as Wittgenstein and still talks as if he would like to show how the kinds of propositions in question are known, i.e., what evidence he drew upon to conclude their truth. Wittgenstein points out that the reason why Moore cannot find the evidence is that there isn't any; not that evidence could not be found; it is rather that these are not the kinds of propositions which we were ever taught because they constituted the picture behind all that we were taught. They lay behind even the very games or procedures of knowing and not knowing, or doubting and removing doubt. As he says,

A child learns there are reliable and unreliable informants much later than it learns facts which are told it. It doesn't learn at all that that mountain has existed for a long time: that is, the question whether it is so doesn't arise at all. It swallows this consequence down, so to speak, together with what it learns.¹

¹Ibid., p. 21.

Wittgenstein's issue with Moore and also his agreement can be seen in the following revealing remark, "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."¹

Wittgenstein's thrust is that Moore cannot possibly know these things because except for highly unusual circumstances there is never any question of not knowing them. They are the hinges upon which our methods of enquiry and doubt turn. Doubt comes after belief. Where there is no question of not knowing there can be no claim to knowing. In the absence of situations in which we come to know these things, there can be no claim to know them.

The role of these propositions is different. They are logical propositions, i.e., somewhat like the rules of a game which are not part of the game itself. In the same way as we can question the validity of a particular move within the game and then show how the rules either sanction the move or not, yet we cannot by those very rules be said to sanction the rules themselves. This would be to commit one of Ryle's "category mistakes." The rules, Wittgenstein would like to say, belong to a description of the game and these propositions belong to a description of how we judge, act, and think. Treating these propositions and propositions

¹Ibid., p. 22.

like them as absolutely certain in ordinary circumstances is part of the essence of our language games, and forms of life.

Wittgenstein does not maintain that the propositions of common sense (i.e., the propositions which frame our world picture) are true absolutely because they correspond with reality or possess some inherent property; however, given our world picture, they do stand as fixed points, part of the landscape by which we know our way around. This role is not superficial but profound for it helps define our methods of thinking, acting, judging and our entire interpretation or experience. "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."¹ Thus on the basis of the propositions that do legitimately belong to the realm of knowing, that participate in the concepts of belief, evidence, learning, support, etc., we can ascertain those propositions which belong to the fixed framework and whose truth is not a question of how they are known.

They can be interpolated in the same way in which the mind posits the missing part of a line segment which joins two fixed points. That which is not learned per se, i.e.,

¹Ibid.

the framework facts, are determined on the basis of what is learned, i.e., ordinary facts.

Certainly another system is possible, one in which these propositions of common sense would not be part of our frame of reference, i.e., would not be absolutely certain; but that is very different from saying that within our frame of reference they may be false. The sceptic's mistake lies in trying to question our world picture by questioning its foundations as if it was exactly like any other set of propositions without our world picture, not seeing that the very methods which they use to question it depend upon this foundation for their meaning. Thus it is a logical mistake, an attempt to use concepts (doubt, certainty, knowledge) which have meaning only within a certain frame of reference to get outside that frame of reference. What they do not realize, according to Wittgenstein, is that in a very fundamental sense any such questioning is without sense, i.e., without reference, because they are undermining our frame of reference.

Wittgenstein's emphasis on On Certainty is to some degree negative. He wants to de-emphasize epistemology. He is trying to show philosophers how to avoid the dilemma of Cartesianism, in which philosophers are stymied in being unable to get past "I know." Wittgenstein tries to dissolve the problems of knowledge by diverting attention away from the bewitching concept of "knowing." The attempt instead

is to examine a whole range of related concepts and in so doing remove the roadblock of scepticism. The traditional problems of epistemology disappear; philosophy's major emphasis is shifted to meaning and the forms of life through which meanings, concepts and our language games develop. This rather than the "I know" is the beginning point for philosophy.

The issue between the sceptic and Moore is not to be decided by coming down on one side or the other. The issue is not to be decided at all. Rather the approach is to understand and clarify exactly why a philosopher would be led into adopting a position such as the sceptic adopts and into having the doubts which the sceptics have. Understanding that the sceptic's doubt is not a request for an instance of knowledge such as Moore's holding up his hand before a crowd goes part of the way toward seeing that the sceptic's position is such that there is nothing which would count as a refutation of the position. Thus, Moore misconstrues the nature of the sceptic's claim and therefore attempts to refute through the use of ordinary facts a position which claims that all such ordinary facts contain inconsistencies, contradictions, and/or logical impossibilities. Moore's rejoinders to the sceptic are pointless. Even if we admit, as does Wittgenstein at certain points, that Moore may not be misusing language in claiming "to know" the kinds of things he claims to know, his claims go little if any

distance toward refuting the sceptic. As Wittgenstein says, "Moore has every right to say he knows there's a tree there in front of him. Naturally he may be wrong. (For it is not as with the utterance 'I believe there is a tree there.')

But whether he is right or wrong in this case is of no philosophical importance."¹ This is because Moore's claim betrays a misunderstanding of what the sceptic's position amounts to. It is of no philosophical importance whether Moore is right or wrong because the issue is how the concepts of knowing and certainty are related, and the kinds of grounds required for the assertion of knowledge.

Wittgenstein is faced with the task of trying to communicate this new perspective and it is the problem of trying to get outside of a context while talking from within that context. It is almost the same type of problem which Moore faces in trying to refute the sceptic. There is nothing which Moore could produce which the sceptic would agree would count as a refutation. Nothing would show or prove the sceptic to be wrong. Therefore, all of Moore's incantations miss the mark. What Moore really needs to do is to get the sceptic to change his mind, to shift his perspective a bit, and it is not clear at all what is required to do this. It is somewhat analogous to trying to effect the shift in perspective when viewing the "duck-rabbit" which Wittgenstein

¹Ibid., p. 68.

uses in the Philosophical Investigations. One cannot be ordered to perceive the shift. And even when one does perceive it, it is impossible to point to the exact moment when the shift occurred. The best order that can be given is--"keep looking and you too will perceive the shift." Wittgenstein makes the same point concerning the grounding of fundamental propositions; "If someone asked us 'but is that true?' we might say 'yes' to him; and if he demanded grounds we might say 'I can't give you any grounds, but if you learn more you too will think the same.'"¹ Thus Wittgenstein repeats the same point time and time again, using slightly different examples, approaching from every angle. This is the reason for his unusual style. He is trying to achieve a change in perspective, and there are no rules for doing this.

¹Ibid., p. 28.

CHAPTER III

MALCOLM'S CRITICISMS OF MOORE

Moore's Knowledge Claims are Misguided Because the Conditions for Properly Asserting "I Know" are Absent

In his essay "Moore and Ordinary Language," Norman Malcolm offers a serious critique of Moore's work. He is particularly interested in showing that all of Moore's attempts to establish things which he knows, such as the premise he uses in his "Proof of an External World," "here is a hand," are misguided and fail. They fail not because Moore overlooks some minor point, which would inject some doubt into his claim. No, they fail, Malcolm says, because Moore's attempt does not even make sense. Oh, we understand what Moore is saying all right. But when we analyze what Moore is saying we find that it cannot be as he says it is.

It is not the case that what Moore says is certain is not certain. He is not wrong in what he says we can rely upon. Rather Moore misuses a form of language, Malcolm claims, the language of knowing. On this point Malcolm swallows wholeheartedly the criticisms of Moore we discussed in the previous section. Malcolm however takes those criticisms much further. And while Wittgenstein discussed much

of this on a conceptual level Malcolm does so from a linguistic point of view. As such his discussion is in terms very different from the terms in which Wittgenstein expresses his position.

Malcolm gives three examples in which (in his opinion) "I know" is properly applied. From his analysis of these examples he draws those conditions which are necessary for the proper application of "I know." Those conditions are:

- (1) There is in each case a question at issue and a doubt to be removed.
- (2) In each case the person who asserts "I know that that's a tree" is able to give a reason for his assertion.
- (3) In each case there is an investigation which if it were carried out, would settle the question at issue.¹

Malcolm then says that he wants to show that "all of these features are missing when Moore says in a philosophical context, 'I know that that's a tree.'"² Malcolm says that if this is so, then Moore's use cannot be a correct use. This shows that he construes the conditions he has identified as necessary conditions, yet his discussion initially just purports to identify conditions which are common to proper instances of asserting "I know." It would seem that if Malcolm intends to use these three conditions as necessary conditions, then further discussion would be required to establish this. In any case, Malcolm is using these conditions

¹Malcolm, "Defending Common Sense," p. 203.

²Ibid.

as if he has established that they are necessary (but not necessary and sufficient) conditions.

At the outset it is important to note two things. Malcolm has shifted the discussion from the question of whether Moore actually knows what he claims to know to the question of whether or not Moore's utterance "I know . . ." in the situations he makes it, is a proper utterance. Proper here means only linguistically proper, as opposed to justified or well founded. This is important because it leaves open the possibility that Moore may not only know what he claims to know, with absolute certainty, and be quite justified in his knowledge claim, yet be unable to properly make the assertion "I know," according to Malcolm.

In criticizing Malcolm's interpretation of Moore's position Max Black points to this as one of the paradoxical conclusions to which Malcolm's position gives rise. "There may be cases where somebody may in fact know P, and others may know that he knows it and say that he knows it, but he himself would be talking nonsense if he said that he knew it."¹

For Malcolm to rule out Moore's position as an answer to the sceptic he would have to claim that his conditions are the conditions for which something may be known as opposed

¹Max Black, "On Speaking with the Vulgar," The Philosophical Review LVIII, 1949; reprinted in Studies in the Philosophy of G. E. Moore ed. E. D. Klemke (Chicago: Quadrangle, 1969), p. 222.

to the conditions which govern when "I know" may be properly asserted. The two are not the same and Malcolm nowhere attempts to support this latter claim. Moore's claims then may indeed refute the sceptic for he may know one of the things the sceptic claims no one in fact ever does know. Yet on Malcolm's position Moore is restrained from asserting that which he knows.

Also the three conditions Malcolm points to are conditions which hold in ordinary circumstances. Yet he admits that Moore's assertions come in philosophical circumstances; he also claims that the two realms are markedly different in their presuppositions and meaning criteria. It is certainly worth asking whether these same conditions hold in philosophical circumstances. On this question, Malcolm is silent although it is fairly obvious that he would claim that they do not.

Now to Malcolm's first condition. Both Malcolm and Wittgenstein point to the fact that when the phrase "I know" is normally and properly used there is some doubt which the assertion is used to remove. If this is one of the necessary criteria then Moore's examples must be judged as not ordinary uses of the phrase "I know." However, we should question this criterion. I think that in most ordinary instances where "I know" is properly applied it so happens that there is a doubt (however small) which has been removed. Yet I think that this is wrongly taken to

show that the removal of doubt is one of the necessary criteria for proper application of "I know." "I know" is more closely connected with the ability to resolve doubt; that is, one who asserts "I know," with regard to the removal of doubt, is not necessarily claiming "I have," but rather "I could." It may be the case that the person has in fact gone through the process of satisfying whatever doubts existed. Therefore the question of "I could" is moot, because if I have removed such and such a doubt then it goes without saying that it would have been proper to assert "I could." Nevertheless, what I want to emphasize is that the necessary component and criterion is the fact that I could resolve the doubt, and not that I have resolved the doubt, for no specific doubt may even be applicable to the knowledge claim at hand, as is the case with Moore's examples.

The strongest argument I can give for this claim is a very Mooreian one, and that is to say--it makes sense to say "I know that here is a hand" even though I have not had to resolve any doubts about the truth of this claim. When I (or Moore) make this utterance all of you certainly understand exactly what I mean, and this shows that the utterance is not meaningless. Furthermore, I may make this remark correctly and properly and not be pointing to any sort of question which has been put to rest. I may make this claim strictly for emphasis.

The reason Malcolm is misled here, I think, is that in the vast majority of instances where we assert "I know" we do so because we have in fact resolved some doubt which existed or still exists. When this is coupled with the fact that "I know" seems to be an achievement word, that is, seems to express something which is accomplished, and what seems like the most likely candidate for having been accomplished is having removed some doubt. That a proposition or a fact is known involves more than that a doubt once existed but has been eliminated. Certainly this is an important part of one use of the concept but there may be other uses for which this is not an important part. I may use "I know" in many ways other than to note the termination of a process wherein a doubt has been resolved.

Once certain types of doubts have been removed concerning a proposition, I may say "I know" to note just this fact, to emphasize that no doubts currently intercede with my claim of knowledge. "I know" may be a correct description of the state of affairs when in fact nothing has been uttered.

The types of things Moore claims to know are such that we find it difficult to say exactly when if ever we learned them. We cannot point to the time at which any doubts regarding them were resolved, and this is why Malcolm and Wittgenstein say they are not known at all. We swallowed

their truth down together with what we learned. Yet we can see how different the emphasis of Malcolm's position is in comparison to Wittgenstein's position. Wittgenstein still talks about what Moore in fact knows, and the status of the things Moore claims to know, while Malcolm primarily talks about the status of the assertions Moore makes.

The utterance "I know" may also be used to convey information such as--what follows can be relied upon, what follows is absolutely certain, what follows is not subject to certain doubts, etc. Whether I have gone through some process to remove an existent doubt is irrelevant to these uses, which are proper uses. Again Black points out,

I may say "It is raining,' even when there is no doubt about it, simply to record the fact (as a sea captain may record the weather in the ship's log), or to prove that I am awake, or to teach somebody English, or to remind somebody that I am a good weather forecaster. So the absence of the necessary criteria of ordinary or non-philosophical doubt is no proof that a sentence is being used incorrectly.¹

For example, if I assert "I know that water boils at 100 degrees centigrade," I may be saying I have been taught that water boils at 100 degrees centigrade, or I may be saying that you can rely upon the fact that water boils at 100 degrees centigrade. By doing this I may only be conveying information about my relationship to this proposition; that is to say, I stand ready to endorse and

¹Ibid., p. 225.

back up the proposition. These are critical to my knowing something, but only slightly related to the conditions required for me to say "I know," whether rightly or wrongly.

Malcolm's second claim is that Moore is not able to give reasons for his assertions. In the very straightforward fashion in which Malcolm expresses this, I think it contains a mistake. Moreover it betrays confusion over just how Moore's procedure is intended to work.

It is not that Moore cannot give a reason, it is that he cannot give a reason for his assertion which is absolutely conclusive, which guarantees the truth of his claim and is sufficient to satisfy the philosophical sceptic. As we have been discussing, if Moore had been asked how he knows that here is a hand, he could have responded by saying that he sees it. In ordinary circumstances this response is normally conclusive. However, in this case, there is no ordinary question, only the philosophical question. Now just because Moore does not offer "I see it" as a reason (because no question exists) does not imply that he could not offer it as a reason; that is, it is not invalidated as a legitimate and conclusive reason for a variety of contingent claims.

Malcolm is pointing to the requirement which the sceptics have, that Moore prove that he knows, that Moore shows how he cannot be wrong. Moore is trying to show that

this is an unreasonable requirement. He believes he can use the ordinary assertion to refute a philosophical assertion. Malcolm does not believe that Moore can do this.

This is why Malcolm sees Moore's assertions as senseless. Malcolm relies upon a strong distinction between philosophical circumstances and ordinary circumstances, and will not permit Moore to mix the two. Once again though, Malcolm seems to think that just because Moore's attempted refutations are unsuccessful that his knowledge claims are senseless. But this connection, which is dubious, must be shown. As Black points out, "But Moore's utterance is not pointless--he uses it, in its ordinary sense, for an unusual philosophical purpose."¹

Moore says, "I have conclusive evidence that I am awake: but that is a very different thing from being able to prove it."² This quote contrasts nicely the difference between the ordinary and the philosophical perspective. In ordinary circumstances a request for a proof amounts to a request for conclusive evidence. Yet in philosophical circumstances conclusive evidence is simply not enough. But Moore's dilemma is really a logical one, that of making the notion of a contingent proposition, which carries with it the possibility of falsity, with the request to show that

¹Ibid.

²Moore, "Proof of an External World," p. 148.

he can't be wrong, i.e., that there is no possibility of falsity. This is the problem which Moore attempts to work out in his essay "Certainty."

Concerning the third condition, Malcolm continually emphasizes that in the type of examples Moore uses, there is no procedure which, if carried out, would function as a proof. Here again Malcolm takes an extremely narrow perspective. The kinds of examples Moore uses, in the situations he uses them, are paradigm examples of things of which we can be certain. For example, if there is some question of what is in a room behind closed doors, I might decide what it is through a variety of means. I might be allowed only to touch it, be given various clues, sounds, etc. Nevertheless one thing is certain, and that is that if I am allowed to see it then I am permitted to be absolutely certain. That is, any question about how I know what is in the room is answered simply and to the point by saying, "I saw it." So the fact of seeing something has the ability to effectively and absolutely squelch many types of doubts which might exist in a variety of circumstances.

Similarly in the examples Moore uses, firstly, no doubt or question exists, and secondly, the object, in this case a hand, is in plain sight of everyone. Even if a question had arisen its resolution would have been immediate.

Now the fact that "I see it" is sufficient to resolve a whole range of questions when they exist should also be

sufficient to allow us to say that it rules out and prevents a whole range of questions from arising at all. And if "I saw it," justifies me in being absolutely certain of what is in the room after some question has arisen, it seems clear that the fact that "I see it" justifies me in being absolutely certain of what is in the room when no question has preceded it.

Malcolm is correct in saying that in philosophical circumstances there is no procedure which would function as a proof. The key question which Malcolm fails to ask is-- Does this request for a proof make sense? If nothing would count as a proof and if nothing which Moore could produce would be recognized as a proof then exactly what if anything does this condition amount to? It is worth questioning whether this sharp division between ordinary circumstances and philosophical circumstances exists at all, as Malcolm seems to think it does.

I think we must conclude that Malcolm takes just too narrow a view of the use of "I know." In this he is guilty of not heeding his own philosophy, wherein the meaning of a phrase and its application is determined by its use in particular circumstances. And just because Moore's circumstances are not the ordinary ones does not establish that in those circumstances "I know" cannot have a legitimate role.

We must be careful to separate the conditions which must apply in order to properly apply a concept from the

function or use of the concept. The conditions which must apply often become an integral part of the concept and are therefore sometimes confused with the meaning or essential purpose of the concept. Malcolm is talking about the necessary conditions for the proper application of the concept "know," conditions which he feels are missing when Moore uses (or misuses) the concept. However this is different from saying that it is part of the meaning of "I know" to point to the different conditions which apply when it is properly used. The claim with regard to Moore's supposed misuse of "I know" is that Moore is not pointing to any additional elements, not contrasting the circumstances (which are perfectly ordinary circumstances) in which it would not be proper to assert "I know." The reason of course is that Moore's circumstances are the circumstances which usually exist.

There are two ways to analyze this situation. First is that even if we grant that "I know" is usually properly applied when it can contrast with "I don't know," this is surely not the function (or the use) of saying so. The function of saying "I know," as opposed to saying "I believe," etc., must be closely related to certifying what follows as being true, a fact, corroborated. Certainly when one says "I know" the emphasis may be placed either on the "I" or the "know." That is, one may be pointing to the fact that not only is what follows known, but known by me (I know), or

simply indicating that what follows is known, not merely surmised or believed (I know). In either case, the component which must be present is the certification of what follows.

If this certification of what is known is the critical component in claiming "I know," then the contrast offered by "I know" is not merely with "I don't know" per se, but the underlying component, namely the certification of what follows. In the one case I stand behind the claim; in the other case I do not. If this is indeed the contrast which legitimates the use of "I know," then Moore is justified in asserting so, not because he has carried out any investigation or process which has allowed him to assert "I know" or because some doubt existed concerning what he asserted and he has succeeded in resolving that doubt; no it is because Moore is certifying what follows, he is emphasizing the degree of certainty which propositions such as those he asserts are accorded in normal circumstances. Moore stands behind such assertions as we all do.

Malcolm may be correct in saying that in certain instances it is one of the conditions for saying "I know" that some doubt which has existed has been removed; however, this does not rule out, in my opinion, the possibility of using the concept quite meaningfully in other circumstances in which this condition (and the others which Malcolm mentions) is not met.

Moore's use of "I know" at least satisfies the same meaning criteria as the kinds of uses Malcolm thinks proper. That is, they both indicate the fact that I stand behind what I assert, and what I assert is true.

When Moore says we can know things which we cannot prove, it strikes us as queer. We think of knowing as the termination of a process. This is our paradigm; but Moore says we can do without the process. How can this be? And the answer is that certain types of propositions are just much more certain than any propositions which might be used to disprove them. These we certify in normal circumstances without having to offer additional support for our certification. Thus Moore's assertions are justified because on a slightly different but legitimate analysis of the function of "I know" his assertions do in fact mark off a proper contrast.

Moore's Position is Best Interpreted as a
Defense of Ordinary Language

Malcolm claims that philosophical doubt and ordinary doubt are mutually exclusive. That is to say, it is Malcolm's view that one can properly be said to possess a philosophical doubt if and only if one does not possess an ordinary doubt. And the converse claim is made as well. For example, he says,

The very actions which would count in favor of saying that he was in doubt as to whether he was awake would count against saying that he

was feeling a philosophical doubt.¹

We should not say that a man was feeling a philosophical doubt as to whether he was having an hallucination if he was, in the ordinary sense of the words, in doubt as to whether he was having a hallucination.²

Malcolm says that Moore's opponents do not use examples in which there is any real doubt, i.e., there is no question in the ordinary sense whether the object was as it appeared to be. He says that their doubt is philosophical not ordinary, that is, ordinary doubts are expressed through actions, philosophical doubts are not.

Malcolm's view is that there are different kinds of doubt and that they have different objects, i.e., ordinary doubt has as its object, questions of fact concerning experience; this being so, ordinary doubt manifests itself in actions. Philosophical doubt applies in instances where there is no ordinary doubt, and has as its object statements, propositions, etc. Moore frequently said that he was arguing against those philosophers who held views which rendered the ordinary claims doubtful, not just the propositions which expressed those ordinary claims. With philosophers who did not doubt the ordinary claims but held some deeper philosophical doubt, Moore was not always concerned. A good way of looking at Moore's point is by saying that he is concerned

¹Malcolm, "Defending Common Sense," p. 206.

²Ibid., p. 208.

with philosophers whose doubts are philosophical in the following sense: the basis for their doubts is philosophical, i.e., the grounds for their doubts are philosophical; it does not come from the experiences themselves but from some reflections upon or considerations which bear upon those experiences, considerations which mold and determine what we are willing to say about those experiences. But for Moore though the grounds for the doubt be philosophical, the doubt may be such as to affect the interpretation of the experience itself. That is, the philosophical doubt may render the experience (as we normally have it) somewhat suspect. Here again we see that Moore's arguments revert back to the empirical world while Malcolm's points are strictly conceptual and reach only as far as the proper language to apply in certain circumstances.

It is possible that Malcolm's understanding and analysis of the nature and import of philosophical doubts is more penetrating than Moore's, but in any case it should be noted that Moore was working with a different notion than Malcolm. Malcolm says, "If I said, 'Do I really see a dog or is this hallucination?' I should not now be expressing a philosophical doubt."¹ Moore would not think that this is so obvious. Malcolm leaves out the important part of the question, the why--for my not knowing whether I see a dog

¹Ibid., p. 207.

or am hallucinating could be traced to a philosophical doubt. For example, I might have said, "I don't know if I truly see a dog or am hallucinating because it's possible that I may be dreaming"; in this case I could very well be expressing a philosophical doubt. And my doing so would be a function of the circumstances. If the circumstances were perfectly ordinary and there is no ordinary reason to suspect that I might be dreaming, then on Malcolm's position I could be expressing a philosophical doubt.

Still Malcolm does note something which should be noted. To possess philosophical doubt is equivalent to adopting a stance vis a vis a proposition or kind of proposition. What is maintained is that the proposition is always to be considered doubtful. And although I maintain that a certain proposition is always doubtful there is no requirement that I actually doubt it. Moore is in agreement with Malcolm up to this point as evidenced by the following remark from his essay "Four Forms of Scepticism"

Then to say that a man is sceptical about certain sorts of things, or holds certain forms of scepticism, does not necessarily imply that he is in doubt about anything whatever.¹

I think that 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.²

¹Moore, "Four Forms of Scepticism," p. 195.

²Ibid., p. 196.

However at this point Moore and Malcolm part company. Malcolm claims that philosophical doubt is incompatible with ordinary doubt; Moore claims that they are perfectly compatible. Moore says, "But of course, though it scepticism is compatible with a complete absence of doubt, it is also quite compatible with doubt."¹ Malcolm is impressed the the fact that we never find examples in which a man holds both a philosophical doubt and an ordinary doubt. This leads him to his position that what counts as grounds for saying that a man holds a philosophical doubt counts against saying that he holds an ordinary doubt and vice versa. However, I think Malcolm is led to this simply by looking at common examples and not by the logic of the concepts themselves. Most often in philosophy, sceptics choose examples in which ordinarily, the experiences are such that what is claimed to be known is known without question. But the reason for this is not, I think, that sceptical philosophers aren't really in doubt at all about these ordinary claims. Rather the intent is to illustrate the power and force of the philosophical doubt. That is, they want to show that even in circumstances in which the ordinary claims seem unquestionable the philosophical considerations are enough to render those claims questionable. If the philosopher would instead choose examples which already embodied

¹Ibid.

some amount of ordinary doubt, then his effort to bring forward considerations which render the claim doubtful would have little additional effect. They would have no contrast since the claim would already be somewhat doubtful. But the philosopher thinks that his considerations are broad, fundamental, and indeed more vital to the validity of knowledge claims than any set of ordinary considerations, perceptions and otherwise, such that no matter how certain ordinary considerations render a knowledge claim, the philosophical considerations are sufficient to render it doubtful.

Of course this is the nature of philosophical considerations which apply regardless of what the ordinary considerations serve to show. This is just what being more fundamental amounts to. It should be obvious that this applies just as well when the ordinary circumstances do not point toward the certainty of the knowledge claim, but that the effect is not nearly as pronounced because of the lack of contrast between a proposition which is certain and a philosophical doubt which questions that proposition.

If Malcolm is incorrect and no such sharp distinction between philosophical doubt and ordinary doubt exists, then one more of his strong arguments against Moore's defense of common sense fails. Moore's position cannot be simply dismissed because he mixes two distinct conceptual realms, that is to say, simply because he tries to counter philosophical

doubts with the kind of arguments which apply only to ordinary doubts. In Moore's view the two doubts are compatible. It is this compatibility which forces many sceptics into asserting propositions which strike us as queer and so flagrantly violate the canons of common sense.

Malcolm takes all of Wittgenstein's criticisms of Moore as his starting point. This causes him to ignore the structure of Moore's position as we have outlined it, i.e., the three elements which together comprise his defense of common sense propositions. Instead he focuses solely on Moore's utterances, "I know . . ." and the circumstances which surround those utterances.

Malcolm also fails to acknowledge the very traditional aspects of Moore's work, including some similarities which are shared by Moore and Wittgenstein.

Both Moore and Wittgenstein bring their talk down to a basic empirical level. They talk about basic kinds of actions, judgements and experiences, not just propositions about those actions, judgements and experiences. This is what adds credibility to Wittgenstein's position. What lies behind Malcolm's interpretation is a view of the relationship between philosophy and the world which quite clearly Moore does not share.

Because of his overall philosophical perspective Malcolm interprets Moore's position as a position about the language of knowing and how and when the concept of knowing

is properly applied. Thus in Malcolm's view, Moore's defense of common sense really amounts to a defense of ordinary language. This switch is not done for critical reasons because Malcolm thinks Moore's position is actually only effective when interpreted as the view that ordinary usage is correct usage. Malcolm believes that this is what Moore was actually doing even though Moore did not perceive so himself. Malcolm does at least admit that Moore does not share his analysis of either the sceptics' position or his own.

Malcolm holds that the nature of the dispute between Moore and the sceptics is wholly linguistic. Malcolm agrees with Wittgenstein that philosophers never disagree over empirical matters. Philosophical problems are ultimately linguistic in nature and opposing philosophical views are really alternative proposals as to the correct language or concepts which correctly describe certain facts or states of affairs. For example, "They [philosophers] disagree not about any empirical facts, but about what language shall be used to describe those facts."¹

Moore's technique is to use ordinary truths and facts to counter sceptical philosophical assertions. Clearly Moore and Malcolm sharply disagree here. Moore believes this technique can work, i.e., can make sense, because part of his approach, his appeal to ordinary language, is to bring

¹Malcolm, "Moore and Ordinary Language," p. 354.

philosophical assertions home to their ordinary context and evaluate them partly on the basis of their impact in that context. Moore interprets sceptics strictly and takes their claims at face value. Because of this, ordinary truths can, as part of a larger argument structure, serve as refutations in Moore's work.

Malcolm begins by taking a different view of the sceptic's position. Therefore it should come as no surprise that, taken the way Moore put them forward, Moore's attempted refutations are unsuccessful. And it is also no surprise that when both Moore and the sceptic are interpreted differently, i.e., as both making linguistic recommendations, then in Malcolm's view Moore's refutations are valid refutations. In Malcolm's words, "Both the philosophical statement and Moore's reply to it are disguised linguistic statements."¹ ". . . When the dispute is seen in this light, then it is perfectly clear that Moore is right."²

That is to say, when Moore is interpreted as saying that ordinary usage is correct usage, i.e., "I know . . ." has a valid role in which it is correctly applied, and the sceptic as urging that this usage is unwarranted and ought to be changed, then Malcolm believes that Moore's recommendations are the correct ones. In this sense then Malcolm grants that Moore refutes sceptical philosophers, although

¹Ibid., p. 354.

²Ibid., p. 350.

it should be noted that when viewed in this light, the refutations lose some of their force, because when the sceptic is interpreted as making a linguistic statement it is apparent (even without any argument at all) that he is making a false statement. Malcolm admits this, saying, "We can see that the philosophical statement which he [Moore] is attacking is false, no matter what arguments may be advanced in favor of it."¹

It may seem a bit curious why Malcolm gives Moore such great credit for refuting positions which are, in his view, obviously false! The answer to this points to Moore's importance in the history of philosophy. He is the first to resist sceptical positions partly because of their conflict with ordinary language. Because he is himself part of the Cartesian tradition he cannot dismiss the sceptical position as simply as Malcolm, yet he does absolutely resist the temptation to succumb to the logic of the sceptical view. Again in Malcolm's words, "To realize how much of philosophy consists of attacks on ordinary language, on common sense, and to see that ordinary language must be right, is to see the importance and justification of Moore's destructive function in philosophy."²

Moore's remarks in his "reply" show that he did not see his own position as being a position strictly about

¹Ibid.

²Ibid., p. 366.

language and the way certain phrases or words are used. Malcolm equates common sense and ordinary language and tries to argue against Moore by interchanging the two contexts freely. Thus he says, "Moore's assertions do not belong to 'common sense' i.e. to ordinary language, at all."¹ Malcolm is taking as his criteria ordinary usage, assertions which might be made in ordinary discourse. He completely disregards the fact that Moore's defense of common sense is made in a situation in which a philosophical doubt is being scrutinized and that this is enough to already mark the circumstances as out of the ordinary.

It seems to me that Malcolm confuses Moore's simply using ordinary claims to counter philosophical arguments with Moore putting forward philosophical arguments to establish certain types of ordinary claims as certain and then applying those arguments to a philosophical dispute over ordinary claims. In a philosophical context one may offer and take note of certain ordinary considerations which are relevant to the philosophical question at issue. One may do this particularly if those ordinary claims and considerations are often simply discounted in the philosophical context.

The fact that an ordinary claim does not meet and answer a philosophical question head on does not prove that that ordinary claim may not be absolutely certain. I think

¹Malcolm, "Defending Common Sense," p. 219.

that Malcolm moves back and forth between ordinary claims and philosophical claims, in an effort to show that if Moore's claims fail to satisfy the philosophical question then they must also be judged as failures in the ordinary realm. That is to say, Malcolm takes it as a prima facie argument that because Moore's rejoinders cannot satisfy the sceptic that he knows what he claims to know, that therefore Moore does not know what he claims to know, in the ordinary sense. Moore's procedure in fact is just the opposite. That is, he tries to show that because in ordinary terms, the kinds of things he claims to know are taken as absolutely certain, the fact that no proof can be given in a philosophical context may be dismissed, and that therefore Moore's claim to know is upheld. This refutes the sceptic's claim, which is not a linguistic claim, that no such thing is ever known.

To sum up, the two key factors in Malcolm's discussions of Moore are his critique of Moore's use of "I know" and his interpretation of Moore's defense of common sense as really constituting a defense of ordinary language. Malcolm agrees with Moore's attempt to refute philosophical scepticism. And when Moore's defense of common sense is seen as a defense of ordinary language, Malcolm thinks it is somewhat successful. However, the validity of this interpretation is questionable.

We have seen that Moore's work contains many more

elements than simply a defense of ordinary language. Malcolm also seems to interpret Moore strictly through glasses colored by Wittgenstein's criticism of Moore's use of "I know." As such, I think he does not do justice to the full breadth of Moore's position.

In his efforts to find in Moore's work an argument which he himself could endorse, I think Malcolm seizes upon the one element in Moore's refutations which is in agreement with his own position, i.e., that the propositions of sceptical philosophers go against ordinary language. While this is correct Malcolm places his interpretation of Moore in a framework which is not only distant from Moore's intended interpretation of his position, but which ignores many aspects of that position.

Most importantly, Malcolm overlooks some of the very traditional aspects of Moore's work. These aspects make Moore's position very different from either Malcolm's or Wittgenstein's. It must be emphasized that Moore's position has its roots in the empirical world and attempts to say something significant about that empirical world.

CHAPTER IV

A CRITICAL APPRAISAL OF MOORE'S ARGUMENTS AGAINST SCEPTICISM

Moore's Attempts to Refute Scepticism Fail

Any appraisal of Moore's work on scepticism must begin by acknowledging that Moore attempted to refute scepticism. This is worth noting because it contrasts Moore's position with those of other philosophers and also because it identifies at least one of the criteria we should use to evaluate his arguments.

Moore believes that it makes sense to try to refute scepticism. He is not simply attempting to offer an alternative epistemological view to scepticism, one which is more reasonable both philosophically and psychologically. Moore interprets the sceptic's position as having an empirical as well as a conceptual component. This leaves room, logically speaking, for scepticism to be refuted through the use of empirical propositions, if Moore can show those propositions to be true, and those propositions are in conflict with scepticism. Moore may be wrong in this interpretation, but he steadfastly adheres to it in formulating his arguments against scepticism.

An attempt to refute a philosophical position may fail either because it simply misses the mark or because it is based upon an incorrect interpretation of that position. As we shall see in this section, Moore's attempted refutation of scepticism combines these defects.

Unlike two of the philosophers we have discussed, Wittgenstein and Malcolm, Moore does not draw a distinction between "basic" propositions or framework facts, and ordinary true contingent propositions. The important part of this distinction is that there exists a set of propositions, "basic" propositions, which appear to be simply true contingent propositions, but are true not merely because they correctly describe a state of affairs which exists, but because of their role or logical status.

For example, a proposition like, "The earth has existed for many years past," is a basic proposition because its truth is pre-supposed by ordinary language. Therefore that truth is constantly being reinforced. We may assert that this or that particular item has existed for many years past, and our assertion is a contingent proposition. But regardless of the truth or falsity of our assertion, there is an entire "framework" of facts whose truth is pre-supposed by the fact that our ordinary language and concepts function as they do. Thus, "The earth has existed for many years past," appears to be a true contingent proposition but in reality there is no question of

its being false. It is a proposition which supports the legitimacy of questioning how long other things have existed. The fact that the earth has existed for many years past is pre-supposed by the question, "How long has this desk existed?"

Making this sort of distinction has two benefits. It permits a further distinction between absolute certainty and ordinary certainty and this distinction can be used to provide another alternative to establishing the possibility of knowledge. It can be argued that the question of absolute certainty is really not a question of a knowledge claim which is indubitable but rather a question of the role of certain propositions whose truth or falsity simply does not come into play in most circumstances. Therefore discovering propositions which are absolutely certain is a task of discovering propositions which possess such a role. Interpreted in this fashion, it seems possible to meet the sceptics demand for absolute certainty and therefore to establish the possibility of knowledge. Consequently the truth of contingent propositions is then seen to rest on the question of ordinary certainty, which, according to most definitions, is attainable.

By not drawing this distinction, Moore must either try to establish the absolute certainty of contingent propositions, i.e. show how they are true, known to be true, and can't be wrong, which seems antithetical to their nature;

or he can try to show that the ordinary certainty of contingent propositions can be established. If he does only the latter, his analysis of ordinary certainty does not meet the sceptic's demand for absolute certainty.

When we analyze Moore's defense of common sense propositions it really amounts to this latter claim, that the ordinary means of establishing the truth of ordinary contingent propositions are indeed sufficient. Further, Moore claims that the truth of ordinary propositions is incompatible with scepticism and therefore refutes scepticism. However, in the absence of a distinction between ordinary certainty and absolute certainty, or the claim that some propositions are true by virtue of their role, Moore still has not addressed the question of absolute certainty upon which (in the sceptic's view) the possibility of any knowledge at all depends.

Not making this distinction creates even further unresolved tension in Moore's position. Many philosophers, including Malcolm and Wisdom, have pointed out the unusual nature of the propositions Moore gives as examples of the kinds of propositions he knows. For example, propositions like, "I am a human being."¹ "I have a body,"² etc. These strike us as queer. They are neither instances of particular true contingent propositions, such as "I am at present

¹Moore, "A Defence of Common Sense," p. 33.

²Ibid.

standing up" nor are they general framework facts such as "All human beings have bodies." Rather, Moore's propositions are curious combinations of the two. They are individual instances of Moore claiming to know something which is generally true. As Wittgenstein points out, they are propositions which, if Moore knows them, then so do all of us.

This clearly shows how Moore is torn between the desire to provide absolute certainty via propositions which are generally true, and ordinary certainty based on contingent propositions which happen to be true. Let us be clear about this. The distinction between absolute certainty and ordinary certainty is not one which must be made. Still, the fact that Moore attempts to refute scepticism through a defense of common sense, combined with the unusual propositions he asserts, leads to the conclusion that his position could have been strengthened had he drawn this distinction clearly. That is to say, Moore's defense of common sense is intuitively plausible. But his claim to have refuted scepticism seems unwarranted because he has not argued for the possibility of knowledge in general, i.e., he has not addressed the question of absolute certainty, upon which scepticism rests. As we have seen, maintaining a distinction between absolute certainty and ordinary certainty is one way of addressing this question. This is an example in which Moore simply misses the mark.

One of the major points for which criticism has been leveled at Moore by Malcolm and Wisdom is that he doesn't directly address the question of how he knows what he claims to know. In this case the criticism is justified. Moore's arguments are more general. Even in those instances in which he is defending a particular assertion, his arguments are general, not particular. He never spells out the grounds which can be brought forward in favor of a particular assertion.

Moore's defense of common sense propositions comes to rest upon a combination of the inconsistencies which arise from attempting to doubt them coupled with Moore's inability to actually doubt them. A couple of examples will serve us well here.

In Moore's essay, "Proof of an External World," he spends the first ten pages attempting to define and narrow in on the conception of "external things." And in the course of this discussion Moore draws a number of valuable distinctions. Then Moore devotes a few more pages to the connection between perception of things which are independent of our experience and those which are not. Having done all this, Moore's actual proof occupies only a few pages. The proof itself is extremely simple:

Here is one hand. Here is another. Therefore two hands exist. Therefore at least two external things exist.

I do not wish to discuss the argument here. What I do want to emphasize is how little time Moore devotes to the point which has puzzled philosophers for ages, namely, the connection between our experiences and perceptions and the ability to claim knowledge of such things as "Here is a hand."

With regard to whether he knew for certain his premise "here is a hand," Moore says, "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!"¹ Next Moore admits that other philosophers might be dissatisfied with his proof if he could not prove the propositions he used as premises in his proof. Further, he recognizes that "what they really want is not merely a proof of these two propositions, but something like a general statement as to how any propositions of this sort may be proved."² Moore continues, "Such a view, though it has been very common among philosophers, can, I think, be shown to be wrong--though shown only by the use of premisses which are not known to be true, unless we do know of the existence of external things."³ In spite of all this, Moore concludes 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

¹Moore, "Proof of an External World," p. 145.

²Ibid., p. 147.

³Ibid., p. 148.

dissatisfaction."¹ This discussion drives home the fact that Moore is depending upon the view that we can know things which we cannot prove, but this still does not obviate the need for Moore to address the question of how he knows the premises of his proof, which he fails to do.

Similarly in his "A Defence of Common Sense" Moore spends a great deal of time discussing his philosophical platform, his approach and the analysis of different types of common sense propositions. Yet again, with regard to what philosophers have thought to be the key points in the issue of Epistemological Scepticism, i.e., 1) How does Moore know what he claims to know? 2) How can it be shown that Moore knows what he claims to know? Moore's arguments are limited to emphasizing the reasonableness of his claims. His position sounds ever so much like the argument above in his "Proof." He says, "We are all, I think, in this strange position that we do know many things, with regard to which we know further that we must have had evidence for them, and yet we do not know how we know them, i.e. we do not know what the evidence was."² The upshot is the same. Moore makes no claim to establish particular propositions, and admits his inability to do so. His defense of particular claims is made entirely through his general position.

¹Ibid.

²Moore, "A Defence of Common Sense," p. 44.

Moore does not connect the validity of a knowledge claim with the ability to give an account of how one knows. His general position may help establish the truth of the propositions he defends, but he automatically assumes that this establishes that they are known as well. He ignores the possibility that "knowing" doesn't apply to these propositions or that "knowing" in certain instances does not depend upon demonstrating some specific relationship between the knower and what is known, and that this may be the reason he cannot show how he knows them. Part of the problem is that Moore doesn't explicate his own position sufficiently, in particular how the appeal to ordinary language and the defense of common sense together form a persuasive argument for his general position, i.e., the view that we can know things which we cannot prove and that the propositions of common sense (as Moore identifies them) are the most reasonable choices for propositions of this kind.

Another reason why Moore's attempted refutations fail is his assumption that ordinary propositions can be used to refute sceptical positions. Moore doesn't discuss this position per se but it is crucial to his refutations. Curiously enough the key to the weakness in Moore's position here is the distinction he makes between the truth of ordinary propositions and their analysis, a distinction which in other respects offers strength to his position.

Moore holds that the truth of ordinary propositions is certain, whereas it is the analysis of ordinary propositions which is open to dispute and may run counter to common sense. That is to say, philosophers can agree on the truth of propositions but disagree over the analysis of those propositions. We have talked about the function of analysis earlier. Moore uses it to show that even philosophical positions which support the beliefs of common sense leave room for dispute about basic issues.

Philosophers may disagree with Moore in one of two ways. They can refuse to take ordinary language as their starting point and therefore end up with positions which go against common sense beliefs. Moore believes that this approach is wrong. On the other hand, philosophers can disagree with Moore and still agree to the truth of ordinary assertions because Moore has provided them with an alternative, i.e., they can disagree over the analysis of those ordinary assertions.

Moore doesn't see that using this distinction simply pushes back his dispute with sceptics one level further. Philosophers are concerned with what is ultimately the case, not superficially the case, and claiming that the dispute between himself and the sceptics is really a question of the analysis of propositions rather than their truth does not resolve that dispute. Moore begins by accepting the beliefs of common sense, and accepting them not just as

proper forms of speech but as empirical truths. Therefore his position cannot permit conclusions which conflict with those common sense beliefs. This is fine. But now Moore, if pressed by a sceptic, must respond by saying "Well you correctly raise certain issues with regard to knowledge, however our dispute is not over the truth of my common sense assertion, but over its analysis." The sceptic may not argue with this. He could quite easily respond by agreeing to the truth of the ordinary assertion as long as the analysis of the assertion did not imply a conclusion with which he could not agree, for instance the reality (in an ultimate sense) of material objects. And if this is all the sceptic will grant, then what Moore has accomplished by defending ordinary assertions is only a defense of ordinary forms of speech, as has been claimed by Lazerowitz and Ambrose.

It is no problem for a sceptic to agree that ordinary beliefs are true and even to agree that part of what this entails is that the material objects discussed, exist; but exactly what is entailed by this latter claim then becomes the focal point of the dispute between them. This type of infinite regress, which Moore doesn't perceive, really shows the impossibility of refuting scepticism.

In his "Defence" Moore parodies the response of some philosophers to the question, "'Do you believe that the earth

has existed for many years past?"¹ He describes their response as:

It all depends on what you mean by 'the earth' and 'exists' and 'years': if you mean so and so, and so and so, and so and so, then I do; but if you mean so and so, and so and so, and so and so, or so and so, and so and so, and so and so, or so and so, and so and so, and so and so, then I don't or at least I think it is extremely doubtful.²

In Moore's opinion "such a view is as profoundly mistaken as any view can be."³ What Moore doesn't realize is that what the philosopher is disputing here is precisely the analysis of the proposition which Moore admits is open to discussion. The sceptic is willing to grant Moore the ordinary linguistic truth of the assertion as long as that does not commit him to other positions which he considers to be doubtful, namely the reality of material things.

Moore accepts ordinary language as somewhat sacrosanct. But based upon his view that philosophers can agree as to the truth of ordinary language, yet disagree over its analysis, Moore's position is the philosophical view that ordinary language should be maintained, rather than changed, in the course of philosophical discussion. It should stand as a frame of reference for our discussions and forms of life as well. I happen to think that this view is correct. But interpreted in this fashion, Moore's position goes no

¹Ibid., p. 36.

²Ibid.

³Ibid., p. 37.

way toward refuting scepticism.

We now see Moore's problem much more clearly. Moore wants philosophers to accept the truth of ordinary propositions while leaving open the question as to the proper philosophical analysis of those propositions. Moore also wants to accept certain implications of the truth of those ordinary propositions, for example, the reality of material things. Moore simply does not see the connection between these two, that this is part of the question of the proper analysis which he offers a way out of the dilemma caused by philosophical positions which flatly contradict the beliefs of common sense.

Moore's position fails to offer an alternative which the sceptic must accept. If the sceptic agrees with Moore's defense of ordinary language, he may disagree with Moore over the analysis of ordinary propositions. In this case their agreement is at best a linguistic agreement. If the sceptic disagrees with Moore's defense of ordinary language, their disagreement is more profound, but the sceptic's position is still not one which is untenable.

Moore's attempted refutations of scepticism would be compelling if he had argued for the correctness of certain analyses of ordinary language as well as for the correctness of ordinary language. In truth he has only done the latter. Moore, it must be granted, does talk as if he understood where the defense of ordinary language leaves off and the

defense of certain analyses of ordinary language picks up. For example, about his "Proof of an External World" he comments:

I think Mr. Wisdom would admit that some philosophers have used 'There are no material things' in this way, although he quotes (p. 431), with apparent approval, Wittgenstein as having said 'Those philosophers who have denied the existence of matter have not wished to deny that under my trousers I wear pants.' If by this Wittgenstein meant that no philosophers who have ever denied the existence of matter have ever wished to deny that pants exist, I think the statement is simply false. Some philosophers, at all events sometimes, have meant to deny this: they have meant to assert that no such proposition as that pants exist is true; and it was only against this assertion that I supposed my proof to be a proof.¹

Moore is saying here that some philosophers have agreed with his analysis, while attempting to dispute the truth of the ordinary claim. He may be correct in this, but he certainly has not established the point. In particular Moore does not establish that this is the case with regard to Bradley and McTaggart, two of the philosophers with whom he is most concerned.

Moore's arguments belie his further position regarding the analysis of ordinary propositions. He neither acknowledges nor discusses this. Yet his view that ordinary propositions can be used to refute sceptical positions depends upon this point.

¹Moore, "A Reply to My Critics," p. 670.

Moore's Contribution to the Issue of Scepticism

One of the most pervasive aspects of Moore's work is his intense, deliberate effort to analyze the meaning of philosophical statements. One cannot read Moore and come away without being impressed with the amount of effort Moore places on discovering exactly what is at stake in a particular issue. At times his efforts seem laborious, even overdone. Moore is not content merely to analyze what a philosopher meant by a given assertion; he tries to determine what he ought to have meant as well. Still this characteristic is a hallmark of Moore's work; he stands as a paradigm of the kind of striving for clarity through the analysis of meaning which has had a profound effect on 20th century philosophy.

Previous philosophers who talked about meaning, such as the Stoics and the medieval philosophers, did so in a very different way. When they did it was only intended in a very ordinary and common sense way to help mark off the scope of their questions and the range of the ensuing discussion. Moore takes this further, using meaning to narrow down the number of possible answers to philosophical questions, to determine the sort of answer which is being looked for, and to delineate just where the question leaves the bounds of ordinary experience and enters the bounds of philosophical discussion. Included in this are a number of

different aspects: 1) the meaning of key concepts in the statement of a problem; 2) the unusual uses of familiar terms; 3) the impact of context on the meaning of statements.

Thus with Moore the question of meaning becomes an integral part of any philosophical discussion, a part of philosophical method. It is interesting to note that at the time when Moore was marrying his expanded concept of meaning to philosophical method, the positivists were marrying their criterion of meaningfulness to philosophical method. However the positivist thrust, which exerted tremendous influence through the twenties and the thirties, has been pushed aside, while the kind of concern with meaning which Moore initiated has thrived and is found, in the work of Wittgenstein, Ryle, Strawson and others. This is not to say that Moore talked about meaning in the same way as did Wittgenstein. He did not. However the role which Moore assigns to the concept of meaning in his arguments is partly the same role which Wittgenstein assigns to meaning. Wittgenstein expands the significance of meaning still further, both in concept and in its role relative to the solution of philosophical problems. But part of the role which meaning plays for Wittgenstein vis a vis method, is the same role it plays for Moore.

Moore's concern is less with definition and more with expression, with examining philosophical questions to

ascertain precisely what is at stake. In many cases this concern takes the form of a painstaking examination of the possible alternatives, one by one. In "Principia Ethica" Moore describes his approach:

It appears to me that in Ethics, as in all other philosophical studies, the difficulties and disagreements, of which its history is full, are mainly due to a very simple cause: namely to the attempt to answer questions, without first discovering precisely what question it is which you desire to answer.¹

It is important to remind ourselves how highly negative Moore's efforts were. And in this respect his concern with discriminating among various questions and subtle shades of meaning serves as a powerful tool. The impact of this approach is expressed well by Stebbing, who says "An intelligent question itself indicates the form which any satisfactory answer to the question must take."²

In his "Proof of an External World" Moore spends a full twenty pages analyzing the issue while the proof itself occupies only a few pages. He does this in an effort to determine exactly what, in his view, he is required to show in order to prove the existence of an external world. His discussion encompasses a variety of notions such as: things outside of us, things external to our minds, things which are to be met with in space, things presented in space,

¹Moore, Principia Ethica, p. vii.

²L. Susan Stebbing, "Moore's Influence," The Philosophy of G. E. Moore ed. Paul Arthur Schilpp (3rd ed. La Salle, Illinois: Open Court, 1968), p. 521.

things in our minds, having an experience, etc. This culminates in Moore's analysis of the phrase 'external to my mind':

But now, if to say of anything, e.g. my body, that it is external to my mind, means merely that from a proposition to the effect that it existed at a specified time, there in no case follows the further proposition that I was having an experience at the time in question, then to say of anything that it is external to our minds, will mean similarly that from a proposition to the effect that it existed at a specified time, it in no case follows that any of us were having experiences at the time in question. And if by our minds be meant . . . ¹

Here we can clearly see the lengths to which Moore went to analyze an issue. However, the benefits are twofold. The analysis itself illuminates the issue, bringing into sharp relief some of the important questions of which the issue is composed. And secondly, the analysis tells us how to interpret what Moore has to say, specifically what questions he is addressing. In his effort to be precise, Moore was conscious of this benefit and emphasized it often. For example, in "Four Forms of Scepticism," he says, regarding his use of the term scepticism:

At all events, whether or not I am right as to this, I wish it to be clearly understood that I am so using the term 'scepticism' that all that is necessary for a man to be a sceptic in this sense with regard to our knowledge of certain things is that he should hold the view (whether doubtfully or not) that no human being ever knows for certain a thing of the

¹Moore, "Proof of an External World," p. 142.

sort in question. It is only with Scepticism in this sense that I shall be concerned.¹

For Moore, discussion of meaning is important to the solution of philosophical problems, but only insofar as defining the problem. Having defined the problem, Moore then proceeds to attack it in ways which must be labeled as highly traditional, albeit retaining a sense of that sensitivity to language which identifies Moore as belonging to the modern analytic school which he helped to establish.

Wittgenstein and his followers take meaning one step further. They see meaning, in a much broader sense, as fundamental to the solution of philosophical problems. Having employed various linguistic techniques to unravel and state a problem clearly, Moore is content to attack the problems of scepticism traditionally. The questions are entertained seriously and possible answers are weighed against the bounds of experience. Thus, Moore's refutations are disappointing. He begins by claiming that scepticism is based upon confusion and a failure to identify those specific questions upon which it rests. Furthermore, Moore's intuitions seem right, that philosophical views which so flagrantly violate the beliefs of common sense, simply can't be correct. His dogged pursuit of clarity and linguistic analyses of the issues of scepticism lead us to believe

¹Moore, "Four Forms of Scepticism," p. 196.

that Moore is on the right track. Still, after his analyses are completed, Moore's reasons for defending ordinary beliefs are very much ordinary reasons. And after much effort at clearing up confusion, Moore ends up sounding confused himself, unable to say how he knows what he claims to know or to see how the distinction between the truth of ordinary propositions and their analysis leaves the door open for scepticism.

Another aspect of Moore's work which is of major importance is his attempt to attack the problems of scepticism through the use of good reasons as well as proof. The key to this is his refusal to accept the absolute dichotomy between acceptance based on demonstrative proof and acceptance merely on faith. Both Kant and Hume equate our inability to prove the existence of the external world with the position that we therefore cannot have any knowledge of the external world. Moore attacks this equation in his "Proof of an External World." There, after analyzing the issue, Moore admits that the validity of the proof of course rests upon the question of whether he does indeed know the two propositions he uses as premises, i.e., here is one hand, and here is another.

Moore states the absolute divergence between his position and the sceptics position well:

They would say: 'If you cannot prove your premiss that here is one hand and here is another, then you do not know it. But you yourself have admitted

that, if you did not know it, then your proof was not, as you say it was, a conclusive proof.' This 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.

Such a view, though it has been very common among philosophers, can, I think, be shown to be wrong--though shown only by the use of premisses which are not known to be true, unless we do know of the existence of external things.¹

What is interesting here is that the sceptic claims that Moore overlooks the connection between the claim to know his premise and the ability to prove it and therefore misses the philosophical point, while Moore in fact is trying to highlight his disagreement over the point to support his own position.

In the case of all proofs, in a certain sense the truth of the conclusion is already contained in the premises. Moore's point here is that the existence of an external world, in general, can be prove, i.e., it is possible to show how we know it to exist simply because it is based on the acceptance of simple perceptual propositions such as 'here is a hand.' Moore is emphasizing the connection between acceptance of simple statements of direct observation and the existence of the external world. Moreover, he is emphasizing the fact that the latter can be proven by

¹Moore, "Proof of an External World," p. 148.

means of the former. And not wanting to commit himself to an infinite regress, Moore here takes a stand regarding such simple perceptual statements and claims that they may be known without proof, without being able to say exactly how it is that we know them, or could know them, by virtue of other more general good reasons which can be brought forward in favor of his position. As he says, "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."¹

Furthermore Moore believes he has very good reasons for this general view and his two premises in particular. First, with regard to the general view, is the fact that all philosophers do in fact rely upon propositions such as these in the course of ordinary experience, whether they can show how they know them or not and whether they are sceptical of our knowledge of these sorts of things or not. Secondly, with regard to the truth of his two premises, Moore asserts that he has conclusive evidence for them, although he admits his inability to say exactly what constitutes conclusive evidence. He asserts, "Yet all this seems to me to be no good reason for doubting that I do know it."² The crucial transition here is from a discussion which is

¹Ibid.

²Moore, "A Defence of Common Sense," p. 44.

fixated on the issue of establishing or proving that Moore knows to a discussion of the reasons for or against the claim that Moore knows. Stebbing considers this to be an important element in Moore's work. She says, "The notion that we may have a reason, though not a logically conclusive reason, for certain statements concerning direct observation, is I believe, one of Moore's important contributions to philosophy."¹

Other good examples of Moore's emphasis on good reasons are easy to find. In "Four Forms of Scepticism," he analyzes Russell's sceptical view into four distinct assumptions. The issue of scepticism, i.e., whether Russell is correct or not, then depends, Moore says, on the further question: "Is it, in fact, as certain that all these four assumptions are true, as that I do know that this is a pencil and that you are conscious."² He answers this question immediately, saying "I cannot help answering: It seems to me more certain that I do know that this is a pencil and that you are conscious than that any single one of these four assumptions is true, let alone all four."³ Notice the contrast Moore has effected between his position and Russell's. The issue is to be decided on the basis of good reasons which can be brought

¹Stebbing, "Moore's Influence," p. 524.

²Moore, "Four Forms of Scepticism," p. 222.

³Ibid.

forward for or against certain specific assumptions as opposed to proving this or that knowledge claim.

One last example will serve to illustrate how Moore tries to shift the focus of scepticism away from the question of proving how certain things may be known. His approach in the essay "Certainty" is extremely similar to "Four Forms of Scepticism." The issue starts out initially as whether Moore knows with certainty a number of assertions he makes at the outset of his lecture. Rather than attempt to prove that he knows them for certain, Moore analyzes the sceptic's claim that he doesn't into the further claim that there is some possibility, however small, that he (Moore) is dreaming. Moore admits that he and the sceptic are at a stand-off here. "I [Moore] 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."¹ Nonetheless, Moore devotes a great deal of time to maneuvering and analyzing both sides of the argument until it can be reduced to a simpler question or set of questions which doesn't depend on proof. In the final analysis this is what lends credibility to his emphasis on good reasons and makes it an important contribution. He analyzes opposing philosophical

¹Moore, "Certainty," p. 242.

views into forms in which good reasons are seen as decisive to their resolution.

Moore justifies his claim that good reasons may be decisive in philosophical disputes by showing how those disputes ultimately depend upon questions which do not permit simple yes or no answers. Rather they require an evaluation and consideration of reasons.

The final area in which Moore has made a significant contribution is related to his entire approach. We have touched upon the fact that in many respects Moore had powerful intuitions about the incorrectness of the sceptic's point of view. Those intuitions manifested themselves in his defense of common sense and insistence that ordinary propositions can be used to refute sceptical positions. The effect of these has been to make philosophers exceedingly cautious about adopting positions which go against common sense. Moore is constantly holding the common sense view of the world before us, constantly asking us to measure our philosophical views against those common sense views to determine which is more plausible.

Moore also uses the common sense view as a yardstick by which to measure philosophical views, more as a general criterion of their tenability rather than as a test of their correctness. Therefore, when faced with a choice between opposing philosophical views, the one which can be reconciled with common sense is always to be preferred. Previous to

Moore, philosophers seemed to labor under the belief that part of their role was to show where common sense was wrong, that what we ordinarily believed to be the case, really couldn't be the case or that what common sense thought to be real was only real in an apparent sense and not in an ultimate sense. This is particularly true of the Absolute Idealists, whom we must never forget were the predominant group against which Moore rebelled.

We are now in a position to see just how much Moore's position is a reaction to this view of philosophy. First, he argues that consistency with the common sense view of the world is a plus for a philosophical view, rather than a negative. The common sense view of the world provides our most important frame of reference, not merely for its truths and the ontology of the ordinary world. Equally important is the way our concepts and language are inextricably bound up in that common sense point of view. This is why Moore's refutation of sceptical views almost invariably come to rest upon the inconsistencies which arise from such views.

Moore never articulates fully the role of framework facts, in the way, say, that Wittgenstein does in "On Certainty." Still his emphasis on the implications of the inconsistencies which result from scepticism, clearly lead toward the position that certain propositions function as the framework which anchor our world view.

Secondly, having argued that the role of philosophers is not to point out the deficiencies of the common sense view of the world, and that therefore philosophical views which are reconcilable with common sense are to be preferred, Moore then attempts to articulate another role for philosophers. The techniques for which Moore is famous are all aimed at justifying and delineating the role of philosophers within the framework of common sense.

Those techniques, analysis, translation into the concrete, the appeal to ordinary language, combined with Moore's insistence on clarity and preciseness of expression to produce a unique philosophical perspective which opposes scepticism.

Moore fails in refuting scepticism but he succeeds in showing it to have serious flaws. By arguing persuasively that our philosophical positions, whatever they may be, must be reconcilable with our common sense view of the world, Moore shows scepticism to have serious problems of credibility. In opening up this area of discussion, Moore is able to shift the burden of proof somewhat to the sceptic. By constantly contrasting the views of scepticism with the views of common sense, and by thoroughly analyzing those views, Moore shows us, in a way not done before, just how radical a view scepticism is. It is shown to rest upon a complete and thorough upheaval, not only of ordinary language claims, which is obvious, but of many of our

established truths and concepts as well.

In this sense Moore's work does fulfill one of the requirements specified by Wittgenstein. He does "assemble reminders for a particular purpose."¹ That purpose is to tie together more closely than ever before the realms of philosophy and common sense, and in this regard Moore's work is a success.

¹Ludwig Wittgenstein, Philosophical Investigations trans. G. E. M. Anscombe (New York: Macmillan Co., 1970), p. 50.

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