G.E. MOORE AND RESPONSES TO

PHILOSOPHICALLY SCEPTICAL DOUBTS

by

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Abstract

Post 1960's, little has been written about G.E. Moore's anti-scepticism. This thesis is intended both as an attempt to clarify the nature of that anti-scepticism and as an attempt to uncover its epistemological significance. I argue the following: (1) *Pace* Wittgenstein and others, Moore's assumption that philosophically sceptical doubts are meaningful was correct. (2) Moore's anti-scepticism was characterized by (a) meeting philosophically sceptical doubts on a one-by-one basis and by (b) avoiding positive accounts of how we know what we know. (3) This anti-scepticism was an effective means of removing the grounds for philosophically sceptical doubts. (4) Despite failure to achieve conclusive victory over the philosophical sceptic, this anti-scepticism nonetheless (a) provides a rational basis for presuming philosophically sceptical doubts false and (b) fares significantly better than certain naturalized responses to philosophically sceptical doubts. (5) Despite one common reading of Moore, he very well understood the philosophical nature of philosophically sceptical doubts.

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Finally, to borrow an acknowledgement from Richard Foley, I would like to thank my parents simply for being the kind of people they are. It is indeed my hope that this thesis reflects in an imperfect way the standards of honesty and fairness that they have taught me. Their support and love has been unfailing.

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Preface

My motivation for writing a thesis on the topic of G.E. Moore and responses to philosophically sceptical doubts can be traced, I think, to at least three primary sources. The first is related to a very pervasive trend in the current philosophical scene at large. I cannot help but see in the philosophically sceptical doubts Moore so frequently addressed if not a basis for, at least a strong connection to, the post-modern disdain for notions of objectivity and certainty. Perhaps seeing this connection is more a comment on my own psychology than anything else. At any rate, I do not think that it is too much of a stretch to treat, for example, the following passage from one of Moore's chief sceptical opponents as, in a fundamental respect, identical to the following remarks from a major representative of post-modern concerns:

> The value of philosophy is, in fact, to be sought largely in its very uncertainty. The man who has no tincture of philosophy goes throughout life imprisoned in the prejudices derived from common sense, from the habitual beliefs of his age or nation, and from convictions which have grown up in his mind without the cooperation or consent of his deliberate reason...As soon as we begin to philosophize...we find...that even the most everyday things lead to problems to which only very incomplete answers can be given. Philosophy, though unable to tell us with certainty what is the true answer to the doubts which it raises, is able to suggest many possibilities which enlarge our thoughts and free them from the tyranny of custom. Thus, while diminishing our feeling of certainty as to what things are, it greatly increases our knowledge as to what things may be; it removes the somewhat arrogant dogmatism of those who have never travelled into the region of liberating doubt...[1]

> One way to see edifying philosophy as the love of wisdom is to see it as the attempt to prevent conversation from degenerating into inquiry, into a research program. Edifying philosophers can never end philosophy, but they can help

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[1] Bertrand Russell, The Problems of Philosophy (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), p. 91.

prevent it from attaining the secure path of a science.
The danger which edifying discourse tries to avert is that
some given vocabulary, some way in which people might come to
think of themselves, will deceive them into thinking that from
now on all discourse could be, or should be, normal discourse.
The resulting freezing-over of culture would be, in the eyes
of edifying philosophers, the dehumanization of human beings.[2]

I am unconvinced that the benefits purported to be gained from the
abandonment, or even from the devaluation, of objectivity and certainty
outweigh the drawbacks of such abandonment or devaluation. Yet I am
convinced that those who disagree with me on the matter will never be
persuaded from their perspective by inconsiderate dismissals of it. Their
reasons, that is, for holding what they do must be seriously and sincerely
addressed. In Moore, I suggest, we find a means of dealing with
philosophically sceptical doubts that, at the very least, takes these
doubts seriously and sincerely. If I am right in drawing a connection
between the sorts of doubts he engaged and those treasured by the post-
modern world, therefore, we may gain from his way of dealing with the
former certain insights with respect to how to deal with the latter.

The second source of my motivation for writing on the topic I have
chosen is my lack of confidence in post-Quinean attempts to quell
philosophically sceptical doubts via the naturalization of epistemology.
In a way, this source is related to the point just raised, viz. the
importance of addressing philosophically sceptical doubts in a serious and
sincere manner. I view Quine's wholehearted abandonment of epistemology
to psychology not as an adequate means of responding to philosophically
sceptical doubts but rather as a refusal to acknowledge their
significance. Granted, Quine's naturalistic program is a radical one, yet
it seems to me that even less radical programs come up short at exactly
the same point at which Quine's does when considered as responses to
philosophically sceptical doubts: they refuse to recognize that questions
about what we ought to believe or how we ought to form beliefs cannot be

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[2] Richard Rorty, Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature (Princeton:
Princeton University Press, 1980), pp. 372, 377.

settled decisively by appeals to what we do believe or how we do form beliefs. I am thus convinced that adequate responses to philosophically sceptical doubts must be of a 'nonnaturalized' nature. And, as far as such nonnaturalized responses go, I hope to show that Moore has a considerable amount to offer.

Finally, some of my motivation for writing on the topic I have chosen stems from a simple respect for Moore the philosopher. I recall a conversation I once had with a fellow academic, in which I mentioned that my work on Wittgenstein's On Certainty was drawing me more and more to an interest in Moore. My friend's response was to remind me of Wittgenstein's remark that Moore is a perfect example of just how far one can go in philosophy without possessing any intelligence whatsoever.[3] What struck me then, and strikes me now, as odd about the view of Moore implied by this response (and especially so in light of my friend's Wittgensteinian sympathies) is the presumption that the production of original theses is of preeminent worth in the practice of philosophy. Near the end of his life, Moore himself readily admitted that he had never been particularly good at producing *answers* to philosophical questions.[4] But surely there is great value in the production and analysis of philosophical *questions*, two things at which Moore excelled. In any case, it is my hope that the pages to follow will convince the reader not only that Moore's ability to produce insightful answers was better than it is often made out to be, but also of the value of his emphasis on query and analysis.

My thesis is divided into four chapters and a postscript. Chapter 1 consists of an attempt to get clear about the nature of philosophically sceptical doubts, and an examination of their meaningfulness, with a view

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[3] Ray Monk, Ludwig Wittgenstein: The Duty of Genius (London: Vintage, 1990), p. 262.

[4] 'A Reply to My Critics', The Philosophy of G.E. Moore, P.A. Schilpp, ed. (Chicago: Northwestern University, 1942), p. 677.

to establishing the justifiability of Moore's presumption that philosophically sceptical doubts, however insecure, certainly make sense. Chapter 2 outlines what I consider to be two of the most important characteristics typical of Moore's 'method' of dealing with philosophically sceptical doubts. I also there take a sort of 'first-pass' evaluation of Moore's method, touching briefly on what seem to me to be the primary benefits attached to it. In Chapter 3 I turn to an examination of three instances of Moore's anti-sceptical method applied: his dispute with Hume's (ultimately sceptical) empiricist epistemology; his consideration of a Cartesian-style argument against our supposed knowledge of the external world; and his remarks on philosophically sceptical arguments that attempt to derive 'p is unknown' from 'p is contingent'. My intention in examining each of these three instances is generally to impress upon the reader the effectiveness of Moore's anti-sceptical method as he was capable of applying it. Chapter 4 is perhaps the most significant of the four; it is an in-depth evaluation of Moore's anti-scepticism in light of the previously considered instances of his anti-sceptical method applied. I there suggest three possible ways in which any approach to dealing with philosophically sceptical doubts might be assessed, judging Moore's anti-scepticism according to each. Finally, in the Exegetical Postscript I attempt to justify my assumption, exhibited throughout the thesis, that, contrary to one common view of Moore the anti-sceptic, he very well understood the philosophical nature of the sceptical doubts he engaged.

Chapter 1: Philosophically Sceptical Doubts:
On Their Nature and Meaningfulness

In this opening chapter I would like to address two questions relating not so much to Moore's anti-scepticism as to the nature of the philosophical enemy his anti-scepticism was directed against. The two questions are simply stated:

Q_1: What are philosophically sceptical doubts?
Q_2: Are such doubts ultimately meaningful?

My primary purpose in addressing the first of these two questions is two-fold. On the one hand, I simply think that it is beneficial at the beginning of a thesis such as this to define and clarify key terms, especially if these key terms are likely to be ambiguous due to a long and varied history of use (as are, I trust it will be granted me, 'philosophical' and 'sceptical'). Secondly, addressing this first question will serve to state up-front one important way in which I read Moore the anti-sceptic. Not a few commentators have read him in such a way that the 'philosophically' sceptical doubts he concerned himself with were not, in his mind, particularly philosophical at all. By characterizing philosophically sceptical doubts as I do, I wish to emphasize that when I say Moore concerned himself with *philosophically* sceptical doubts, I mean just that.

My purpose in addressing the second of these two questions is to help the reader see some of the importance of Moore's anti-sceptical endeavours. If it is true, as some notable philosophers such as Wittgenstein have claimed, that philosophically sceptical doubts in the end prove meaningless, then philosophical attempts to quell these doubts are at best fundamentally misguided, at worst equally meaningless. If,

however, there is good reason to believe that philosophically sceptical doubts are not meaningless, then philosophical attempts to deal with such doubts are far from worthless.

1.1: What Are Philosophically Sceptical Doubts?

Presumably, when we speak of 'philosophically' sceptical doubts we mean to distinguish them from 'plain' or 'ordinary' sceptical doubts. That is, we mean to distinguish between 'philosophical' doubts about putative knowledge in a given domain as opposed to 'plain' doubts about putative knowledge in a given domain. And so, to get clear about the nature of the former, it will be helpful to emphasize the distinction between these two sorts of epistemic doubts.

Thompson Clarke has offered the following analogy to help illustrate the 'plain'/'philosophical' distinction here raised:

> Pilots are being taught to identify enemy aircraft. Then kinds of enemy aircraft, A,B,...,J, are characterized in terms of their capabilities and mutually distinguishing features. The pilots are instructed to identify *any* enemy aircraft by running through a provided checklist of features. It is recognized that this may result in misidentifications: there are types of enemy aircraft, antiquated, rarely used, intentionally not covered by the checklist, which specifies features sufficient for distinguishing the ten types one from another, but none from X,Y,Z, the antiquated types the pilots are instructed to ignore. This procedure is adopted for certain overriding practical advantages.[5]

Here we have a picture of 'plain' individuals making and raising 'plain' epistemic assertions and doubts. Governing all of the pilots' efforts at identifying enemy aircraft is a restriction: the pilots are required to ignore the possibility that any enemy aircraft they encounter might be of type X,Y,Z; that is, they are required to assume that the criteria they have been given for identifying enemy aircraft are sufficient for the task. In a similar way, there is a restriction governing all 'plain' epistemic assertions and doubts: we are required to assume that the criteria commonly accepted for properly asserting or

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[5] Thompson Clarke, 'The Legacy of Skepticism', *The Journal of Philosophy*, Vol. LXIX, No. 20, Nov. 1972, p. 759.

doubting something as (un)known are sufficient for the task. 'Plain' inquirers do not question the standards that they have been trained to accept as sufficient conditions for legitimate knowledge claims. 'Plain' epistemic assertions and doubts, therefore, are assertions and doubts that are made and raised under the assumption that the criteria commonly accepted for making and raising legitimate assertions and doubts about what is (un)known are adequate; they are assertions and doubts that assume, respect and do not call into question or controvert commonly accepted standards for properly making and raising assertions and doubts about what is (un)known.

'Philosophical' epistemic assertions and doubts, on the other hand, are supposed to be made in a comparatively unrestricted fashion. If we imagine certain of Thompson's fictitious pilots deciding to ignore the identification restriction they have been given - deciding to consider the possibility that any enemy aircraft they encounter might be of type X,Y,Z, then we will have a picture of what 'philosophical' individuals are up to. The pilots would in effect be rejecting, or at least questioning, the commonly accepted criteria for what constitutes properly asserting or doubting that a given enemy aircraft is of a particular type. Similarly, 'philosophical' individuals do not assume that the commonly accepted criteria for properly making and raising assertions and doubts about what is (un)known are adequate. 'Philosophical' individuals make and raise epistemic assertions and doubts that do not respect but call into question commonly accepted standards for properly asserting and doubting that something is (un)known. 'Philosophical' epistemic assertions and doubts, therefore, may be described as those assertions and doubts that do not assume but call into question commonly accepted standards for properly asserting and doubting something as (un)known.

Perhaps a concrete example will better clarify this rather abstract discussion of assertions and doubts that do respect commonly accepted standards for properly asserting and doubting something as (un)known and

those that *do not*. Suppose an individual, A, claims that it is raining. It is quite possible that some friend, B, may question A's claim, even though she does not think that A is deliberately telling an untruth. B may think that perhaps it has been quite some time since A was last outside and that it may have since stopped raining; or B may think that A was not outside at all but merely heard a (typically unreliable) weather report on the radio, according to which it was at that time supposed to be raining, but that perhaps the report made a false prediction. In any case, we might imagine B asking: 'How do you know (that it's raining)?' Now suppose that A responds by saying 'I was just outside a minute ago and it was a steady pour' and that this response suffices to convince B that it is in fact raining outside. Here we have a good example of a plain epistemic assertion and a plain epistemic doubt. Both A's assertion (that she knows that it is raining) and B's initial doubt (about whether A knows that it is raining) assumed and did not call into question a commonly accepted standard for determining whether it is known that it is raining, viz. that if one sees that it is raining one knows that it is raining. B's initial doubt was legitimate on the assumption that A perhaps did not see it raining. (We may assume that not knowing if anyone has seen the rain is a commonly accepted ground for legitimately doubting whether it is known that it is raining.) But once it was made clear that A had just seen it raining outside, B's initial, legitimate doubt was legitimately quelled and A's assertion was taken as true.

But now consider a situation in which an individual, C, responds to a friend's inquiry regarding the state of the weather outside by asserting that she knows that it is raining. Suppose the friend, D, asks C to justify this assertion and C further responds 'I was just outside a minute ago and it was a steady pour'. But now suppose D raises a doubt about whether just having seemed to see the rain *really* constitutes adequate grounds for claiming that one knows that it is raining: 'Yes, but it's possible that it isn't really raining after all; you may have suffered

some sort of strange hallucination and merely *thought* that you saw it raining when in fact you didn't'. C will no doubt do her best to nullify D's strange doubt by adducing reasons why she could not have been hallucinating. But the more C offers evidence for her claim that she did in fact see it raining outside, the more D expands the scope of the possible hallucination she has attributed to C until C finally has to admit that everything she is currently experiencing may be part of one grand hallucination, and that D is right: she really does not know after all that it is raining.

D's doubt (about whether C knows that it is raining) and C's confession (that she does not after all know that it is raining) are good examples of philosophical epistemic assertions and doubts. In doubting C's knowledge claim, D was in effect calling into question a commonly accepted criterion for asserting that one knows that it is raining outside; D was questioning whether seeming to see the rain is a sufficient reason for asserting that one knows that it is in fact raining. And in asserting (finally) that she did not know whether it was in fact raining outside, C was also questioning whether seeing the rain is a sufficient reason for asserting that it is known that it is in fact raining.[6]

Another way of stating the difference between plain and

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[6] Clarke's understanding of the difference between plain and philosophical epistemic assertions and doubts as being a difference between those assertions and doubts that do not call into question commonly accepted standards for properly asserting or doubting that something is known and those that do appears to be a fairly standard one. John Cook discusses the difference in terms of 'purely epistemological' doubts as opposed to 'metaphysical' doubts, the former being doubts raised in the context of certain unquestioned metaphysical assumptions, the latter being doubts about the very metaphysical assumptions left unquestioned by the purely epistemic doubts (John W. Cook, 'Moore and Scepticism', Knowledge and Mind: Philosophical Essays, Carl Ginet, Sydney Shoemaker, eds. [New York: Oxford University Press, 1983], p. 7). Barry Stroud discusses the difference in terms of 'internal' and 'external' questions about knowledge, the former being questions occurring within the context of a body of beliefs taken to be knowledge, the latter being questions about the epistemic status of this entire body of beliefs as a whole (Barry Stroud, The Significance of Philosophical Scepticism [Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1984], pp. 118-119). Yet common to each of these discussions is an underlying delineation between those sorts of doubts that do respect commonly accepted standards for doubting that something is known and those sorts that do not.

philosophical epistemic assertions and doubts is to say that whereas the former are 'first-order' epistemic assertions and doubts, the latter are 'higher-order' epistemic assertions and doubts.[7] As first-order epistemic assertions and doubts, plain assertions and doubts are about what is (un)known, made and raised in light of commonly accepted standards for properly asserting and doubting that something is (un)known; as higher-order epistemic assertions and doubts, philosophical assertions and doubts are about (plain, first-order epistemic) assertions and doubts about what is (un)known, and thus also about the commonly accepted standards in light of which these latter (plain, first-order epistemic) assertions and doubts are taken as properly made and raised.

We may say, then, that when we are speaking of the difference between 'plain' and 'philosophically' sceptical doubts, we are speaking of the difference between first-order epistemic doubts, raised in light of commonly accepted standards for properly doubting whether something is known, and higher-order epistemic doubts, raised not only outside commonly accepted standards for properly doubting whether something is known but even raised about the worth of those very standards themselves.

1.2 Are Philosophically Sceptical Doubts Ultimately Meaningful?

I hope to have said enough to make it quite clear what I mean when I speak of doubts which are specifically philosophical in nature. I wish now to turn to an examination of one prominent philosopher's attempts to establish that such doubts ultimately prove unintelligible. My intention is to demonstrate that, despite their initial plausibility, these attempts fall short of their goal of establishing the meaninglessness of philosophically sceptical doubts.

The early Wittgenstein's view of the presumed meaningfulness of philosophically sceptical doubts is set out in characteristically strong

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[7] Cf. Thomas Baldwin, G.E. Moore (New York: Routledge, 1990), pp. 288-289.

tones near the end of the <u>Tractatus</u>:

> Scepticism is *not* irrefutable, but obviously nonsensical, when it tries to raise doubts where no questions can be asked.
>   For doubt can exist only where a question exists, a question only where an answer exists, and an answer only where something *can be said.*[8]

Wittgenstein goes on to delimit the domain of possible questions to the realm of those answerable by empirical investigation:

> We feel that even when all *possible* scientific questions have been answered, the problems of life remain completely untouched. Of course there are then no questions left, and this itself is the answer.[9]

Taking the latter remark into consideration, I think we may fairly represent this 'Tractatus Argument' against the meaningfulness of philosophically sceptical doubts as follows:

(P₁) If a doubt makes sense, an intelligible question corresponding to that doubt can be asked.

(P₂) If an intelligible question corresponding to a given doubt can be asked, a definite answer can be given to that question.

(P₃) If a definite answer can be given to an intelligible question, that answer must be derived from empirical investigation.

(P₄) Empirical investigation can produce no definite answers to any (supposedly) intelligible questions corresponding to philosophically sceptical doubts.

(C₁) No definite answers can be given to any (supposedly) intelligible questions corresponding to philosophically sceptical doubts.

(C₂) No intelligible questions corresponding to philosophically sceptical doubts can be asked.

(C₃) Philosophically sceptical doubts make no sense.

By looking briefly at a couple of classic examples of philosophically sceptical doubts, it may be possible to get a better view of how Wittgenstein's <u>Tractatus</u> Argument is intended to apply to these sorts of doubts. First, however, it will be helpful to consider what Wittgenstein himself would surely regard as a manifestly meaningful doubt,

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[8] Wittgenstein, <u>Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus</u>, trans. by D.F. Pears and B.F. McGuinness (New York: Routledge, 1994), §6.51.

[9] Wittgenstein, <u>Tractatus</u>, §6.52.

so as to provide a useful contrast with the philosophically sceptical doubts to be examined. Take an archaeologist's doubt about the age of a particular, recently discovered ancient artefact. Suppose that, for the most part, the archaeologist's colleagues agree, based on certain preliminary considerations, that the artefact is approximately x years old. The archaeologist in question, however, believes that her colleagues have overlooked or failed to consider a significant piece of evidence, which suggests that the artefact is in fact much older than they believe it to be. What is the 'intelligible question corresponding to' the archaeologist's doubt here? Something along the lines of: 'Is this artefact significantly older than x years?' (Or 'How old is this artefact?') It is true that a (reasonably) definite answer can be given to this question; it is also true that this definite answer may be derived from empirical investigation. By examining the significant piece of evidence which the archaeologist believes her colleagues have overlooked or failed to consider, and by carrying out additional, appropriate physical tests -carbon dating the artefact, more extensive excavation of the area in which it was discovered, etc.- it should be possible to determine whether the artefact is significantly older than x years. So the archaeologist's doubt meets the criteria presented by Wittgenstein for it to be meaningful: an intelligible question corresponding to it can be asked, a definite answer to this question can be given, and this answer may be derived from empirical investigation.

Now consider scepticism about our knowledge of the external world. The sceptical doubt here is whether there is any such thing as knowledge of the external world, distinct from mere probable belief about the external world. One would suppose that the 'intelligible question corresponding to' this doubt would be something like: 'Is it possible to know anything about the external world?' And if anything is certain, it is that this question cannot be answered via empirical investigation. Doubt of this kind calls into question a basic assumption supporting all

empirical investigation, viz. that in carrying it out one is discovering something about the external world, that one is increasing one's knowledge of its nature and characteristics. Responding to the question 'Is it possible to know anything about the external world?' by citing examples of truths known via empirical investigation would be much the same as responding to the question 'Are you sure that your method of calculation is accurate?' by pointing to past cases in which one's method produced 'correct' answers. The response in each case no more nullifies the doubt connected with the question at hand than failure to respond at all. Thus, the sceptical doubt about our knowledge of the external world falls short of Wittgenstein's criteria for its making sense.

Consider scepticism about inductive inference. The doubt involved here is whether we can know anything based on inferences from some (observed) cases of a kind to all (including unobserved) cases of a kind, or from past (observed) cases of a kind to future (unobserved) cases of a kind. The 'intelligible question corresponding to' this doubt would seem to be 'Is it possible to know anything based on some (observed) cases of a kind to all (including unobserved) cases of a kind, or from past (observed) cases of a kind to future (unobserved) cases of a kind?' Once again, the hope of finding a definite answer to such a question from the realm of empirical investigation appears non-existent. For the doubt connected with this question is a doubt about a basic assumption that lies at the heart of empirical investigation and testing, viz. the reliability of inductive inference as a means of obtaining knowledge. Since all empirical investigation, in Russell's words, 'demands the use of induction...if it is to be believed'[10], to cite as proof (or even as evidence) that we can in fact know things based on inductive inference the results of empirical investigation would be no better than to cite one's past use of a given method of calculation as evidence that that method was

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[10] An Outline of Philosophy (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1979), p. 215.

in fact a reliable one.

It is clear, then, that these classical instances of philosophically sceptical doubt are meaningless according to Wittgenstein's criteria for meaningful doubt. What is not so clear, however, is why Wittgenstein's criteria ought to be accepted. He would have us move from the inability to produce an empirical resolution to these doubts to their meaninglessness. It is certainly difficult to see, without any further support for this inference, how it fares any better than the inference from the meaningfulness of these doubts to the rejection of Wittgenstein's criteria for meaningful doubt. In fact, given that (for a great many people at least) the doubts seem, on the face of things, to possess meaning, the latter of the two inferences may justifiably be judged as prima facie more acceptable.

The Tractatus Argument is essentially a positivist one, and recent counters to positivistic attempts to write off philosophically sceptical doubts as meaningless are not lacking. Stroud offers one such counter in The Significance of Philosophical Scepticism, where he examines Carnap's attempt to reduce philosophically sceptical doubts about the external world to meaninglessness. For Carnap, acceptance of the verifiability principle of meaning leads quite directly to the meaninglessness of philosophically sceptical doubts about the external world. Of whatever area in which doubt is raised, it must be possible to have a determinate knowledge; otherwise 'there would be nothing intelligible [in that area] for us to lack knowledge of'.[11] In the case of scepticism about our knowledge of the external world the sceptic asks 'Can we know anything about the external world?', but her use of 'We can (can't) know anything about the external world' must be unintelligible since she does not allow for any kind of empirical means of verifying the statement; thus, the question in which the statement is embedded -'Can we know...?, etc.'- is

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[11] Stroud, p. 173.

also unintelligible, since it contains an unintelligible component.[12]

Stroud's reply to Carnap's positivist attack is at bottom very simple, effective, and more than compatible with the response to the <u>Tractatus</u> Argument I hinted at briefly above. He points out that our acceptance of the verifiability principle must be the result of our belief that it successfully rules out meaningless statements and successfully rules in meaningful statements. Determining whether it does in fact do so, then, 'would be a matter of saying how well it captures [the distinction between meaningful and meaningless statements] we already know how to draw'. It follows that the verifiability principle should

> never put us in a position to rule out as meaningless
> something we already and quite independently think we find
> intelligible. Taken as a statement of the conditions we
> actually rely on in drawing the distinction as we do, the
> principle would have to answer to our independent judgements
> of meaningfulness, and could not be used as a weapon to
> deprive us of something we are fairly sure we understand.[13]

Carnap's attempt to reduce philosophically sceptical doubts about the external world to meaninglessness by means of the verifiability principle thus fails, or at least is no more compelling than the argument '*I* don't find this doubt intelligible, therefore your conviction that it is intelligible is misplaced', an argument which may always be countered by the equally simple observation, 'I do find this doubt intelligible, therefore your conviction that it is unintelligible is misplaced'. Since

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[12] Stroud, p. 174.

[13] Stroud, p. 199. Of course, this is but one of several well-known objections to verificationism. (Cf. Hempel's observation that the verifiability criterion of meaning tends either [1] to be too restrictive [ruling out, for example, general statements and various other types of statements involving terms germane to the physical sciences], [2] to be too inclusive [admitting, for example, disjunctive statements having one or more obviously meaningless disjuncts], [3] to lead to a denial of either [a] bivalence or [b] the equivalence of $(Vx) \sim (Px)$ and $\sim (\exists x)(Px)$, or [4] to be self-refuting ('Problems and Changes in the Empiricist Criterion of Meaning', <u>Classics of Analytic Philosophy</u>, Robert Ammerman, ed. [Indianapolis: Hackett Pub. Co., 1990), pp. 218-228.) It seems to me, however, that Stroud's reply is sufficient for my present purpose of undermining positivist attacks on the meaningfulness of philosophically sceptical doubts, and that an extensive critique of verificationism would be out of place here.

I can see no essential difference between Carnap's attempt to reduce philosophically sceptical doubts about the external world to meaninglessness and Wittgenstein's Tractatus Argument (reading Wittgenstein's stipulation that the realm of intelligible questions be delimited to those answerable by empirical investigation as his endorsement of the verifiability principle, and his move from the non-existence of definite answers not derived from empirical investigation to the non-existence of intelligible questions corresponding to philosophically sceptical doubts as equivalent to the claim that embedding a meaningless component in a question renders the question meaningless), I take Stroud's reply to Carnap to be equally effective against the latter.[14] There just seems to be 'no verificationist shortcut'[15] to a dismissal of philosophically sceptical doubts.

In On Certainty Wittgenstein goes beyond the positivistic argument of the Tractatus in order to establish the meaninglessness of philosophically sceptical doubts. In the remainder of this section I want to outline what I take to be the three primary ways in which Wittgenstein attempts in On Certainty to achieve the goal that his Tractatus Argument falls short of, and offer some thoughts on why they too seem to fall short of that goal.

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[14] Stroud goes on to point out that even if we were to conclude that the verifiability principle captures our independent judgements of meaningfulness, it would be incumbent on us to provide 'at least the outline of a conception, or theory of how intelligible thought is possible'; and, he says, 'only in the articulation and defense of that conception or theory could the basis be found for eliminating as meaningless philosophical problems which otherwise seem intelligible enough'. He takes Carnap's remarks on alternative linguistic frameworks, on how 'theoretical' questions such as the philosophical sceptic's are really 'practical' questions about one's choice of linguistic framework, as an attempt to provide such a concept or theory, and as problematic on two counts: (1) it leaves Carnap with a rather striking form of idealism/ relativism, according to which there are no truths independent of our particular linguistic frameworks; and (2) it is difficult to see how these remarks are not themselves precisely the sort of thing Carnap considers unintelligible, viz. something neither verifiable nor confirmable by empirical testing (Stroud, pp. 187-188, 192-197).

[15] Stroud, p. 207.

Again and again in <u>On Certainty</u> Wittgenstein comes back to the idea that doubt, like knowledge, requires grounds or justification. A doubt that called into question everything, he tells us, would not even be a doubt.[16]

The more the text progresses, however, the clearer it becomes why he believes this. As he says in §§369-370:

> If I wanted to doubt that this was my hand, how could I avoid doubting whether the word 'hand' has any meaning? So that is something I seem to *know* after all.
> But more correctly: the fact that I use the word 'hand' and all the other words in my sentence without a second thought, indeed that I should stand before the abyss if I wanted so much as to try doubting their meanings -shows that an absence of doubt belongs to the essence of the language-game, that the question 'How do I know...' drags out the language-game, or else does away with it.

Or in §519:

> [I]f you are obeying the order 'Bring me a book', you may have to check to see whether the thing you see over there really is a book, but then you do at least know what people mean by 'book'; and if you don't you can look it up, -but then you must know what some other word means. And the fact that a word means such-and-such, is used in such-and-such a way, is in turn an empirical fact, like the fact that what you see over there is a book.
> Therefore, in order for you to be able to carry out an order, there must be some empirical fact about which you are not in doubt. Doubt itself rests only on what is beyond doubt...[17]

The essential idea here, I think, is that the universality inherent in certain types of philosophically sceptical doubts (e.g. those about our supposed knowledge of the external world) cannot be allowed to terminate at the point of linguistic meaning (which meaning is surely as much to be considered an empirical fact as anything else), and, in extending such doubts into the realm of linguistic meaning, they would consequently preclude the intelligibility of their own expression. At the risk of ignoring some of the subtleties of the above remarks, I shall formulate

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[16] Wittgenstein, <u>On Certainty</u>, trans. by G.E.M. Anscombe and Denis Paul (New York: Harper and Row, 1972), §§115, 122, 123, 354, 625.

[17] Cf. Wittgenstein, <u>On Certainty</u>, §§114, 306, 383, 506, 507, 522, 523.

the argument implicit in them as follows:

(P₁) In order intelligibly to express a doubt one must know the meaning of the words used to express it.

(P₂) If one knows the meaning of any set of words, one knows an empirical fact.

(C₁) In order intelligibly to express a doubt one must know an empirical fact.

(P₃) Certain types of philosophically sceptical doubts entail that we do not know any empirical fact (and, hence, do not know the meaning of any set of words).

(C₂) Certain types of philosophically sceptical doubts cannot be intelligibly expressed.

It seems to me that there is an important problem with this 'Fact of Meaning Argument', a problem, in fact, which arises from a fallacy Wittgenstein himself was quite famous for attributing to Moore: confusing certainty with knowledge.[18] Philosophically sceptical doubts are about the extent of our *knowledge*, not about the extent of our *certainty*. Indeed, even Moore recognized that philosophically sceptical doubts about our knowledge of what is the case in any given domain is quite compatible with a feeling of complete certainty about what is the case in that domain.[19] In the above argument, Wittgenstein seems to want to say that an intelligible expression of doubt requires that we *know* the meaning of the words used to express it. But two questions arise here: (1) Is it not true that an intelligible expression of doubt merely requires that, at most, we *feel certain of* (not *know*) the meaning of the words used to express it? and (2) If certainty is the most that is required here, does Wittgenstein's argument, modified so as to accord with the fact that

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[18] One may view the following criticism of Wittgenstein's failure to separate knowledge from certainty as parallel to, or even as essentially the same as, Baldwin's claim that Moore's Argument from 'Differential Certainty' fails to distinguish between *subjective* and *objective* certainty (Baldwin, G.E. Moore, pp. 270-271). Although I think such a view is correct, I hope to make it clear later in the thesis that Moore's failure explicitly to distinguish between subjective and objective certainty does not render his Argument from Differential Certainty ineffective in the same way in which Wittgenstein's failure here to distinguish between certainty and knowledge renders his Fact of Meaning Argument ineffective.

[19] See Exegetical Postscript, p. 89.

nothing more than certainty is required, get him to his goal of establishing the meaninglessness of certain types of philosophically sceptical doubt?

In answering (1), it is necessary to keep in mind the important difference between knowledge and certainty. Wittgenstein's own claim that they belong to different categories[20] rests upon the idea that whereas knowledge demands the ability to specify one's justification, certainty does not. To claim that one is certain that p (i.e. feels certain that p) need not open one up to the question of why one is certain; to claim that one knows that p, however, always leaves one open to the question of how one knows that p.[21] That is, 'one uses "I know" when one is ready to give compelling grounds'[22], but one's use of 'I'm certain' need not be accompanied by such a readiness. But does the intelligible expression of a given doubt require that one be certain about the meaning of the words used to express it and be able to specify one's grounds for believing that they mean what one takes them to mean? It would seem not: For how could one be any more able to specify one's grounds for believing that one's words mean what one takes them to mean than able to specify one's grounds for believing Moore's 'common sense propositions' (such as 'There exists at present a living human body' or 'Here is one hand'), which Wittgenstein in On Certainty quite clearly takes as unjustified (yet certain). In fact, unless relevant justification were provided by advocates of the Fact of Meaning Argument, a negative answer seems the only legitimate one here.

If I am right, then, the answer to (1) (viz. 'Is it not true that an intelligible expression of doubt merely requires that, at most, we be certain of [not know)] the meaning of the words used to express it?') must be 'yes'. But what about (2)? Even if an intelligible expression of

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[20] Wittgenstein, On Certainty, §308.

[21] Wittgenstein, On Certainty, §550.

[22] Wittgenstein, On Certainty, §243.

doubt merely requires that, at most, one be certain about the meaning of the words used to express it, might this not still be enough to generate Wittgenstein's conclusion that certain types of philosophically sceptical doubts are unintelligible? Consider the Fact of Meaning Argument modified so as to account for the claim that certainty is all that is required:

> (P₁) In order intelligibly to express a doubt one must be certain of the meaning of the words used to express it.

> (P₂) If one is certain of the meaning of any set of words, one is certain of an empirical fact.

> (C₁) In order intelligibly to express a doubt one must be certain of an empirical fact.

> (P₃) Certain types of philosophically sceptical doubts entail that we do not know any empirical fact, and, hence, do not know the meaning of any set of words.

> (C₂) Certain types of philosophically sceptical doubts cannot be intelligibly expressed.

It is clear that (C₂) does not follow. In order to obtain it, (P₃) would have to be modified to:

> (P₃.) Certain types of philosophically sceptical doubts entail that we are not certain of any empirical fact, and, hence, are not certain of the meaning of any set of words.

But the philosophical sceptic need not be burdened with (P₃.); nor, therefore, need she be too unsettled by the Fact of Meaning Argument.

The case against the Fact of Meaning Argument may be pressed even further. It is not entirely clear that the philosophical sceptic is even bound logically to admit that she is *certain* of the meaning of the words by which she expresses her philosophically sceptical doubts, let alone that she *knows* their meaning. It is difficult to see why the expression of such doubts may not merely be accompanied by the *supposition* that the words used to express them mean what they are taken to mean, and why such a supposition need be construed as a feeling of certainty. Indeed, it is quite conceivable that the philosophical sceptic, when pressed by Wittgenstein or others to account for the 'fact' that she cannot relinquish her feeling of certainty that the words by which she expresses doubts mean what she takes them to mean, might respond quite sincerely and

legitimately along the lines of: 'I'm just not sure whether my words in fact mean what I take them to mean, yet my supposition that they do is enough to allow my expression of these philosophically sceptical doubts to make sense'.[23]

The second argument raised by Wittgenstein in On Certainty against the meaningfulness of philosophically sceptical doubts may be seen in the following remark:

> If someone doubted whether the earth existed a hundred years ago, I should not understand, for this reason: I would not know what such a person would still allow to be counted as evidence and what not.[24]

Or again:

> Supposing it wasn't true that the earth had existed long before I was born - how should we imagine the mistake being discovered?
>
> It's no good saying 'Perhaps we are wrong' when, if no evidence is trustworthy, trust is excluded in the case of present evidence.
>
> If, for example, we have always been miscalculating, and twelve times twelve isn't a hundred and forty-four, why should we trust any other calculation?...[25]

My rendition of the argument contained in these remarks, which I will call the 'Loss of Conceivable Evidence Argument', is as follows:

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[23] The importance of distinguishing between supposition and certainty (or something similar) when looking at philosophically sceptical doubts in any given domain has been emphasized by recent epistemologists. Ernest Sosa, for example, does so when commenting on Quine's attempt to rule out philosophical doubt about the certainty of science on the grounds that this doubt originally gets its purchase from within the framework of scientific inquiry itself. According to Quine, says Sosa, '[e]pistemology cannot legitimately indulge in such universal questioning of science, for the very problem of knowledge of the world presupposes science. It is only the posit of physical objects with their respective regularities that raises the problem of illusion. Without that contrast there is no contrast between physical appearance and reality'. However, cautions Sosa, '[s]uch reasoning does not quiet philosophical doubt...for the problem of knowledge presupposes not acceptance of science as believed truth but at most supposition of science as relevant possibility' (Ernest Sosa, Knowledge in Perspective [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995], p. 102). Baldwin seems to stress the same point (Baldwin, G.E. Moore, p. 276).

[24] Wittgenstein, On Certainty, §231.

[25] Wittgenstein, On Certainty, §§301-303; cf. §§32, 257, 624, 660, 662, 663, 672.

(P₁) Philosophically sceptical doubts call into question paradigm cases of what counts in favour of something's being known in a given domain.

(P₂) If paradigm cases of what counts in favour of something's being known in a given domain are called into question, we are no longer sure of what 'known', 'unknown', etc. mean as applied to that domain.

(P₃) If we are no longer sure of what 'known', 'unknown', etc. mean as applied to a given domain, we cannot be sure of what phrases in which these words are embedded, such as 'You do not know', 'Perhaps it is not known', etc. mean as applied to that domain.

(C) Since they call into question paradigm cases of what counts in favour of something's being known in a given domain, and since in so doing they render meaningless the application to that domain of such phrases essential to their expression as 'You do not know', 'Perhaps it is not known', etc., philosophically sceptical doubts are themselves meaningless.

Initially this argument seems quite sound. The argument is, I think, the most compelling of all of Wittgenstein's anti-sceptical attacks. Yet it is not clear that the meaninglessness of philosophically sceptical doubts need be the argument's conclusion. In fact, the philosophical sceptic may use the truth of the premises in her favour, provided her scepticism is viewed in an appropriate manner. In order to reach Wittgenstein's conclusion, one must see the philosophical sceptic as attempting to maintain the intelligibility of the concept of knowledge in a given domain while at the same time ruling out any possible instances of this concept by calling into question paradigm cases of what counts in favour of something's being known in that domain. But again, this is saddling the sceptic with too much: she is well within her philosophical rights merely to call into question purported paradigm cases of what counts in favour of something's being known in a given domain and then, instead of holding on to the concept of knowledge in that domain, conclude that she finds the concept unintelligible; that the idea of something's being certain without the possibility of error in that domain makes no sense. Recalling the final response to the Fact of Meaning Argument: we may say that the sceptic merely *supposes* that the concept of knowledge in a given domain makes sense for the purposes of a *reductio ad absurdum* of that very supposition. Then it would not matter to the intelligibility of

her scepticism if purported paradigm cases of what counts in favour of something's being known in a given domain are called into question, since the very point of her calling them into question is to render the concept of knowledge in that domain unintelligible. The Lack of Conceivable Evidence Argument may therefore have an impact on the philosophical sceptic: it may prevent her, in the precise articulation of her position, from saying things like 'There is no certain knowledge of such-and-such' and require her to say things like 'The concept of certain knowledge about such-and-such is unintelligible'. One wonders, however, whether this impact would be a negative or positive one for the philosophical sceptic. Perhaps the skin would come off her opponent's back, rather than her own.

Another plausible response to the Lack of Conceivable Evidence Argument focuses on the truth of (P$_2$). More loosely, this premise sometimes gets formulated along the lines of 'If one has absolutely no idea what would count as knowledge here, one can't make sense out of the claim that there is (or is not) knowledge here'. But is it really true to say that what the sceptic is in effect doing by raising a philosophically sceptical doubt about paradigm cases of what counts in favour of something's being known in a given domain is asserting that we have 'absolutely no idea what would count as knowledge' in that domain? Surely not. By calling into question such paradigm cases, the sceptic is not calling into question, or doing away with, the general notion of knowledge in that domain; she is merely claiming that, as of yet, no instances of this general notion have been produced, that none of the beliefs typically offered as instances of this general notion are in fact instances of it. When the beliefs are examined, it turns out that they fail to meet the conditions necessary for counting as instances of knowledge in the domain under consideration. In this way, the sceptic *does* have some idea about what would count as knowledge in the domain she is sceptical about, viz. a belief about the objects in the domain that is both justified and true.

A philosophical sceptic about the existence of knowledge in *any*

domain[26] might be forced to do away with the general notion of knowledge altogether, since she would be unable to point to *any* domain in which there were instances of justified true beliefs. But most philosophical sceptics are sceptical only about our supposed knowledge in particular domains; they may thus transport the general notion of knowledge found in other domains (in which there are instances of this notion) to the domain they are sceptical about, and, on the basis of this transportation, claim that, while the idea of knowledge in this domain makes sense, as of yet no instances of it have been produced.

It is tempting to think that those who see merit in the Lack of Conceivable Evidence Argument as applied not only to the former, universal sort of philosophical sceptic but also to the latter, more common sort of philosophical sceptic make the mistake of thinking that specification of the conditions necessary for membership in a class entails the existence of members of that class. But, of course, this cannot be right, since we can quite well grasp what would be required for something to be included in a class without being able to point to anything which matches these requirements. In the same way that we can understand what it would mean for something to belong to the class of neon-green books with Greek titles without being able to point to any neon-green books with Greek titles, we can understand what it would mean for something to be a justified true belief about x without being able to 'point' to any justified true beliefs about x.

Thus, calling into question the existence of paradigm cases of what counts in favour of something's being known in a given domain need not render the general concept of something's being known in that domain unintelligible.

The third and final major argument against the meaningfulness of philosophically sceptical doubts that appears in On Certainty centres

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[26] See, e.g., Keith Lehrer, 'Why Not Scepticism?', Essays on Knowledge and Justification, G.S. Pappas and M. Swain, eds. (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1978), p. 346.

around Moore's and the sceptic's use of 'I know'. This 'Grammatical Argument' is, I believe, the least compelling of Wittgenstein's attempts to establish the meaninglessness of philosophically sceptical doubts. Throughout On Certainty, he stresses the justificatory aspect of knowledge. We have already touched upon the fact that for him, the proper use of 'I know' is always accompanied by the ability to specify one's grounds for the knowledge claim made by it; that is just what distinguishes it from the use of 'I believe'.[27] The odd thing about the debate between Moore and the philosophical sceptic, however, is that both parties seem to think that it makes sense to use 'I know' (and it's negation and related phrases such as 'I don't know', 'You don't know', etc.) in contexts where the ability to specify one's grounds for the knowledge claim made by it appears non-existent. Moore asserts that he does know his common sense propositions, the philosophical sceptic denies this, Moore repeats his claim, and so on. But since Moore does not, or perhaps cannot, specify the grounds for his knowledge claims (as they form the unjustified 'foundations' of all his asserting and questioning[28]), it appears as though his use of 'I know' in making these knowledge claims, as well as the sceptic's use of it in rejecting them, is a misuse, thus making the knowledge claims themselves, as well as their denial, meaningless.[29]

This argument closely parallels one given by Norman Malcolm in his 1949 paper 'Defending Common Sense'.[30] There Malcolm also had charged Moore with a misuse of 'I know'. According to Malcolm, the phrase is

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[27] Wittgenstein, On Certainty, §550.

[28] Wittgenstein, On Certainty, §162.

[29] Wittgenstein, On Certainty, §622; cf. §§495, 498, 520, 521.

[30] Given what appears to be the reason for Wittgenstein's writing the remarks of On Certainty, of course, this is no surprise. Different authors have commented on the influence of Wittgenstein on Malcolm with respect to the latter's view of Moore's common sense epistemology -and vice versa (See Baldwin, G.E. Moore, p. 283).

ordinarily and properly employed only in contexts where there is some doubt about the truth of the proposition claimed to be known. It follows (on the assumption that 'use in ordinary context' is equivalent to 'ordinary, proper use') that since Moore's common sense knowledge claims were made in contexts where there was no serious doubt about the propositions claimed to be known (Malcolm, of course, following Wittgenstein's lead in not accepting *philosophical* doubt as serious doubt at all[31]), Moore's use of 'I know' in making these knowledge claims, as well as the philosophical sceptic's in denying them, was a misuse and thus meaningless:

> I hold, therefore, that Moore was not defending "common sense" at all when he declared "I know with certainty" that "There exists at present a living human body which is *my* body", that "The earth had existed for many years before I was born", [etc.] His assertions were made in circumstances where there was no question, and it wouldn't have made sense to raise a question, as to whether Moore had a body and was a human being, or as to whether the earth had existed for many years before he was born, [etc.] Moore's assertions do not belong to "common sense", i.e., to ordinary language, at all. They involve a use of "[I] know" which is a radical departure from ordinary usage.
> Moore wished to attack all those philosophers who hold views from which it follows that no human being knows that he is a human being and that no human being knows any proposition like "Here's a hand" to be true. Moore, to his everlasting credit, saw it would be a misuse of language for him to say..."I don't know that I'm a human being"...or to say..."I don't know that this is a hand". Therefore, he stoutly affirmed, "I *know* that I am a human being", "I *know* that this is a hand". He did not see that these statements too are a misuse of language.[32]

The absurd implications of Malcolm's criterion[33] for the proper use

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[31] Malcolm, 'Defending Common Sense', in <u>Studies in the Philosophy of G.E. Moore</u>, E.D. Klemke, ed. (Chicago: Quadrangle Books, 1969), p. 207.

[32] Malcolm, 'Defending Common Sense', pp. 218-219. Malcolm's preceding remarks make it very clear that 'radical departure from ordinary usage' and 'misuse' are equivalent to or imply 'senseless'.

[33] I say 'criterion'; Malcolm actually stipulates three criteria ('Defending Common Sense', p. 203). Only the first is directly relevant to my present concerns, however, since it is the one to which Moore specifically replies.

of 'I know' did not go unnoticed by Moore[34], and have been well drawn out by subsequent philosophers. Baldwin notes that Malcolm's criterion not only gives investigations and proofs (designed, of course, to remove doubt) the curious quality of rendering knowledge claims meaningless (since once doubt about the truth of a particular proposition has been removed it no longer makes sense to claim that the proposition is known), but also leaves one with a very peculiar view of knowledge: everything known is uncertain, and nothing certain is known.[35]

What is interesting for our present purposes, however, is not the absurd implications of Malcolm's criterion, but how Moore went about responding to Malcolm's charge that his use of 'I know', by failing to live up to the criterion, constituted an extraordinary use and hence was a misuse and meaningless. In his 'Letter to Malcolm', Moore is quite willing to concede that in his anti-sceptical affirmations he may have been using 'I know' *in extraordinary circumstances*; but he goes on to point out that this is quite a different thing than the claim that he was using the phrase *in an extraordinary sense*. In order to misuse the phrase, he would have to use it *in an extraordinary sense*, not merely in extraordinary circumstances: 'But that I used it under circumstances under which it would not ordinarily be used is no reason at all for saying that I misused it or used it incorrectly, if, though this was so, I was using it in *the sense* in which it is ordinarily used'[36]. In effect, Moore denies the assumption from which Malcolm's charge gains its point, viz. that 'use in ordinary context' is equivalent to 'ordinary, proper use'. Since he was using it in its ordinary sense, says Moore, he cannot justifiably be charged with misusing the phrase, let alone misusing it in such a way as to render it meaningless. The fact that 'I know' is

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[34] See Moore, 'Letter to Malcolm', G.E. Moore: Selected Writings, Thomas Baldwin, ed. (New York: Routledge, 1993), p. 214.

[35] Baldwin, G.E. Moore, p. 284.

[36] Moore, 'Letter to Malcolm', p. 215.

ordinarily used in circumstances in which there either is or has just been a doubt raised about the truth of the proposition claimed to be known by it does not mean that the phrase *means* that there is some doubt about the truth of the proposition claimed to be known by it.[37]

I see no reason why the main thrust of Moore's response to Malcolm may not be used with equal effectiveness against Wittgenstein's charge that Moore's and the philosophical sceptic's use of 'I know' is a misuse. There can be no doubt that there is something strange about both Moore's common sense knowledge claims and the philosophical sceptic's denial of them, or more generally, that there is something strange about the debate between philosophical sceptics and any of their philosophical opponents. Wittgenstein is surely right to pick up on this. The peculiarity, however, need not be captured by saying that the philosophical, epistemic assertions of the non-sceptic and their philosophical denials by the sceptic involve an extraordinary sense of 'I know'; it is adequately captured by pointing out that the claims and their denials involve a use of 'I know' divorced from its ordinary contexts of use. But if Moore is right, 'divorced from ordinary contexts of use' is not equivalent either to 'extraordinary sense' or 'misuse'. It is quite true that 'I know' is ordinarily used *under circumstances* where it is possible to specify one's grounds for the knowledge claim by it. It is not true that 'I know' ordinarily means that it is possible to specify one's grounds for the knowledge claim made by it. At least if one takes Moore's view on the matter one can both account for the peculiarity of philosophical, epistemic assertions (by pointing to their extraordinary context of use) and still hold that they make sense.[38]

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[37] Moore, 'Letter to Malcolm', pp. 214-215. Interestingly, Moore's response here anticipates H.P. Grice's point in the 1967 William James lectures (see Grice, 'Prolegomena', Studies in the Ways of Words [Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1991], pp. 3-21) that (as Clarke puts it) we must be careful not to conflate 'oddity of assertorial performance with meaninglessness of what's asserted' (Clarke, p. 756).

[38] Cf. Lehrer, p. 353.

Chapter 2: Some Comments on Moore's Anti-sceptical 'Method'

A survey of Moore's anti-sceptical papers[39] reveals that his 'method'[40] of dealing with philosophically sceptical doubts typically manifested two prominent characteristics. I wish in this chapter to outline what these two characteristics are, as well as to touch briefly on the value of employing an anti-sceptical method which manifests them.

2.1: Particularism

The first characteristic typical of Moore's anti-sceptical method I will call his anti-sceptical *particularism*. By this I simply mean Moore's persistent tendency to address philosophically sceptical doubts on a one-by-one basis, and his persistent unwillingness to preclude all such doubts *a priori* by finding fault with them categorically (in the manner in which, for example, Wittgenstein attempted to do). Thus, in 'Hume's Philosophy' we find Moore looking specifically at Hume's philosophically sceptical doubts about our knowledge of the external world and of causal connections

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[39] I take Moore's anti-sceptical papers to include the following: 'Hume's Philosophy' (Philosophical Studies [Paterson, NJ: Littlefield, Adams & Co., 1959], pp. 147-167), 'Hume's Theory' and 'Hume's Theory Examined' (Some Main Problems of Philosophy [London: George Allen & Unwin, 1969], pp. 89-107, 108-126), 'A Defence of Common Sense' (Philosophical Papers [London: George Allen & Unwin], pp. 32-59), 'Certainty' (Philosophical Papers, pp. 227-251) and 'Four Forms of Scepticism' (Philosophical Papers, pp. 196-126). I do not include 'Proof of an External World' (Philosophical Papers, pp. 127-150), for as Baldwin stresses, despite popular impression, it was not directed against philosophically sceptical doubts, but rather against the metaphysical thesis of Idealism (Baldwin, G.E. Moore, pp. 281-282; cf. Moore, 'Reply to My Critics', Philosophy of G.E. Moore, p. 668).

[40] See footnote 51, second paragraph.

between facts.[41] In 'Four Forms of Scepticism' we find Moore attempting a careful articulation and deconstruction of Russell's views that (a) one can never know with certainty anything about oneself, (b) one can never know with certainty anything one remembers, (c) one can never know with certainty of the existence of other minds and (d) one never knows with certainty any empirical proposition.[42] And, finally, 'Certainty' focuses on the sceptical inference from 'p is contingent' to 'p is possibly false'/'p is not known with certainty' as well as on a Cartesian-type 'dream argument' against our presumed knowledge of the external world.[43]

It seems to me that the primary value of Moore's anti-sceptical particularism lies in the charitable attitude it fosters toward philosophically sceptical doubts. It is too easy to ignore the significance of philosophically sceptical doubts in particular domains if one views all philosophically sceptical doubts as part of one, monolithic sceptical 'system' or 'position', thereby ignoring the parts on the basis of the apparent absurdity of the whole. Of course, philosophically sceptical doubts share certain common characteristics. Yet there are other characteristics that they do not share; at the very least they concern different domains of what we commonly take ourselves to know. The viability of any one of them, or of any one sub-class of them, need not stand or fall together with all the rest. Yet this seems to get assumed, more often than not, by attempts such as Wittgenstein's to undermine philosophically sceptical doubts together as a unit. Moore's anti-sceptical particularism keeps before our minds the fact that philosophically sceptical doubts need not necessarily all stand or fall together, and it prevents us from constructing a rationale for refusing even to 'take a look see' at the purported truth of particular types of

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[41] Moore, Philosophical Studies, pp. 145-167.

[42] Moore, Philosophical Papers, pp. 192-226.

[43] Moore, Philosophical Papers, pp. 227-251.

philosophically sceptical claims and the grounds of particular types of philosophically sceptical doubts.

2.2: Defensivism

I will call the second characteristic typical of Moore's anti-sceptical method his anti-sceptical *defensivism*. By this I mean Moore's persistent avoidance of any attempt to construct a positive account of how what we commonly take ourselves to know is possible, in favour of merely attempting to remove the grounds of the philosophically sceptical doubts he engaged. Thus, in 'Hume's Philosophy' he addresses Hume's doubts about our knowledge of the external world and of causal connections by pointing out false assumptions, logical fallacies, apparently absurd implications, etc. involved in Hume's attempts to ground the doubts. In 'A Defence of Common Sense' we find him, having asserted the whole, literal truth of a list of 'common sense' truisms, as well as their positive epistemic status, arguing for their truth and epistemic status by stressing supposed absurdities in failing to affirm the truisms' truth and epistemic status.[44] Russell's sceptical theses in 'Four Forms of Scepticism' are undermined; without, however, providing any glimpse of Moore's view of how knowledge of the sorts of things Russell's doubts concerned is possible. And Moore's means of highlighting the dubious nature of the philosophically sceptical inferences and arguments he examines in 'Certainty' is merely one of pointing out the modal fallacies and disconcerting implications of these inferences and arguments.

Moore's anti-sceptical defensivism may seem at first glance to be a primarily negative aspect of his anti-sceptical method. After all, can any response to philosophically sceptical doubts be deemed adequate if it only demonstrates the baselessness of those doubts, without also demonstrating how the knowledge they called into question is possible?

It is of course true that, *if* one is aware of one's conclusive

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[44] Moore, Philosophical Papers, pp. 32-45.

grounds for believing something, and *if* one *can* quite clearly articulate these grounds, the best means of quelling philosophically sceptical doubts about what one believes will be to articulate the grounds. But, unfortunately, and as Moore stresses[45], we are very often in the position of having conclusive grounds for believing something while being unable to articulate those grounds (either because of the immense difficulty involved in doing so, or because we have never adequately reflected on the matter, etc.). It is in light of this fact, I think, that we see the value of Moore's anti-sceptical defensivism: it allows us to address philosophically sceptical doubts about what we take ourselves to know even before we are fully capable (or even if we are *never* fully capable) of articulating our grounds for taking ourselves to know such things.

In his article 'Max on Moore', Avrum Stroll has highlighted this benefit of Moore's anti-sceptical defensivism. He expresses his dissatisfaction with those who see Moore 'as believing that he knows such and such, and by asserting this vigorously, he will manage, as it were, to shout down his opponents'[46], arguing that such interpreters miss a very important element of Moore's *modus operandi*. The philosophical sceptic, claims Stroll, avoids positing a theory or doctrine (so as to avoid being subjected to the question that she herself so frequently directs at others, viz. 'How do you know that...?') and seeks merely to point out the inadequacy of attempts to justify knowledge claims made by others. The sceptic waits, that is, for another individual to set forward a theory or doctrine (i.e. to make a knowledge claim) and then presses that individual to justify it. Once ostensive justification is offered, however, the sceptic then takes advantage of the 'Problem of the Criterion', i.e. of the fact that, given the traditional conception of knowledge as demanding

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[45] See, e.g., 'Defence of Common Sense', p. 44 and 'Proof of an External World', p. 149.

[46] Avrum Stroll, 'Max on Moore', *Dialectica*, Vol. 44, No. 1-2, 1990, p. 157.

the impossibility of error, there seems to be a logical gap between any proposed criterion or justification for knowing a proposition and the proposition itself. The sceptic seems always able to produce some conceivable circumstance in which the justification offered might hold true and yet in which the proposition to be justified might be false. Thus, the individual who made the knowledge claim and who offered initial justification for it is pressed by the sceptic for another justification for the initial justification, and so on until justification runs out. The sceptic seems to win the day by a purely negative procedure, without ever having posited a knowledge claim herself.[47]

The genius of Moore's anti-sceptical defensivism, claims Stroll, is made plain when it is considered as a '*non-argumentative counter strategy*' to the philosophical sceptic's negative procedure[48]. Instead of playing the sceptic's game, instead of locking himself into the trap of proposing a criterion or justification for his common sense knowledge claims, Moore simply met sceptical challenges by reiterating his knowledge claims; and, '[b]y resisting the request to explain how he knew...he blocked at that point the pressures that led to the sceptical regress'[49]. The result of this reiteration and refusal on Moore's part was an unpleasant dilemma for the sceptic: On the one hand, the sceptic could remain silent, 'thereby leaving the field unopposed to Moore' - surely an 'infeasible option'; on the other hand, she could assert that, because he failed to provide the required justification, Moore did not in fact know what he took himself to know. The problem with this latter option, however, is that in choosing it the philosophical sceptic abandons her typically negative procedure and thereby opens herself up to that very question she has worked so hard to avoid: 'How do you know that Moore doesn't know what he takes himself to

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[47] Stroll, 'Max on Moore', pp. 158-162.

[48] Stroll, 'Max on Moore', p. 159.

[49] Stroll, 'Max on Moore', p. 162.

know?'[50] The sceptic thus puts herself in the position of a non-sceptic in order to establish her scepticism. The result, concludes Stroll, 'is something less than victory and something more than defeat': although 'purists' will be dissatisfied with anything less than conclusive proof of how the knowledge philosophically sceptical doubts call into question is possible, Moore's anti-sceptical defensivism at least allows us to silence the philosophical sceptic and continue our scientific and philosophical endeavours on the assumption that we do know may of the things we commonly take ourselves to know, 'without worrying about being undercut by sceptical challenges'.[51]

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[50] Stroll, 'Max on Moore', p. 162.

[51] Stroll, 'Max on Moore', p. 163. Stroll is careful to point out that his claim about the primary value of Moore's anti-sceptical defensivism is not something which finds explicit confirmation in anything Moore says (Stroll, 'Max on Moore', p. 158). I think that Moore's defensivism has more to do with the fact that, as noted above, very often he just could not see his way to formulate any positive account of how we know what we commonly take ourselves to know than it had to do with any consciously thought-out plan to avoid the formulation of such accounts. It is difficult to see how Moore's slyness could be extended to cover an attempt, throughout his philosophical career, to avoid discussing, or indeed even to hide, something he regarded as an important element of his anti-sceptical campaign.

And perhaps here is an appropriate place to comment on how to read my attribution of any sort of anti-sceptical 'method' to Moore at all. I do not intend to suggest that Moore consciously adopted one particular method each time he engaged a philosophical sceptic. Rather, my talk of 'Moore's Method' should be construed as nothing more than a description of those characteristics which seem to me to be most often exemplified in his anti-sceptical engagements. I wish to make no claims about Moore's own motivations for employing the method I have attributed to him. (Cf. Moore, 'Reply to My Critics', p. 676.)

Chapter 3: The Method Applied

3.1: Hume's Principles and the Argument from 'Differential Certainty'

Having outlined what I take to be its most important characteristics, I want now to examine a few instances of Moore's anti-sceptical method applied. In this section I shall look at Moore's attempt in Some Main Problems of Philosophy to undermine the philosophically sceptical implications of Hume's Empiricist epistemology. My attention will be focused primarily on Moore's appeal there to degrees of, or differentiated, certainty. As I hope to show, this appeal on Moore's part is quite an effective means of undermining the grounds for philosophically sceptical doubts about our knowledge of the external world, and, despite what has been taken a crippling criticism of that appeal, it deserves more attention than it has up to the present attracted.

The ostensive topic of the Some Main Problems of Philosophy lectures 'Hume's Theory' and 'Hume's Theory Examined' is, as Moore puts it at the beginning of each lecture, 'Under what circumstances (if any) does a man, when he believes a proposition, not merely believe it but also absolutely *know* it to be true?'[52] The substance of the lectures, however, consists of an examination of Hume's answer to the much narrower question, 'Under what conditions does a man know of the existence of anything which he *has never* directly apprehended?'[53] Hume's answer to this question, according to Moore, rests upon the following two 'principles':

> (HP₁) One can never know of the existence of anything, A, which one has not directly apprehended, unless one knows that

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[52] Moore, 'Hume's Theory', p. 89; 'Hume's Theory Examined', p. 108.

[53] Moore, 'Hume's Theory', p. 91.

> some one thing, or some set of things, B, which one has directly apprehended, would not have existed unless the other thing, which one has not directly apprehended, really existed also -either before, or after, or at the same time, as the case may be.

> (HP₂) One can never know that some one thing, or some set of things, B, which one has directly apprehended, would not have existed unless another thing, A, which one has not directly apprehended, really existed also, unless one has experienced a general conjunction between things like A and things like B.[54]

Moore finds the first of these two principles unobjectionable; yet he is more than uncomfortable with its conjunction with the second. Taken together, the principles imply that we do not know many of the things about material objects or about the external world that we commonly take ourselves to know. If Hume's principles are true, for example, we cannot know whether what seems to be a pencil in Moore's hand as he lectures really exists, or whether it is a material object with such-and-such characteristics. For, given this indirect realist understanding of perception, it is simply not the case that one has ever experienced a general conjunction between things like this pencil (i.e. between material objects) and the sense-data we take to be associated with them. All we can ever experience in this regard is a general conjunction between sets of sense-data and other sets of sense-data. And so, says Moore, 'the position we have got to is this':

> If Hume's principles are true, then...I do not know now that this pencil -the material object- exists. If, therefore, I am to prove that I do know that this pencil exists, I must prove, somehow, that Hume's principles, one or both of them, are not true.[55]

At this point Moore employs his most favoured rule of inference, *Modus Tollens*. He observes that while the philosophically sceptical argument implied by Hume's Empiricist epistemology takes the following, *Modus Ponens* form:

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[54] Moore, 'Hume's Theory', pp. 96-98; 'Hume's Theory Examined', pp. 108-109.

[55] Moore, 'Hume's Theory Examined', p. 119.

(P₁) If Hume's principles concerning the limits of our knowledge of the external world are true, we can never know any proposition about the external world, such as, for example, that this is a pencil

(P₂) Hume's principles are true

(C) We can never know any proposition about the external world;

he can argue with equal validity:

(P₁) If Hume's principles concerning the limits of our knowledge of the external world are true, we can never know any proposition about the external world, such as, for example, that this is a pencil

(P₂) We do know propositions about the external world; we know, for example, that this is a pencil

(C) Hume's principles are false.[56]

Yet in offering the *Modus Tollens* counter-argument Moore has done little more than create a stand-off between him and a Humean sceptic. In both his and the sceptic's argument, the desired conclusion follows from the adduced premises; yet the two conclusions cannot both be true.

It is at this point that Moore brings in what Baldwin has aptly named the Argument from 'Differential Certainty'.[57] The Argument is perhaps one of Moore's most frequently employed anti-sceptical arguments, and can be found in both the early and later anti-sceptical papers.[58] Here the argument comes out in the following passage:

[T]he...proposition which formed my premiss, namely: I do know that this pencil exists...[is] much more certain than any premiss which could be used to prove that [it is] false; and also much more certain than any other premiss which could be used to prove that [it is] true...That is why I say that the strongest argument to prove that Hume's principles are false is the argument from a particular case, like this in which we do know of the existence of some material object. And similarly, if the object is to prove *in general* that we do know of the existence of material objects, no argument which is really stronger can, I think, be brought forward to prove

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[56] Moore, 'Hume's Theory Examined', pp. 119-121.

[57] Baldwin, G.E. Moore, p. 269.

[58] See, e.g., in addition to the following quotation from 'Hume's Theory Examined', 'Material Things', Main Problems, p. 143; 'Some Judgements of Perception', Philosophical Studies, pp. 227-228; and 'Four Forms of Scepticism', p. 226.

this than particular instances in which we do in fact know of the existence of such an object. I admit, however, that other arguments may be more convincing; and perhaps some of you may be able to supply me with one that is. But, however much more *convincing* it may be, it is, I think, sure to depend upon some premiss which is, in fact, less certain than the premiss that I do know of the existence of this pencil; and so, too, in the case of any arguments which may be brought forward to prove that we do not know of the existence of any material object.[59]

The basic response to the Humean-type sceptic here is clear:

(P_1) The proposition that we do know a great many of the things we commonly take ourselves to know about the external world is bound always to be more certain than Hume's principles, from which the negation of this proposition follows.

(P_2) If the proposition that we do know a great many of the things we commonly take ourselves to know about the external world is bound always to be more certain than Hume's principles, then we are always more justified in affirming this proposition than we are in affirming Hume's principles.

(C) We are always more justified in affirming the proposition that we do know a great many of the things we commonly take ourselves to know about the external world than we are in affirming Hume's principles.

There has to be some means of deciding between his and the Humean-type sceptic's crucial premises, claims Moore. And, once one considers the difference in certainty attached to each of the two conflicting premises, his premise will win hands down every time. We are always more certain of the claim that we do know such things as that this is a pencil and that this is a finger than we are of any claim used to establish the opposite.

There is something about this appeal to degrees of certainty that strikes us as immediately obvious. It is Baldwin's contention, however, that what strikes us as immediately obvious about it is not what Moore needs to establish his anti-sceptical conclusion. A major problem with the Argument from Differential Certainty, he tells us, is that it fails to distinguish between *subjective certainty* (i.e. the kind of certainty involved when we say that we *feel* something to be certain) and *objective certainty* (i.e. the kind of certainty involved when we say that something

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[59] Moore, 'Hume's Theory Examined', pp. 125-126.

is certain), the one being a psychological property, the other a propositional (or perhaps epistemic) property. But once we do so distinguish, and then ask the question of which type of certainty the Argument from Differential Certainty appeals to, 'an unattractive dilemma opens up for Moore':

> If we say that Moore is appealing to differences in objective certainty, then the anti-sceptical conclusion follows; but we can surely ask Moore where, and how it is established as objectively certain that he does know that [e.g.] 'This is a finger' without assuming in advance that the sceptic is mistaken. If then we try the subjective interpretation, which fits well with the rhetorical appeal in Moore's text, we get premises which are doubtless true, for most people anyway, and whose acceptance does not obviously beg any questions. But now the difficulty is to detach the anti-sceptical conclusion from them; for the sceptical will suggest that it is not proper for us to feel as certain as we do feel that 'This is a finger', and until his arguments have been laid to rest, we cannot place any rational reliance on the fact of our common-sense subjective certainty.[60]

Baldwin's point about the subjective interpretation fitting well with the rhetorical appeal in Moore's text is well taken. The point holds true, I think, in every case in which Moore formulates the Argument. I will, therefore, assume that the subjective reading is the correct one. Nonetheless, I am not sure that such a reading sounds the death toll for the Argument as quickly as Baldwin seems to think it does.

Curiously enough, Baldwin's own proposal for a naturalized response to the philosophical sceptic is grounded in an appeal to our subjective, 'involuntary beliefs'[61], an appeal which he does not consider possible, in Moore's case, to develop further into any plausible response to the sceptic. For Baldwin, once we adopt the subjective reading of Moore's appeal to differential certainty, the viability of the Argument from Differential Certainty vanishes. What I want to suggest is that, despite having never done so himself, Moore's appeal to our subjective certainty about the proposition that we do know a great many of the things we

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[60] Baldwin, G.E. Moore, pp. 270-271.

[61] Baldwin, G.E. Moore, pp. 306-308.

commonly take ourselves to know may be cashed out as an ultimately effective anti-sceptical manoeuvre.

It is important to keep in mind the concept of knowledge with which we are dealing here. Contrary to what seems to be Wittgenstein's view in On Certainty[62], Moore did not view knowledge as a subjective, inner psychological phenomenon. Rather his conception of knowledge was quite traditional. In the Some Main Problems of Philosophy lecture, 'Ways of Knowing', he tells us that 'knowledge proper' (i.e. propositional knowledge that such-and-such is the case) involves four things: (a) direct apprehension of a proposition; (b) belief in the truth of that proposition; (c) the truth of the proposition; and (d) 'some other condition', by which he presumably means conclusive justification (in whatever form it must take).[63]

Thus, it must be kept in mind that when I speak of developing the Argument from Differential Certainty into an effective anti-sceptical manoeuvre, I mean developing it into an effective means of meeting philosophically sceptical doubts about knowledge in the traditional sense of justified true belief.

Here is the crux of my proposal: if Moore's claim about the subjective certainty attached to the proposition that we do in fact know a great many of the things we commonly take ourselves to know about the external world is correct (and Baldwin himself seems to grant this), it follows that if anything is ever to count as knowledge, as justified true

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[62] See, e.g., On Certainty, §6. Wittgenstein in not alone in misreading Moore in this way. Arthur Holmes claims that Moore, like other early twentieth-century British philosophers such as J. Cook Wilson and H.A. Prichard, viewed knowledge as 'a simple, irreducible experience[,]...a psychological fact...[which] nobody should deny any more than any other private experience, whether emotions or pains or imaginary ideas' and for which we need not adduce any logical support whatever ('Moore's Appeal to Common Sense', The Journal of Philosophy, Vol. LVIII, No. 8, April 1961, p. 198). Even Grice seems unfortunately to have bought into this misreading (see his 'Retrospective Epilogue', Ways of Words, pp. 383-384).

[63] Moore, Main Problems, p. 81.

belief, this proposition will always at least stand a chance of so counting, whereas principles such as Hume's, from which its negation follows, will never stand a chance of so counting. This is because the proposition that we do know a great many of the things we commonly take ourselves to know about the external world will always outstrip principles such as Hume's, when it comes to meeting the second necessary condition given above for something's counting as knowledge, viz. that it must be *believed* [(b)]. It will always be the case that the proposition that we do in fact know a great many of the things we commonly take ourselves to know about the external world has a better chance of counting as knowledge than principles such as Hume's, from which its negation follows, since, *ex hypothesi*, it will always be *believed* instead of those principles, when compared with them. (I take the inference here from 'p is always more subjectively certain than ~p' to 'p will always be believed instead of -p when compared with -p' to be an obvious one.)

Put slightly differently, we have four necessary, and together sufficient, conditions for something's counting as knowledge (a), (b), (c) and (d). We also have two contradictory propositions (or sets of propositions), α and β, proposed to count as knowledge. Since both α and β are propositions (or sets of propositions), they both automatically meet condition (a). And since they are contradictories, they cannot both count as knowledge. We thus have three possible combinations with respect to which of the two count as knowledge ('K' here being a knowledge operator):

(1) $K\alpha$ and $-K\beta$
(2) $-K\alpha$ and $K\beta$
(3) $-K\alpha$ and $-K\beta$

But now suppose that if either α or β meets condition (b), α will, but *not* if either α or β meets condition (b), β will. This supposition rules out possibility (2). Since we are thus left only with possibilities (1) and (3), it follows that only α can possibly count as knowledge; β never can. Of course, it does not follow from our supposition that α does in fact count as knowledge, since no argument has been given to show that

it meets conditions (c) and (d); ~Kα and ~Kβ remains a possibility. What does follow, however, is that whereas α at least stands a chance of counting as knowledge, β never does.

What I am suggesting is that α stands in the place of the proposition that we do know many of the things we commonly take ourselves to know about the external world, and that β stands in the place of principles such as Hume's. And if my reasoning is sound, it is apparent that while the Argument from Differential Certainty (consistent with Moore's defensivism) does not prove the proposition that we do know many of the things we commonly take ourselves to know about the external world, it does at least secure the possibility that the proposition is known and rule out the possibility that principles such as Hume's ever could be.

Taking my entire proposal for developing the Argument from Differential Certainty into an effective anti-sceptical manoeuvre into account, we arrive at the following extension of the Argument's initial formulation above:

> Let 'P' represent 'the proposition that we do know a great many of the things we commonly take ourselves to know about the external world'.
>
> Let 'HP' represent 'principles such as Hume's, from which not-P follows'.
>
>> (P$_1$) We are always more certain, subjectively speaking, of P than of HP.
>>
>> (P$_2$) If we are always more certain, subjectively speaking, of P than of HP, then P will always meet the second necessary condition for something's counting as knowledge (viz. that it must be believed) if either it or HP, meets this condition, whereas it is not the case that HP will always meet the second necessary condition if either it or P meets this condition.
>>
>> (C$_1$) P will always meet the second necessary condition for something's counting as knowledge if either it or HP meets this condition, whereas it is not the case that HP will always meet the second necessary condition if either it or P meets this condition.
>>
>> (P$_3$) If P will always meet the second necessary condition for something's counting as knowledge if either it or HP meets this condition, whereas it is not the case HP will always meet the second necessary condition if either it or P meets this condition, then P may at least possibly count as knowledge, whereas HP can never so count.

(C_2) P may at least possibly count as knowledge, whereas HP can never so count.

(P_4) If a given proposition may at least possibly count as knowledge, whereas its negation, or any principles from which its negation follows, may never so count, then we can never conceive of its negation, or any principles from which its negation follows, as objectively certain, whereas we can so conceive of the proposition.

(C_3) We can conceive of P as objectively certain, whereas we cannot so conceive of HP.

(P_5) If we can at least conceive of a given proposition as objectively certain but cannot so conceive of its negation, or of any principles from which its negation follows, we have more grounds for (and hence are more justified in) affirming the proposition than we have either for affirming its negation, or for affirming any principles from which its negation follows.

(C_4) We have more grounds for (and hence are more justified in) affirming P than we have for affirming HP.

Of course, the Argument from Differential Certainty, so developed, is only as good as its crucial premise, (P_1), and it is difficult to imagine any compelling argument one might give in support of that premise. I suspect at this point Moore would simply appeal to our honesty, that he would put the question to us directly: 'Can you sincerely deny that you at least feel the proposition that we do in fact know a great many of the things we commonly take ourselves to know about the external world to be more certain than principles such as Hume's?' My own Moorean sympathies force me to conclude that if people were honest about the matter, they would, with Moore, admit to this feeling of certainty about his proposition, (P_1). Yet is it important to note the avenue of escape here left open to the philosophical sceptic. If she *can* sincerely deny that she shares with many others this feeling of certainty, she can legitimately circumvent the Argument from Differential Certainty.

3.2: The Dream Argument Considered

Since Descartes, the philosophically sceptical 'Dream Argument' has found a place of central importance in discussions of the possibility and extent of our knowledge (especially) of the external world. Few have

found Descartes' response to the Argument satisfactory or even plausible; even fewer have found themselves compelled to formulate an adequate response of their own. Given the current, post-Quinean trend towards the naturalization of epistemology - a trend which seems to go hand in hand with a disparaging attitude towards the 'traditional Cartesian project' - this apparent lack of concern is unsurprising. One gets a sneaking suspicion, however, that the apparent lack of concern results not so much from satisfaction with the sorts of answers Descartes produced as from an uneasiness about the sorts of problems he raised. More comfortable either than attempting to formulate acceptable solutions to problems like his Dream Argument or than embracing the implications of admitting that no such solutions exist is the route of ruling these problems of no importance.

Moore, to his credit, at least recognized the need to address the Dream Argument, a fact which should not be obscured by his unshakable confidence in the Argument's unsoundness. My purpose in the present section is to illustrate the effectiveness of Moore's anti-sceptical method as he applied it to the Dream Argument. As I hope to show, this application of his method, like the previously examined one, contains more of philosophical interest and import than seems heretofore to have been recognized.

Moore's formulation of the Dream Argument runs as follows:

> (P_1) Some at least of the sensory experiences which I am having now are similar in important respects to dream-images which actually have occurred in dreams.

> (C_1) Since there have been dream-images similar in important respects to some of the sensory experiences I am now having, it is logically possible that there should be dream-images *exactly like all* of the sensory experiences I am now having, and logically possible, therefore, that all the sensory experiences I am now having are mere dream-images.

> (C_2) Since it is logically possible that all the sensory experiences which I am now having are mere dream-images, I do not know [e.g.] that I am now standing up.[64]

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[64] Moore, 'Certainty', pp. 245-249.

As I read the latter-half of 'Certainty', Moore's response to the Dream Argument is two-pronged. The first prong of the response picks up on a pragmatic absurdity involved in asserting both (P_1) and (C_1). In each case, according to Moore, by asserting the premiss in question the philosophical sceptic pragmatically implies 'that he himself knows it to be true. He is *implying*, therefore, that he himself knows that dreams have occurred'[65]. But if the desired conclusion is that it is presently impossible to know for certain that one is not dreaming, these pragmatic implications seem inconsistent with that conclusion:

> Can anybody possibly know that dreams have occurred, if, at the time, he does not himself know that he is not dreaming?...I do not think that he can; and therefore I think that anyone who uses [these premises] and also asserts the conclusion that nobody ever knows that he is not dreaming, is guilty of an inconsistency.[66]

This emphasis on the apparent pragmatic absurdity involved in asserting (P_1), (C_1) and (C_2) together is typical Moore; what is particularly delightful here to Mooreans and other non-sceptics is the turning of the philosophical sceptic's weapons back on herself. Granting the dangerous edge of 'If you're dreaming you can't know what you take yourself to know', Moore observes that the maxim has a second edge the danger of which the sceptic seems unaware.

Delightful as it may first appear, however, this part of Moore's response is not without its problems. The crucial question is whether it is in fact the case, as Moore assumes, that asserting that p pragmatically implies that one knows that p. Since assertion is essentially putting forward as true, it does at least seem strange that anyone would (in honesty, of course) put forward a proposition as true while at the same time deny that it is known. Moore is here treating the idea that assertion pragmatically implies a claim to knowledge in the same way in which he treated the idea that assertion pragmatically implies a claim to

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[65] Moore, 'Certainty', p. 249.

[66] Moore, 'Certainty', p. 249.

belief. Indeed, he is quite explicit about the matter both in the opening of 'Certainty' itself[67] and elsewhere: 'When a person says a thing assertively,' he informs us, 'we often ask: "How do you know that?" - as if by saying it he *implied* not only that he believed it but that he *knew* it. And *very* often we do'[68]. Thus, for Moore, asserting (2) is just as pragmatically absurd as asserting (1):

> (1) It's raining but I don't believe that it's raining.
> (2) It's raining but I don't know that it's raining.

At this point Baldwin sees Moore as saddling the Dream Argument proponent with too much. Arguing that what is 'constitutive of assertion [is] that the speaker should intend his audience to take him to believe what he asserts'[69], he denies that asserting (2) is just as pragmatically absurd as asserting (1). While it may be true that, given this thesis about what is constitutive of assertion, 'assertion implies that one have some reason for one's assertion, this falls short of the thesis that [assertion] implies a claim to knowledge'[70]. By asserting (P_1) and (C_1) the philosophical sceptic at most implies that he believes, with *some* reason for this belief, what is asserted, not that he believes such on the basis of *conclusive evidence*.

In fairness to Moore, there is something counter-intuitive about Baldwin's claim that assertion merely implies that one have *some* reason for believing what is asserted; one gets the impression that he is bending over backwards in an effort to treat the sceptic charitably. Moore's contention is that assertion implies that one has conclusive reasons for believing what is asserted; Baldwin's is that assertion implies merely that one has some reason for believing what is asserted. Perhaps the truth lies somewhere in between, but I think it is at least plausible to

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[67] Moore, 'Certainty', p. 227.

[68] Moore, 'Moore's Paradox', Selected Writings, p. 211.

[69] Baldwin, G.E. Moore, p. 277.

[70] Baldwin, G.E. Moore, p. 277.

suggest that Baldwin's claim is too lax; for, if the claim is taken as stated, asserting that it is raining outside might be construed as implying no more than that one believes this on the basis of having heard a questionable, long-range forecast on the radio a week ago. But surely this is wrong; surely we take one's assertion that it is raining outside to imply at least that one has *good* reason to believe what is asserted, i.e. reason which secures a significantly greater likelihood that what is asserted is true than that it is not.[71]

However, I do not think that treading the *via media* here will ultimately be of much use. Even if we suppose that what is implied by assertion is that one has good (as opposed to some) but not conclusive reason for believing what is asserted, the question arises whether such an implication is enough to generate the pragmatic absurdity for which Moore

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[71] It is tempting to claim that I have Grice on my side at this point (or maybe even that Moore has), for his second maxim of Quality, 'Do not say that for which you lack *adequate* evidence' ('Logic and Conversation', Ways of Words, p. 27; my emphasis), is surely stronger than Baldwin's claim about *some* reason. Yet it is important to get clear about how, if at all, Grice might be construed as being on my (or Moore's) side. He is, in fact, opposed (in one sense or another) to the claim that 'A believes· that p on the basis of adequate/good evidence' is a pragmatic implication of A's assertion that p. Commenting on Moore's 'Paradox', he tells us that 'it is not a natural use of language to describe one who has said that p as having... "implied", "indicated", or "suggested" that he believes that p' ('Further Notes on Logic and Conversation', Ways of Words, p. 42). For Grice, conversational implicatures at least are the result of violations of the Cooperative Principle and its derivative maxims; so, when one asserts that p without violating the Principle, one cannot be said to have 'implied' in any natural sense that one believes that p, whether on adequate/good grounds or otherwise.

Nonetheless, Grice does tell us that our commitment to the Cooperative Principle and its derivative maxims is a demand of rationality ('Logic and Conversation', p. 26). It would seem to follow, therefore, that it is only *rational for us to assume* that in asserting that p one has adequate/good grounds for believing that p. Grice prefers to describe this assumption as our recognition of the fact that one who asserts that p 'has *expressed...*the belief that p' ('Further Notes', p. 42; my emphasis). Accordingly, it seems to me that the only way in which Grice might be construed as on my (or Moore's) side here is by saying that what I mean by my claim that 'A believes that p on the basis of adequate/good evidence' is a pragmatic implication of A's assertion that p, is essentially what Grice means when he claims that when A asserts that p he has *expressed the belief that p* (which belief he holds, presumably, on the basis of adequate/good evidence), that he has 'committed himself, in a certain way, to its being the case that he believes that p, and [that] while this commitment is not a case of saying that he believes that p, it is bound up, in a special way, with saying that p' ('Further Notes', p. 42).

is aiming. And it seems that it is not, since the proposition that one has good but not conclusive reason for believing that p is not inconsistent with the proposition that one does not know that p. Despite the good reason, there is at least a chance, however small, that p may turn out to be false.

So, one's evaluation of this first prong of Moore's response to the Dream Argument will hinge to a large extent on one's view of what assertion pragmatically implies. If one takes assertion to imply merely that one has some, or even good, reason for believing what is asserted, there is no pragmatic absurdity involved in setting forward the Dream Argument, and this prong of Moore's response fails to have any significant impact at all. If, on the other hand, one takes assertion to imply a claim to knowledge, one may hold this prong of Moore's response in fairly high regard; one *may* even take it to have succeeded in removing the grounds of the philosophically sceptical doubt in question (viz. the conclusion of the Dream Argument).

I say '*may*' here for an important reason: the epistemic significance of proving an assertion pragmatically absurd is not clear. To show that one is committed to a *logical* absurdity in asserting that p (where p may be a single proposition or an argument) is to show that p cannot possibly be the case, and hence must be false or unsound. To show that one is committed to a *pragmatic* absurdity in asserting that p, on the other hand, is not to show that p cannot possibly be the case; it is, at best, to show that there is some sort of tension between the meaning of p and its assertion. Despite this tension, however, p may very well be true or sound. For example, despite the pragmatic absurdity involved in asserting it, both conjuncts of Moore's famous 'paradox' may nonetheless be true: 'It's raining but I don't believe that it's raining' arguably expresses precisely the same proposition (when uttered by him) as does 'It's raining but Moore doesn't believe that it's raining'[72], and there is no doubt at

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[72] Cf. Moore, 'Moore's Paradox', pp. 208-209.

all that both conjuncts of the latter may well have been true.

Thus, even if Moore's view of what is constitutive of assertion, and hence his claim about the pragmatic absurdity involved in putting forward the Dream Argument, is accepted, it seems as though the most we can draw from this is that, in putting forward the Argument, the philosophical sceptic commits herself to an absurdity of the same sort that one commits oneself to in asserting 'It's raining but I don't believe that it's raining', and absurdity which, though paradoxical, is not necessarily evidence of falsity or unsoundness. Does such paradox suffice to remove the grounds of the philosophically sceptical doubt in question? It is difficult to see how, since, even given the absurdity, it is still possible that both the premises and conclusion of the Dream Argument should turn out to be true; the Argument may even be sound. Perhaps the best way to view Moore's charge of pragmatic absurdity is not as a sufficient means of removing the grounds of the philosophically sceptical doubt in question, but rather like a warning bell: if the sceptic, in holding to the Argument, is willing to embrace pragmatic absurdity, this raises the suspicion (though as yet nothing more) that an even greater error lurks in the background.

And perhaps the second prong of Moore's response to the Dream Argument will prove to uncover that greater error. He admits, after raising the objection from pragmatic absurdity, that the premises of the Dream Argument are true. (The first prong of his response was never designed to dispute that, but merely designed to object to asserting the premises together with the Argument's conclusion.) The second prong focuses on the validity of inferring the conclusion from these premises, by emphasizing the distinction between our *memories* and our *sensory experiences*. Moore's basic claim is this: Even if it is in fact 'logically possible that all the sensory experiences I am now having might be mere dream images', it does not follow from this 'that I really *may* be

dreaming - that I don't know for certain that I'm not'[73]. The Dream Argument is not, according to Moore, as all-embracing as it is often supposed to be. To show this, he paints for his audience an interesting scenario. He asks us to imagine him having, for the space of an hour, all the sensory experiences of someone enjoying a tropical paradise - 'lying naked on a white beach, in front of a blue sea, under a bright sun', etc. But then we are asked to imagine him suddenly having the decisively less pleasurable set of sensory experiences which he is presently having (either while writing 'Certainty' or while delivering it as a lecture), and, at the same time, remembering the pleasurable set of sensory experiences he had just previously had for the space of an hour. Such a radical discontinuity between what he presently remembers and what he is presently experiencing *via* the senses would be more than sufficient to cast doubt upon the veridicality of his present sensory experiences: 'I should certainly *not* know what to think', says Moore, 'and not know for certain at the moment that I was not dreaming; it would very likely occur to me as a possible explanation of the extremely strange state of things that I might be dreaming'[74].

Moore's reasoning based on this hypothetical scenario appears to be along the following lines: Our knowledge of empirical propositions such as 'I am at present standing up' is not based merely on evidence gathered from our present sensory experience; it is also based on other aspects of our experience such as our memories. But since the sceptic's Dream Argument, if sound, calls into question only the veridicality of our

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[73] Moore, 'Certainty', <u>Selected Writings</u>, p. 195. I am now working with the final five paragraphs that Moore originally composed for 'Certainty' (as they are given in <u>Selected Writings</u>), which, according to Baldwin, Moore later omitted in favour of the two that appear in the <u>Philosophical Papers</u> version of 'Certainty'. I focus on the 'alternative' (i.e. original) paragraphs because they make it clearer what Moore had in mind when he says in the revised version, 'But the conjunction of my memories of the immediate past with these sensory experiences *may* be sufficient to enable me to know that I am not dreaming'.

[74] Moore, 'Certainty', <u>Selected Writings</u>, p. 195.

present sensory experiences, and does not consider the conjunction of our present sensory experiences together with our memories, it does not suffice to cast doubt upon our knowledge of empirical propositions such as 'I am at present standing up'.

The most obvious sceptical response at this point is to expand the scope of the Dream Argument to include not only sensory experiences but memories as well. The Argument would thus become:

> (P$_1$.) Some at least of the experiences (sensory and memory) which I am having now are similar in important respects to dream-images which actually have occurred in dreams.

> (C$_1$.) Since there have been dream-images similar in important respects to some of the experiences (sensory and memory) I am now having, it is logically possible that there should be dream-images *exactly like all* of the experiences (sensory and memory) I am now having, and logically possible, therefore, that all the experiences (sensory and memory) I am now having are mere dream-images.

> (C$_2$.) Since it is logically possible that all the experiences (sensory and memory) which I am now having are mere dream-images, I do not know [e.g.] that I am now standing up.

Moore anticipates this response, and centres his counter to it around the truth of (C$_1$.). Not only does he question the move made in this premiss from 'there have been dream-images similar in important respects to some of the experiences (sensory and memory) I am now having' to 'it is logically possible that there should be dream-images exactly like all of the experiences (sensory and memory) I am now having', he suspects that the inferred proposition is actually *self-contradictory*: 'The conjunction of the proposition that I have these sensory experiences and these memories with the proposition that I am dreaming seems to me to be very likely self-contradictory'[75].

The charge of self-contradiction is startling; and, given the fact that Moore fails to offer any explanation of what he means by it, one might be led to believe that it is little more than an un-thought-through shot in the dark, a mere grasping for straws. But Moore's track record is not one of shots in the dark or of grasping for straws. We might

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[75] Moore, 'Certainty', <u>Selected Writings</u>, p. 194.

therefore presume that he had something specific in mind in levelling the charge of self-contradiction. I shall here suggest two possible explanations of what that was.

The first explanation is that Moore was again thinking of some sort of pragmatic absurdity. Thus, his charge of self-contradiction would amount to either (1) the charge that asserting 'I am currently experiencing all these sensory and memory experiences' in some way commits me to either (a) the proposition that I am *not* dreaming or (b) the proposition that I know that I am experiencing all of these sensory and memory experiences (which would in turn commit me to the proposition that I am not dreaming); or (2) the charge that asserting 'I am dreaming' in some way commits me to either (a) the proposition that I am *not* experiencing all these sensory and memory experiences or (b) the proposition that I know that I am dreaming (which in turn commits me to the proposition that I am not experiencing all these sensory and memory experiences). Although I think that a good case might be made for claiming that some such 'commitments' are involved here, the worth of the charge of self-contradiction interpreted in this way would have to be gauged in light of our previous comments on the epistemic worth of pragmatic (as opposed to logical) absurdity.

The second explanation is that Moore was thinking of something stronger than pragmatic absurdity, of some form of logical absurdity contained in the proposition that one could both be having all one's current sensory and memory experiences and yet be dreaming $(C_1.)$. And this seems to me to be a more likely explanation. The sceptic, in affirming the truth of this proposition, is saying in effect that one could both be experiencing *everything* one experiences when awake, and hence *be* awake (if the state has every essential quality that a waking state has, then it *is* a waking state), and yet be experiencing *everything* one experiences when dreaming, and hence *be* dreaming (if the state has every essential quality that a dreaming state has, then it *is* a dreaming state); from which it

follows that one could both be dreaming and not dreaming (or, alternatively, both be awake and not awake) at the same time. A more explicit rendition of Moore's charge of self-contradiction in this sense would thus take the form of a *reductio ad absurdum*:

(P$_1$) Suppose (C$_1$.).

(P$_2$) If (C$_1$.), I could be having every single experience essential to the state of being awake, and hence *be* awake.

(P$_3$) If (C$_1$.), I could be having every single experience essential to the state of dreaming, and hence *be* dreaming.

(C$_1$) If (C$_1$.), I could both be dreaming and not dreaming (or, alternatively, both be awake and not awake) at the same time.

(C$_2$) Not (C$_1$.).

One might object to Moore's reply, so developed, on the grounds that it confuses something's *being* indiscernible from another thing with something's *seeming* indiscernible from another thing. Perhaps all the sceptic is committing herself to in affirming the first conjunct of (C$_1$. (viz., that I could be 'having' all my current sensory and memory experiences) is that it is possible that I should *seem* to be having every single experience essential to the state of being awake (but not that it is possible that I should [actually] *be* having every single experience essential to the state of being awake). Accordingly, the sceptic need not be construed as committing herself to the claim that it is possible both that I should *be* awake and *not be* awake; she may be construed as committing herself merely to the claim that it is possible both that I should *seem* to be awake and yet *not be* awake.

There are a couple of serious problems with this objection, however. For one thing, it assumes that some intelligible distinction can be made between *seeming* to have a given set of experiences and (actually) *having* that set of experiences, and it is certainly questionable whether any such distinction can be made. The only intelligible sense I can attach to the claim that I am 'seeming to have a given set of experiences' is that I am *dreaming* (hallucinating, in a delirious state, etc.). But this cannot be what the sceptic means when she affirms the first conjunct of (C$_1$.), for

that I am dreaming is precisely what the first conjunct of $(C_1.)$ is designed to show; if this is what she means by affirming it she is clearly begging the question. But what else could she mean by the first conjunct of $(C_1.)$ if it is explained as committing her to no more than that I am seeming to have every single experience essential to the state of being awake?

Another serious problem with this objection is that, even if we are willing to admit an intelligible distinction between seeming to have a given set of experiences and (actually) having that set of experiences, it is not clear that this will prevent the sceptic from committing herself to a contradiction, this time at the level of seeming as opposed to the level of being. In order to see this, consider my development of Moore's (*reductio*) reply above, modified so as to accord with the claim that what the sceptic commits herself to in affirming the first conjunct of $(C_1.)$ is not that it is possible that I should be having every single experience essential to the state of being awake, but rather that it is possible that I should seem to be having every single experience essential to the state of being awake:

> $(P_1.)$ Suppose $(C_1.)$.
>
> $(P_2.)$ If $(C_1.)$, I could *seem* to be having every single experience essential to the state of being awake.
>
> $(P_3.)$ If $(C_1.)$, I could *seem* to be having every single experience essential to the state of dreaming.
>
> $(C_1.)$ If $(C_1.)$, I could both *seem* to be dreaming and *seem not* to be dreaming (or, alternatively, both *seem* to be awake and *seem not* to be awake) at the same time.
>
> (C_2) Not $(C_1.)$.

The problem is that while the sceptic may not be committed to the claim that I could both be having and not be having every single experience essential to the state of being awake, she is nonetheless committed to the claim that I both could seem to be having *and* seem not to be having every single experience essential to the state of being awake. For, given the seeming/having distinction, it is quite true that I do

presently seem to be awake; yet, since she is also claiming that I cannot distinguish what seems to be my present set of experiences from a set of dreaming experiences, it must also be true that I seem to be dreaming. It follows that the sceptic is committed to the claim that I could both seem to be having all the experiences essential to the state of being awake *and* seem not to be having these experiences. Thus, by creating the seeming/having distinction, the sceptic seems merely to have shifted the contradiction involved in the Dream Argument from the level of being to the level of seeming.

It is to be noted here that the modified *reductio* does not say that in affirming the first conjunct of $(C_1.)$ the sceptic is committed to the claim that I could both seem to be dreaming and *not* seem to be dreaming; it says rather that she is committed to the claim that I could both seem to be dreaming and seem *not* to be dreaming. The contradiction involved here (at the level of seeming) is thus not of the form Sd & ~Sd (where 'S' represents 'It seems that' and 'd' represents 'I am dreaming') but of the form Sd & S~d. Nonetheless, I think that ~Sd does in fact follow from S~d, and that, therefore, in affirming the first conjunct of $(C_1.)$ the sceptic is committed both to the claim (a) that I could both seem to be dreaming and seem not to be dreaming, and to the claim (b) that I could both seem to be dreaming and not seem to be dreaming.

Clearly, ~Sd → S~d is false. For, in situations where I am not in any way entertaining the proposition that I am dreaming it would be quite true to say of me that it does not seem to me that I am dreaming (and true also to say of me that it does not seem to me that I am not dreaming) but quite false to say of me that it seems to me that I am not dreaming. But I suggest that S~d → ~Sd is true. That is, I suggest that in every situation where it is true to say of me that it seems to me that I am not dreaming, it is also true to say of me that it does not seem to me that I am dreaming. In such situations, of course, I will be entertaining the proposition that I am dreaming, so we cannot deny the truth of S~d → ~Sd

on the same grounds on which we denied the truth of ~Sd → S~d. But, other than the fact that these grounds are lacking, I cannot think of a good argument to prove that S~d → ~Sd is true; I must here appeal to the intuition of others on the matter, and hope that their intuition agrees with my own in holding that S~d → ~Sd is true. (At least, given the strength of my own intuition here, it is incumbent upon one who wishes to deny its veridicality to provide me with a situation in which S~d is true and ~Sd is false.)

If my intuition is right here, it follows that in affirming the first conjunct of $(C_1.)$ the sceptic commits herself both to the claim (a) that I could both seem to be dreaming and seem not to be dreaming, and to the claim (b) that I could both seem to be dreaming and not seem to be dreaming. Thus, granting the above-mentioned seeming/having distinction, the contradiction contained in the Dream Argument is not only of the form Sd & S~d, but also of the form Sd & ~Sd.

Accordingly, Moore's reply to the Dream Argument at this point seems to me to be a very good example of the effectiveness of his anti-sceptical method 'in action', at least as he was capable of applying it.[76] If my interpretation of the charge of self-contradiction is correct, then he seems by that charge to have removed, in a very compelling fashion, the grounds for the philosophically sceptical doubt in question. He has given no account or proof of how it is we do in fact know such things as 'I am at present standing up'; but he has at least shown that the Dream Argument, used to prove that we do not know such things, either lacks the scope necessary to prove this, or founders on logical absurdity.

3.3: Contingent Certainties

Throughout his anti-sceptical campaign Moore insisted on the

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[76] And, interpreted in this sense, the reply also seems to me to be an anticipation of Austin's comment that '[t]here are recognized ways of distinguishing between dreaming and waking (how otherwise should we know how to use and to contrast the words?)' (J.L. Austin, 'Other Minds', Philosophical Papers [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979], p. 87).

absolute certainty of a great many *contingent* propositions. Though no doubt an oversimplification, Avrum Stroll's observation that much of contemporary analytic philosophy refuses to relinquish the 'traditional' Humean doctrine that such propositions can never properly be regarded as anything more than highly probable hypotheses[77] surely contains an element of truth. Stroll takes Moore's affirmation of the absolute certainty not only of the more general 'context independent' propositions listed in 'A Defence of Common Sense'[78] but also of the more particular, 'person relative' propositions discussed in 'Certainty'[79] as a challenge to this 'traditional' doctrine: such affirmation stands in direct opposition, for example, to the scientism (or, perhaps better, confirmation holism) of Popper and Quine. Thus, says Stroll, 'Moore's philosophy has a significant bearing on the contemporary scene[,] in which forms of relativism, probabilism and outright scepticism are in fashion'.[80]

I wish here to examine one of Moore's more favoured means of defending contingent certainties: pointing out the equivocations and fallacies involved in arguments designed to call these certainties into question. It seems to me that we have in Moore's scrutiny in this respect yet another exemplary instance of his anti-sceptical method. For, as we shall see, as a result of this scrutiny one is left wondering exactly why it was ever supposed that contingent truths are always less than certain, never truly candidates for secure knowledge.

A good deal of 'Certainty' consists of Moore's attempt to get clear about just what does, and does not, follow from the fact that the propositions with which he opens the paper are contingent. These propositions include:

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[77] Stroll, <u>Moore and Wittgenstein on Certainty</u> (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), p. 29.

[78] Moore, <u>Philosophical Papers</u>, pp. 32-35.

[79] Moore, <u>Philosophical Papers</u>, p. 227.

[80] Stroll, <u>Moore and Wittgenstein</u>, p. 30.

> I am at present, as you can all see, in a room and not in the open air; I am standing up, and not either sitting or lying down; I have clothes on, and am not absolutely naked; I am speaking in a fairly loud voice, and am not either singing or whispering or keeping quite silent; I have in my hand some sheets of paper with writing on them; there are a good many other people in the same room in which I am; and there are windows in that wall and a door in this one.[81]

Moore is particularly intent on stressing the point that, from the fact that these propositions are not necessarily true, nothing whatever follows about whether they are in fact both true and known with certainty. Put slightly differently, he wants to remind us that while it may well be true that on the basis of 'p is true in all possible worlds' alone we can infer that p is true in the actual world, and that on the basis of 'p is false in all possible worlds' alone we can infer that p is false in the actual world, nonetheless, on the basis of 'p is true in only some possible worlds (and, hence, false [and not known] in some possible worlds)' alone, we have no reason at all either to affirm or suspect the truth of a claim that p is both true and known in the actual world.[82]

One might take this to be an obvious point, hardly worth mentioning. Yet Moore is convinced that sceptics often rely on a tacit inference from 'It is possible that not p' to 'p is not known with certainty', and that this inference is often masked by equivocation on the phrase 'possible that not'. In Moore's view, when sceptics assert 'It is possible that not p' they seem most often to mean that it is unknown whether p.[83] And, from 'It is possible that not p' in this sense, it of course follows (trivially) that p is not known with certainty. But it must be noted that the sceptic is not moving from evidence to a conclusion; she is rather moving from one formulation of a claim to another formulation of the very same claim: in asserting 'It is possible that not p' she is not affirming grounds for believing that p is unknown; she is merely asserting that p is

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[81] Moore, 'Certainty', p. 227.

[82] Moore, 'Certainty', pp. 231-233.

[83] Moore, 'Certainty', p. 233.

unknown. The fact that sceptics do sometimes say things like 'It is possible that not p; therefore p is not known with absolute certainty'[14] shows that they are equivocating on the phrase 'possible that not'; they begin with 'possible that not' in the sense of 'contingent that' (in their premise[s]) and finish with 'possible that not ' in the sense of 'unknown whether' (in their conclusion).

In 'Four Forms of Scepticism' Moore again calls attention to what he takes to be equivocations found in sceptical arguments involving modalities. Specifically, he focuses on what he takes to be two different equivocations found in Russell's argument that, since in dreams one often has the experience of seeming to remember something that did not in fact occur, it is always possible that, and hence not known whether, one's experience of seeming to remember something is not in fact preceded by the something in question. We may thus dub the following 'Russell's Argument':

> (P₁) There have been some cases (e.g. dreams) in which one's seeming to remember something was not in fact preceded by the something in question.

> (P₂) If there have been some cases in which one's seeming to remember something was not in fact preceded by the something in question, it is always at least possible that one's experience of seeming to remember something is not in fact preceded by the something in question.

> (C₁) It is always at least possible that one's experience of seeming to remember something is not in fact preceded by the something in question.

> (P₃) If it is always at least possible that one's experience of seeming to remember something is not in fact preceded by the something in question, then it is unknown whether one's experience of seeming to remember something is in fact preceded by the something in question.

> (C₂) It is unknown whether one's experience of seeming to remember something is preceded by the something in question.

Moore offers two interpretations of what sceptics like Russell mean when they say that it is always possible *that one's experience of seeming*

[14] Russell (whom I think Moore has in mind here), at least, was fond of offering such sceptical arguments. Cf., in addition to the argument to follow, Russell, Our Knowledge of the External World (New York: Mentor Books, 1960), p. 57; Outline of Philosophy, pp. 5, 215, 233.

to *remember something* is not preceded by the something in question. The first is this: It is possible for *an experience of this sort* (i.e. of seeming to remember something) not to be preceded by the something in question. And the second is: It is possible for *this particular experience* (of seeming to remember something) not to be preceded by the something in question. In addition to equivocating on the two different senses of 'possible that not' (mentioned above), Moore takes sceptical arguments like Russell's also to equivocate on these two different interpretations of 'ones experience of seeming to remember something'. Such arguments shift from the first interpretation to the second interpretation in order to establish their conclusion. That is, what is initially claimed is the obviously true proposition that it is possible that *some* of my experiences of seeming to remember something are not preceded by the something in question. But, by the time the conclusion is reached, this proposition has been transformed into something much different, into the proposition that it is possible that *this particular experience* of seeming to remember something is not in fact preceded by the something in question. One might even see such sceptical arguments as equivocating between the two former and yet another interpretation of 'one's experience of seeming to remember something', viz. '*all of one's experiences of seeming to remember something*', since it would appear that the proposition that it is possible that *this particular experience* of seeming to remember something is not in fact preceded by the something in question could only be derived from the proposition that it is possible that *all* of one's experiences of seeming to remember something are not in fact preceded by the something in question. The former could certainly never be derived from the proposition that it is possible that *some* experiences of seeming to remember something are in fact not preceded by the something in question (which is equivalent to the first interpretation above) alone; to suppose it could would be to commit the glaring fallacy of supposing that $\Diamond \Phi a$ follows from $(\exists x)(\Diamond \Phi x)$ (where 'Φ' stands for a

general predicate, 'x' is a variable, and 'a' is a constant).

Moore draws a parallel to highlight the equivocal nature of sceptical arguments like Russell's. Such arguments are, he tells us, 'precisely on a par with the following: It is possible for a human being to be of the female sex; (but) I am a human being; therefore it is possible that I am of the female sex'[85]. We may thus dub the following the 'Parallel Argument':

>(P_1) It is possible for a human being not to be of the male sex.
>
>(P_2) Moore is a human being.
>
>(C_1) Therefore it is possible that Moore is not of the male sex.
>
>(P_3) If it is possible that Moore is not of the male sex, then it is unknown whether Moore is of the male sex.
>
>(C_2) It is unknown whether Moore is of the male sex.

This parallel argument is fallacious both because of its equivocation on 'a human being' (does it mean 'all human beings', 'some human beings' or 'one particular human being'?) and because of its equivocation on 'possible that...not' (does it mean 'contingent that' or 'unknown whether'?). To see this, assume the following notation.

>p - 'It is possible for a human being not to be of the male sex; Moore is a human being'
>
>p_{s1} - 'It is a contingent claim that no human beings are of the male sex; Moore is a human being'
>
>p_{s2} - 'It is a contingent claim that some human beings are not of the male sex; Moore is a human being'
>
>p_{s3} - 'It is a contingent claim that one particular human being is not of the male sex; Moore is a human being'
>
>p_{s4} - 'It is unknown whether any human being is of the male sex; Moore is a human being'
>
>p_{s5} - 'It is unknown whether some human beings are of the male sex; Moore is a human being'
>
>p_{s6} - 'It is unknown whether one particular human being is of the male sex; Moore is a human being'

From p in the sense of either p_{s1}, p_{s2} or p_{s3}, it does not follow that

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[85] Moore, 'Four Forms of Scepticism', p. 220.

it is unknown whether Moore is of the male sex. From p in the sense of p_{s4}, it does follow that it is unknown whether Moore is of the male sex, but the premise here adduced is certainly no more obvious or acceptable than the conclusion it is adduced in favour of. From p in the sense of p_{s5}, it does not follow that it is unknown whether Moore is of the male sex, unless it can be shown that Moore is included in the domain of those human beings about whom it is unknown whether they are of the male sex. And, finally, from p in the sense of p_{s6}, it does not follow that it is unknown whether Moore is of the male sex, unless it is assumed that the 'one particular human being' in question is Moore, in which case the Parallel Argument would blatantly beg the question at hand.

These points hold, *mutatis mutandis*, for sceptical arguments like Russell's. Assume the following notation.

q - 'It is possible that one's experience of seeming to remember something is not in fact preceded by the something in question'

q_{s1} - 'It is a contingent claim that all of one's experiences of seeming to remember something are in fact preceded by the something in question'

q_{s2} - 'It is a contingent claim that some of one's experiences of seeming to remember something are in fact preceded by the something in question'

q_{s3} - 'It is a contingent claim that one particular experience of one's experiences of seeming to remember something is in fact preceded by the something in question'

q_{s4} - 'It is unknown whether any of one's experiences of seeming to remember something are in fact preceded by the something in question'

q_{s5} - 'It is unknown whether some of one's experiences of seeming to remember something are in fact preceded by the something in question'

q_{s6} - 'It is unknown whether one particular experience of one's experiences of seeming to remember something is in fact preceded by the something in question'

From q in the sense of either q_{s1}, q_{s2} or q_{s3}, it does not follow that it is unknown whether one's present experience of seeming to remember something is in fact preceded by the something in question. From q in the sense of q_{s4}, it does follow that it is unknown whether one's present experience of seeming to remember something is in fact preceded by the

something in question, but, again, the premise here adduced in favour of the conclusion is much less obvious than the conclusion itself. From q in the sense of q_{a5}, it does not follow that it is unknown whether one's present experience of seeming to remember something is in fact preceded by the something in question, unless it can be shown that the domain of experiences of seeming to remember something of which it is unknown whether they are in fact preceded by the something in question includes one's present experience of seeming to remember something. And, finally, from q in the sense of q_{a6}, it does not follow that it is unknown whether one's present experience of seeming to remember something is in fact preceded by the something in question, unless it is assumed that the 'one particular experience' in question here is one's present experience of seeming to remember something, in which case sceptical arguments like Russell's would be question-begging.

In an article entitled 'Moore's Modal Argument'[86], R.L. Purtill has offered further insight into the strength of Moore's points here, both by characterizing what is at issue between Moore and the sceptic more formally and by examining the viability of some avenues of escape left open to the sceptic which Moore fails to consider. Purtill asks two relevant questions:

> i. Is Moore correct in calling the parallel argument a fallacy, and is it a fallacy for the reasons given by Moore?
> ii. Is it true, as Moore alleges, that the sceptic's argument [i.e. Russell's Argument] is "precisely on a par with" the parallel argument?[87]

With respect to (i), Purtill points out that, in addition to the interpretations of the Parallel Argument's first premise that Moore considers, there is yet another interpretation that he fails to consider. This further interpretation reads 'It is possible for a human being to be of the female sex' as 'For any human being, there is a non-zero

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[86] *American Philosophical Quarterly*, Vol. 3, No. 3, July 1966, pp. 236- 243.

[87] Purtill, p. 236.

probability that that human being is of the female sex'. On this interpretation, the Parallel Argument becomes:

(P_1) (Vx)(Prob [Fx/Hx] $\neq$ 0)
(P_2) Hm
(C) Prob (Fm/Hm) $\neq$ 0.

Following Purtill[88], we may say that the Parallel Argument, so formulated, is invalid, since, in appealing to probabilities, it is open to the objection that there are facts about Moore ('m') beyond his being human, and that these facts play significantly into the (objective) probability that he is female. Provided the first premise here is taken to apply to all things independently of every fact except that these things are human, we may be willing to assent to its truth. But it would not be appropriate so to assent if the premise is taken to apply to all things including those which are both human and whose sex is otherwise determined male. If, for example, the fact that Moore is the son of D. Moore, M.D., is added to the hopper of relevant facts, then the probability of his being female (i.e. not male), consistent with those facts, is reduced to zero.

With respect to (ii), Purtill provides another plausible interpretation, which Moore fails to consider, of the key phrase of Russell's Argument (viz. 'It is possible that one's experience of seeming to remember something is not in fact preceded by the something in question'). Perhaps by 'It is possible that one's experience of seeming to remember something is not preceded by the something in question' sceptics like Russell mean 'For any experience of seeming to remember something, there is a non-zero probability that that experience is not preceded by the something in question'. The sceptic's argument would accordingly get represented as:

(P_1) (Vx)(Prob [-Px/Sx] $\neq$ 0)
(P_2) Sm

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[88] Purtill, p. 238.

(C)   Prob $(\sim Pm/Sm) \neq 0.$[89]

But, again, we have to ask what (P_1) is claiming: is it claiming that for all those things about which the *only* relevant fact is that they are experiences of seeming to remember something,. there is a non-zero probability that the experiences were not preceded by the something in question, or is it claiming that for all those things about which merely *one* of the relevant facts is that they are experiences of seeming to remember something there is a non-zero-probability that the experiences were not preceded by the something in question? If it is the former that is being claimed, the premise seems quite true; but hardly so if it is the latter that is being claimed. For if Moore's point (considered in the previous section of this chapter) about the self-contradictory nature of the proposition that my present set of experiences is indistinguishable both from a set of dreaming experiences and from a set of waking experiences is a valid one, there must be things of which it is not only true that they are experiences of seeming to remember something, but also true that there are facts that reduce the probability that these experiences were not preceded by the something in question to zero. (If it is self-contradictory to claim that my present set of experiences is indistinguishable both from a set of dreaming experiences and from a set of waking experiences, then it is necessarily the case that there are facts which rule out either (a) the possibility that these experiences were preceded by the something in question, or (b) the possibility that these experiences were not preceded by the something in question.)

In light of these considerations, it seems to me fair to suggest that Moore has at least gone a considerable way towards undermining the doubt with which contingent propositions are often categorically viewed. If Moore's crucial points about the fallacies involved in philosophically sceptical attempts to derive 'p is not known with absolute certainty' from 'it is possible that not p' are valid - and I think Purtill's observations

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[89] Purtill, p. 240.

buttress the initial impression that they are - those harbouring a deep-seated suspicion about the inherent uncertainty of contingent propositions are left in the awkward position of having no good reason for harbouring their suspicion (or, at least, they are left without what have been taken as primary arguments for the suspicion). While it is true to say that, simply in virtue of their modal status, we have conclusive reason to affirm that necessary propositions are true in the actual world, it is not true to say that, simply in virtue of their modal status, we have reason to *doubt* that contingent propositions are both true and known in the actual world.

Chapter 4: Assessing Moore's Success

Let us now pause to recapitulate what we have observed in the foregoing examination of Moore's anti-sceptical endeavours. We have seen that Moore has provided good reasons, though by no means conclusive ones, for rejecting philosophically sceptical principles such as Hume's, and for affirming our common sense conviction that we do in fact know many of the things we commonly take ourselves to know about the external world. We have also seen Moore expose as unsound a very important philosophically sceptical argument - the Cartesian-style 'Dream Argument' - on three counts: first, by showing that the argument, as often formulated, is not as all-encompassing, and hence not as threatening, as it is usually made out to be; second, by making a plausible case for thinking that the argument, as often formulated, may only be asserted with pragmatically absurd implications; and, third, by showing that the argument runs the risk of logical absurdity if it is transformed into something more all-encompassing and hence more threatening. And we have seen Moore argue persuasively to the effect that, despite a common philosophical impression, there is little reason to suppose that contingent truths are always less than objectively certain, that they are never known with certainty (at least, no such reason arising from philosophically sceptical arguments moving from 'It is possible that not p' to 'p is not known with certainty').

It certainly seems that Moore has had some measure of success in these anti-sceptical engagements. But how much? Just how are we to evaluate the overall and ultimate epistemic significance of his anti-

sceptical endeavours? I want to suggest that there are three basic levels of anti-sceptical success any approach to dealing with philosophically sceptical doubts might hope to achieve, and in light of which any such approach may be evaluated. I shall dub these three levels of anti-sceptical success/evaluation the 'Apologetic Level', the 'Rational Presumption Level', and the 'Conclusive Victory Level'. In this chapter I shall try to make it clear what each of these levels consists of, how each differs from the others, and how well Moore's anti-scepticism fares at each level.

4.1: The Apologetic Level

To attempt to respond to a philosophically sceptical doubt at all is to attempt, at the very least, to defend, in one way or another, the plausibility of belief in the sort of knowledge called into question by the doubt. If one is not attempting at least to defend the plausibility of belief in the sort of knowledge called into question by such a doubt when attempting to respond to it, it is questionable that one is truly attempting to respond to it at all; questionable, that is, that one is really attempting to respond, as opposed to attempting to ignore, fail to take seriously, cast unwarranted odium upon, etc., the doubt in question. Suppose, for example, that A raises a philosophically sceptical doubt about our purported knowledge in domain x. B may *react* to this doubt in one of at least two ways: she may examine the validity, coherence, meaningfulness, grounds, etc., of the doubt, with a view to rejecting it (on rational grounds), or she may simply reject it outright without at all attempting to provide a cogent rationale for the rejection. In the latter case I want to say that B is not *responding* to the philosophically sceptical doubt in question, however much we might say that she is *reacting* to it. In the former case, however, I think B is responding to the doubt. Thus, when I say that any attempt to respond to a philosophically sceptical doubt is an attempt at the very least to defend

the plausibility of belief in the sort of knowledge called into question by the doubt, I trust what I say will be accepted as fairly obvious. If one is not so attempting to defend the plausibility of belief in the sort of knowledge called into question by the doubt in attempting to respond to it, I cannot imagine what one *would* be trying to do.

Accordingly, it seems to me that the first, most rudimentary level of success one might hope to achieve by any response to a given philosophically sceptical doubt is that of defending the plausibility of belief in the sort of knowledge called into question by that doubt.[90] And this is what I call the 'Apologetic Level' of anti-sceptical success/evaluation. The anti-sceptic shooting for this level of success would be practicing a kind of 'epistemic apologetics', such that her concern would not be primarily one of proving conclusively, or even of providing compelling but not conclusive grounds for maintaining a belief in, the existence of the sort of knowledge called into question by the philosophically sceptical doubts with which she was dealing. Rather, her concern would merely be one of showing how there were no rational grounds for *disbelieving* in the existence of the sort of knowledge called into question by the philosophically sceptical doubts with which she was dealing. Such an anti-sceptic's *modus operandi* would be wholly negative in character; it would focus on removing the grounds for, dismantling arguments offered in favour of, etc., any philosophically sceptical doubt which threatened the plausibility of belief in knowledge of a certain sort. This type of anti-sceptic would endeavour to show that her sceptical opponent's arguments did not rule out at least the possibility of the sort of knowledge they seemed to call into question.

Based on what I have said up to now, it should be clear that Moore's

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[90] Note the 'second-order' nature of this level (and the following levels) of anti-sceptical success: it concerns beliefs *about other* (justified, true) beliefs. The reason why it is higher-order in nature is simple: philosophically sceptical doubts, as I have characterized them, are higher-order in nature; hence, any attempt to quell such doubts, as well as any success in quelling them, will also be higher-order in nature.

anti-sceptical endeavours obtain full marks on this level of anti-sceptical success/evaluation. (Indeed, given the defensivism characteristic of Moore's anti-sceptical method, one might be tempted to suppose that the Apologetic Level was not only all that Moore was shooting for, but all that he could hope to achieve. I shall try to show that this is not the case.) If Moore has done anything in the anti-sceptical papers, he has at least defended the plausibility of belief in the sort of knowledge called into question by the philosophically sceptical doubts he engaged therein. If, as I have tried to show, Moore's Argument from Differential Certainty may be developed into an argument that makes it more reasonable to affirm the proposition that we do in fact know many of the things we commonly take ourselves to know about the external world than to affirm the grounds of any philosophically sceptical doubts inconsistent with that proposition, it seems fair to say that he has at least defended the plausibility of belief in that proposition. If it is indeed the case, as Moore has argued convincingly, that the philosophically sceptical 'Dream Argument' - the conclusion of which denies that we have knowledge of such things as that there are pencils or that I am sitting down when I ordinarily seem to be sitting down - involves those who assert it in either pragmatic or logical absurdity, or both, then it seems to follow that it is at least plausible to believe that knowledge of such things as that there are pencils or that I am sitting down when I ordinarily seem to be sitting down is possible. And if one can show, as Moore has perhaps done *via* his examination and criticism of philosophically sceptical arguments moving from 'It is possible that not p' to 'p is unknown', that there is no good reason to suspect that ordinary, contingent truths are always less than objectively certain, he seems to have provided fairly good reason for supposing that belief in the objective certainty of such contingent truths is at least plausible.

4.2: The Rational Presumption Level

Very often, though not always, an attempt to respond to a given philosophically sceptical doubt is more than an attempt merely to defend the plausibility of belief in the sort of knowledge called into question by that doubt: it is an attempt further to provide *some* good reasons for maintaining that belief over its negation. And it is this further aspect that characterizes what I wish to call the 'Rational Presumption Level' of anti-sceptical success/evaluation. In order for an anti-sceptic to reach this level, she will have to be able to specify good (but not necessarily conclusive) reasons for believing in the sort of knowledge called into question by the philosophically sceptical doubts she engages; she will have to make the case that we at least have *more* reason to affirm this belief over the parallel doubt, that there is some reason for thinking that it is *more likely* that the belief is true than that the doubt is. Hence the '*Rational Presumption* Level': the anti-sceptic aiming for it is seeking to specify *rational* grounds for *presuming* that belief in the sort of knowledge called into question by the philosophically sceptical doubts with which she is dealing is correct, and that, therefore, the doubts are incorrect.

I believe that in order to see Moore as doing well on this level of anti-sceptical success/evaluation we must focus our attention on his Argument from Differential Certainty. As examined in the previous chapter, that Argument was directed specifically at epistemological principles which lead to doubts about our commonly supposed knowledge of the external world. Nevertheless, I think it is plausible to suggest that the Argument may be generalized to apply to more types of philosophically sceptical doubts than merely those arising from Humean-type epistemologies. Indeed, Moore himself seemed inclined to think that such a generalization was possible, for, as we have noted above, he raised the argument in its basic form on numerous occasions, against various

sceptical opponents."[91]

What would such a generalized version of the Argument from Differential Certainty look like? Something along the following lines seems correct:

> Let 'P_g' represent 'the proposition that we do know a great many of the things we commonly take ourselves to know, whether they be about the external world or otherwise'.

> Let 'PP' represent 'a set of philosophical principles inconsistent with P_g'.

>> (P_1) We are always more certain, subjectively speaking, of P_g than of PP.

>> (P_2) If we are always more certain, subjectively speaking, of P_g than of PP, then P_g will always meet the second necessary condition for something's counting as knowledge (viz. that it must be believed) if either it or PP meets this condition, whereas it is not the case that PP will always meet the second necessary condition if either it or P_g meets this condition.

>> (C_1) P_g will always meet the second necessary condition for something's counting as knowledge if either it or PP meets this condition, whereas it is not the case that PP will always meet the second necessary condition if either it or P_g meets this condition.

>> (P_3) If P_g will always meet the second necessary condition for something's counting as knowledge if either it or PP meets this condition, whereas it is not the case PP will always meet the second necessary condition if either it or P_g meets this condition, then P_g may at least possibly count as knowledge, whereas PP can never so count (since P_g and PP are inconsistent).

>> (C_2) P_g may at least possibly count as knowledge, whereas PP can never so count.

>> (P_4) If a given proposition or set of propositions may at least possibly count as knowledge, whereas another proposition or set of propositions inconsistent with it can never so count, then we can never conceive of the latter proposition or set of propositions as objectively certain, whereas we can so conceive of the former proposition or set of propositions.

>> (C_3) We can conceive of P_g as objectively certain, whereas we cannot so conceive of PP.

>> (P_5) If we can at least conceive of a given proposition or set of propositions as objectively certain but cannot so conceive of another proposition or set of propositions inconsistent with it, we have more grounds for (and hence are more

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[91] Interestingly, Simon Blackburn appears to identify the Argument as the central feature of Moore's later philosophical perspective. See Blackburn's entry on Moore in the <u>Oxford Dictionary of Philosophy</u> (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), p. 250.

justified in) affirming the former than for affirming the latter.

(C$_4$) We have more grounds for (and hence are more justified in) affirming P$_g$ than we have for affirming PP.

If such a generalized version of the Argument from Differential Certainty does prove sound, I can see no reason why Moore's anti-sceptical endeavours may not be ranked highly on the Rational Presumption Level of anti-sceptical success/evaluation. For such a generalized version of the Argument does indeed, in the case of many philosophically sceptical doubts, provide us with rational grounds at least for presuming that our belief that much of what we commonly count as knowledge is in fact knowledge is a correct one, and that many philosophically sceptical doubts (perhaps all heretofore seen) that would call this belief into question are therefore incorrect. (The rational grounds for presumption would here be that we cannot conceive of the grounds of these philosophically sceptical doubts as objectively certain, whereas we can so conceive of our belief that we do in fact know many of the things we commonly take as known.)

4.3: The Conclusive Victory Level

The anti-sceptic may not be content either with merely defending the plausibility of belief in the sort of knowledge called into question by the philosophically sceptical doubts she engages, or with merely providing some rational grounds for presuming the correctness of our common sense belief that we do in fact know many of the things we commonly take ourselves to know. She may aim for a more final success, for a conclusive demonstration or proof of the existence of the sort of knowledge called into question by the philosophically sceptical doubts she engages (and, consequently, a conclusive demonstration or proof of the falsity of those philosophically sceptical doubts). It is this level of anti-sceptical success/evaluation that I wish to call the 'Conclusive Victory Level'. It is, in a sense, an attempt to produce second-order *knowledge*, to provide us with knowledge of (the existence of) knowledge in a given domain.

Just as it is clear that Moore's anti-sceptical endeavours achieve full-marks when assessed according to the Apologetic level, it is clear that those endeavours do not do well when assessed according to this third and ultimate level of anti-sceptical success/evaluation. Indeed, given that those endeavours typically employed an anti-sceptical method characterized by defensivism, this is not surprising. However, what I want to emphasize in the remainder of this chapter is this: despite the fact that his anti-sceptical endeavours come up short on the Conclusive Victory Level of anti-sceptical success/evaluation, there is a sense in which Moore's approach to dealing with philosophically sceptical doubts nonetheless fares significantly better in relation to this level than do certain other approaches, specifically those of a naturalized nature.

As an example of such other approaches, take Baldwin's proposal in G.E. Moore for dealing with philosophically sceptical doubts. The problem with Moore's anti-scepticism, in Baldwin's view, is its nonnaturalized character (or the 'Cartesian tradition' within which Moore conceived of his debates with the philosophical sceptic[92]). It was this nonnaturalism (or Cartesianism) that provided Moore with his 'internalist' (i.e. traditional) conception of knowledge, according to which in order to know that p one must eliminate all sceptical hypotheses to the effect that p is false. But Baldwin suggests that Moore would have been better off shedding his anti-sceptical nonnaturalism and its accompanying internalist conception of knowledge, in favour of a more naturalistic approach, accompanied by an 'externalist' conception of knowledge, according to which in order to know that p one need not eliminate all sceptical hypotheses to the effect that p is false, but rather merely need show that 'an appropriate natural relation' (whatever that may be) 'holds between the belief-state [that p]...and the situation which makes the belief-state

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[92] Baldwin, G.E. Moore, p. 303.

true'.[93] And showing that the appropriate natural relation obtains is simply a matter of showing that, 'in the light of [our] experience, [the sceptical suggestion that the relation may fail to obtain] is an extremely implausible hypothesis'[94].

Such a demonstration can be effected, says Baldwin, by a combination of two things: (1) an appeal to our non-voluntary beliefs about what is true and what is not and (2) considerations of coherence. The fact that we have, continually welling-up inside us, as it were, non-voluntary beliefs that run against philosophically sceptical doubts, provides us 'with ever new reasons for rejecting the doubt[s]' and prevents the dismissal of such non-voluntary beliefs as question-begging against the sceptic (since their non-voluntary nature 'implies that, initially, [we] do not have the opportunity [so to dismiss them]': we do not acquire the beliefs by 'lines of argument the doubts call into question, so they can't be question-begging').[95] And the fact that our non-voluntary beliefs manifest a great deal of reflective coherence, 'sufficient to enable us to understand the causes of error on our part', prevents us from falling into the problem into which someone with non-voluntary but paranoid beliefs about other people has fallen.[96]

It is well beyond the scope of this thesis to detail my reasons for rejecting Baldwin's naturalistic approach to dealing with philosophically sceptical doubts. Suffice to say that in my view the biggest gap in his armour is located in the move from 'I have such-and-such non-voluntary beliefs' and 'These non-voluntary beliefs manifest a great deal of reflective coherence' to 'It is true that natural relation r obtains between my belief that p and the state of affairs in the world that makes

[93] Baldwin, G.E. Moore, p. 304.

[94] Baldwin, G.E. Moore, p. 306.

[95] Baldwin, G.E. Moore, pp. 306-307.

[96] Baldwin, G.E. Moore, p. 307.

this belief true' (or 'I *know* that it is true that natural relation r obtains between my belief that p and the state of affairs in the world that makes this belief true'); I find it hard to understand how he can make this move without calling into play the very sort of internalist conception of knowledge and justification he rejects.

However, I want to point out the following with respect to Baldwin's approach to dealing with philosophically sceptical doubts. (1) I think it is clear that in revising our ordinary concept of knowledge such that in order to know that p one must merely be *more sure* that a given natural relation obtains than that it does not, Baldwin has precluded the possibility of distinguishing between knowledge and highly probable belief. (2) Baldwin has also precluded the possibility of ever reaching the Conclusive Victory Level of anti-sceptical success, since by rejecting the traditional conception of knowledge as demanding the ability to eliminate the possibility of error, he has rejected a condition for the very possibility of such a level of anti-sceptical success. If the distinction between knowledge and mere probable belief is obliterated, so too is the distinction between the Rational Presumption and Conclusive Victory Levels of anti-sceptical success. Baldwin himself admits to this point; as he puts it: 'Naturalism in epistemology is the means to victory over scepticism; but the price to pay is the abandonment of self-sufficient rational certainty'[97]. (3) Furthermore, I think it is clear that Baldwin has, by revising our ordinary concept of knowledge, treated the philosophical sceptic unfairly. The sceptic begins by raising a doubt about whether we do in fact possess knowledge, and not merely probable belief, in a given domain, only to find her doubt written off as inappropriate by virtue of a reformulation of the concept of knowledge such that it becomes nothing more than mere probable belief.

I have made at least two important claims here which call for further explanation and support: first, that any explication of the

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[97] Baldwin, G.E. Moore, p. 309.

concept of knowledge merely in terms of probable belief constitutes a *revision* in our ordinary concept of knowledge (I am thus affirming that our ordinary concept of knowledge is the same as what I have heretofore called the 'traditional' concept of knowledge); and, second, that such a revision is *inappropriate* (i.e. unfair to the philosophical sceptic). In support of the first of these two claims, I want to recall a criticism, given by G.J. Warnock, of Austin's treatment of the concept of knowledge in 'Other Minds'. I believe that the basic point of Warnock's criticism may be used to show that our ordinary concept of knowledge must indeed be more than merely one of (however highly) probable belief.

Austin draws a strong connection between knowing and promising. What one does, he tells us, in claiming that p is known is offer others the right to rely on one's claim that p, in the same way that what one does in promising that p is offer others the right to rely on one's claim that p. One may say 'I hope that I shall do such-and-such', and yet not be bound to one's word that one will do such-and-such; similarly, one may say 'I believe that such-and-such is the case', and yet not be bound to one's word that such-and-such is the case. However,

> when I say "I promise", a new plunge is taken: I have not merely announced my intention, but, by using this formula (performing this ritual), I have bound myself to others, and staked my reputation, in a new way. Similarly, saying "I know" is taking a new plunge. But it is *not* saying "I have performed a specially striking feat of cognition, superior, in the same scale as believing and being sure, even to being quite sure": for there *is* nothing in that scale superior to being quite sure. Just as promising is not something superior, in the same scale as hoping and intending, even to merely fully intending: for there *is* nothing in that scale superior to fully intending. When I say "I know", I *give others my word*: I *give others my authority for saying* that [such-and-such is the case].[98]

Accordingly for Austin, it may be perfectly justifiable, in some circumstances, to say that one knows that such-and-such is the case, even if it may happen to turn out not to be the case, just as it may be quite justifiable to promise to do such-and-such, even though it may turn out

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[98] Austin, 'Other Minds', pp. 98-99.

that one does not in the end do such-and-such; for, in either case, one is merely binding oneself to one's word, not claiming infallibility (about future prediction). Austin concludes: 'Surely, [therefore,] we are often right to say that we *know* even in cases where we turn out subsequently to have been mistaken - and indeed we seem always, or practically always, liable to be mistaken'"[99].

Warnock's criticism of Austin's treatment of knowledge-claims is simple but crippling: the treatment simply does not accord with our ordinary intuitions about what it means to know that something is the case. That this is so can be seen from the fact that, while we are still willing to admit that 'A promised to do such-and-such' is true even if A never does end up doing such-and-such, we are *not* willing to admit that 'A knew such-and-such' is true even if it turns out that such-and-such is false. In other words, our ordinary concept of knowledge is such that 'p is known' *entails* that p is true; our ordinary concept of promising, on the other hand, is quite different: 'p has been promised' does *not* entail that p is true.[100] (Austin's use of the present tense in claiming that 'we are often right to say that we *know* even in cases where we turn out subsequently to have been mistaken' seems to be what led him to overlook this.)

In proposing the parallel between promising and knowing, and in extending it as far as he did, Austin equated, in effect, the concept of knowledge with something other (less) than the 'traditional' concept of knowledge. But, as I believe Warnock's criticism indicates, Austin also thereby attempted to *revise* our ordinary concept of knowledge. *Contra* Austin, our ordinary concept of knowledge is, in fact, the 'traditional' concept, at least in so far as the latter demands that 'p is known' entails that p is true.

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[99] Austin, 'Other Minds', p. 98, 101.

[100] G.J. Warnock, <u>J.L. Austin</u> (New York: Routledge, 1991), pp. 39-40.

I think it is fair to suggest that any attempt such as Baldwin's to explicate the concept of knowledge merely in terms of (however highly) probable belief constitutes an attempt to *revise* our ordinary concept of knowledge in the same way that Austin's attempt to explicate the concept in terms of offering one's word constituted such a revision, and for the same reason. Any such attempt would leave us with a concept of knowledge such that 'p is known' does not entail that p is true; but it is very clear that the very point by which we ordinarily distinguish between knowledge and mere probable belief lies in the fact that while we do not take 'p is highly probable' to entail that p is true, we do take 'p is known' to entail that p is true.

But, assuming that I am right to affirm that any attempt to explicate the concept of knowledge merely in terms of highly probable belief constitutes an attempt to revise our ordinary concept of knowledge, am I right in holding that any such revision is inappropriate as a response to sceptical challenges? The answer, it seems to me, is plainly 'yes'. It must be kept in mind that the sceptic is calling into question what we commonly take ourselves to know in a given domain. She is, to put it slightly differently, taking our ordinary concept of knowledge and trying to see if anything in fact lives up to the standard in a given domain. In responding to the sceptic's claims, then, it is entirely out of place for us to revise our ordinary concept of knowledge and then chastise the sceptic for having called purported instances of it into question. In so doing, we are jumping back and forth between a concept of knowledge we ordinarily use and a concept created to defend ourselves from sceptical attacks. The problem is that what we end up defending in this way is not what the sceptic is interested in; and it will not do for us to claim that what she *is* interested in is some silly philosophical construct no one ever really utilizes: it is in fact a concept with which we work everyday.

Consider an illustration from Stroud of Baldwin's view. We might

imagine a situation in which someone, A, makes the startling announcement that there are currently no physicians in New York City. Undoubtedly this would prompt us to uncover A's reasons for the announcement. If upon inquiring we discover that what A means by 'physician' is 'a person who has a medical degree and can cure any conceivable illness in less than two minutes', her announcement will no longer strike us as shocking. 'If that is what you mean by "physician",' we would probably reply, 'then of course there are no physicians in New York. But that is not what we ordinarily mean when we speak of "physicians".' As Stroud puts it:

> Once we understand it as it was meant to be understood, there is nothing startling about the announcement, except perhaps the form in which it was expressed. It does not deny what on first sight it might seem to deny, and it poses no threat to our ordinary belief that there are thousands and thousands of physicians in New York.[101]

Philosophers like Baldwin want to treat sceptical claims about our lack of knowledge in a given domain as similar to A's claim about a lack of physicians in New York City. In the same way that what A means by 'physician' is quite different from what we all ordinarily mean by the term, what the sceptic means by 'knowledge' is quite different from what we all ordinarily mean by the term. In each case the conditions demanded for proper usage are too high when compared with the conditions ordinarily demanded for proper usage. Accordingly, the sceptic has no right to go around saying that we do not 'know' such-and-such, which we commonly do take ourselves to know, since she is using 'known' in a peculiar fashion. Indeed, that we do in fact 'know' many things in the ordinary sense of the term may be said to be evidenced by the fact that we constantly admit sentences of the form 'p is known' as true. And, if it turns out that what we ordinarily admit as 'known' in a given domain never amounts to anything more than highly probable belief, it must be the case that our ordinary concept of knowledge is just one of highly probable belief after all; and it must also be the case that the concept of knowledge with which

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[101] Stroud, *Significance of Philosophical Scepticism*, p. 40.

the sceptic is working is a fictitious philosophical construct. We need not, therefore, as the sceptic suggests, be able to rule out any possibility that p is false in order to know that p.

However, if my claim (viz. that our ordinary concept of knowledge is such that 'p is known' entails that p is true) is correct, this cannot be right. The case of A claiming that there are no physicians in New York is not similar to that of the sceptic claiming that there is no knowledge in domain x, since in demanding that it must be possible to rule out any possibility that p is false in order for us to be objectively certain that p is known, the sceptic is doing nothing more than upholding our ordinary understanding of what knowledge is.[102]

Accordingly, I believe it justifiable to say that naturalistic approaches (such as Baldwin's) to dealing with philosophically sceptical doubts do in fact revise our ordinary concept of knowledge, thereby making it impossible to distinguish between knowledge and mere probable belief as well as thereby precluding the possibility of eventual success at the Conclusive Victory Level. I believe it is also justifiable to say that such revision is unfair as an attempt to defend oneself from sceptical attacks.

In chapter 3 I touched briefly on what I considered to be one primary benefit of Moore's anti-sceptical defensivism, viz. that it allows us to address philosophically sceptical doubts even before we have adequately formulated our grounds for believing many of the things we commonly hold as known. But it is extremely important to notice here that Moore's anti-sceptical defensivism was not, in his mind, something with which we should rest content. He continually insisted that he did in fact have conclusive grounds for believing what he took, and what we all commonly take, as known. The fact that he did not specify these grounds when dealing with the philosophical sceptic was not an indication that all he hoped or wished to do in responding to the sceptic was establish that

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[102] Cf. Lehrer, p. 355.

it is more likely that she is wrong than that she is right; it was not an indication that he believed either that he had no conclusive grounds for believing what he did or that it was impossible ever adequately to formulate those grounds. Rather the fact merely indicates his (then) present inability adequately to formulate such grounds. But such an inability, and its resulting defensivism, are not incompatible with a firm commitment to the belief that both will someday be overcome. And this commitment, which is nothing less than faith in eventual success at the Conclusive Victory Level, Moore certainly held.

Thus Moore's anti-scepticism not only allows, but encourages, us to maintain a traditional understanding of the concept of knowledge, according to which 'p is known' entails that p is true, and, hence, according to which in order for p properly to be said to be known it must be possible to eliminate any possibility that p is false. And it is primarily in this respect that Moore's anti-sceptical approach bests naturalized approaches such as Baldwin's when considered in relation to the Conclusive Victory Level of success - despite the fact that it does not achieve a passing grade on that Level. And this is so not only because it allows for the possibility of distinguishing between knowledge and mere probable belief[103] and for the possibility of eventual success at the Conclusive Victory Level, but also because it thereby treats the philosophical sceptic's doubts fairly.

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[103] One striking example of Moore's concern for maintaining this distinction occurs in his 'Reply to My Critics', where, in response to L. Susan Stebbing's suggestion that we ought to think of some of Moore's knowledge claims as constituting claims about 'probable knowledge' (i.e. as claims about beliefs for which we have some, but not conclusive, reasons for believing) as opposed to claims about 'demonstrative knowledge' (i.e. as claims about beliefs for which we have conclusive reasons for believing) (Stebbing, 'Moore's Influence', Philosophy of G.E. Moore, pp. 525-526), he says: 'I do not at all like her proposal...to call the kind of knowledge I have now when sitting in a chair "probable knowledge". I hold that it is certain that I am now sitting in a chair, and to say that I have "probable knowledge" that I am, seems to me to suggest that it is not certain' (Philosophy of G.E. Moore, p. 667).

Conclusions

The most significant conclusions of this thesis can now be succinctly summarized. First, Moore was quite justified in presuming the meaningfulness of philosophically sceptical doubts. Contrary to the exaggerated claims of philosophers such as Wittgenstein and Malcolm, there is no good reason to think that philosophically sceptical doubts are in general meaningless. Second, Moore's anti-scepticism ranks very highly on the Apologetic Level of anti-sceptical success/evaluation. Our observations in chapter 4 made it abundantly clear that Moore's method of responding to those philosophically sceptical doubts he engaged was a very effective means of undermining the grounds of those doubts, and hence of affirming the plausibility of belief in the sorts of knowledge they called into question. Third, Moore's anti-scepticism seems also to rank highly on the Rational Presumption Level of anti-sceptical success/evaluation. For, if the Argument from Differential Certainty as Moore applied it to Hume's empiricist epistemology can be generalized in the way I have suggested in this chapter, we seem to have some rational grounds at least for presuming the correctness of our common sense belief that we do in fact know many of the things we commonly take ourselves to know, and, consequently, for presuming the incorrectness of any set of philosophical principles or doubts inconsistent with this belief. Fourth, and finally, despite its failure at the Conclusive Victory Level of anti-sceptical success/evaluation, Moore's anti-scepticism nonetheless places ahead of other, naturalized approaches to dealing with philosophically sceptical doubts, on four counts: (1) it is consistent with, and indeed, favourably disposed to maintaining, the traditional concept of knowledge (which is our ordinary concept) according to which 'p is known' entails that p is true; (2) it thereby allows for a coherent distinction between knowledge and mere probable belief; (3) it at least ensures the possibility of eventual success at the Conclusive Victory Level of anti-sceptical success/evaluation (If one adopts a naturalistic approach to countering

philosophically sceptical doubts, one can never expect to achieve any more than we have already seen Moore achieve; one can never expect to reach anything more than success at the Rational Presumption Level, where Moore has done very well); and (4) it treats philosophically sceptical doubts fairly, as it does not engage in the shady business of revising our ordinary concept of knowledge in a way that makes it indistinguishable from mere probable belief.

Exegetical Postscript

Throughout this thesis I have assumed that Moore grasped well the philosophical nature of the philosophically sceptical doubts he engaged. This assumption, however, has not enjoyed widespread acceptance in recent Moore exegesis. I would like here to address the justifiability of that assumption in light of a bit of Moore exegesis of my own. I want, in other words, to detail my reasons for answering the question 'Did Moore in fact conceive of the philosophically sceptical doubts he engaged as truly philosophical in nature, or rather as more "plain" or "ordinary" in nature?' in the affirmative.

It will be recalled that at the beginning of this thesis we defined 'philosophically' sceptical doubts as higher-order epistemic doubts which call into question the commonly accepted standards according to which 'ordinary', first-order epistemic claims are properly made. We may say, then, that when we are asking whether Moore conceived of philosophically sceptical doubts as truly philosophical in nature, we are asking whether Moore conceived of philosophically sceptical doubts as first-order epistemic doubts, raised in light of commonly accepted standards for properly doubting that something is known, or whether he conceived of philosophically sceptical doubts as higher-order epistemic doubts, raised about the ultimate epistemic value of first-order epistemic doubts as well as about the commonly accepted standards in light of which these first-order doubts are taken as properly raised.

Clarke lays out what he perceives to be the only two possible

answers to our present question. If we view Moore as a 'philosophical man', as conceiving of the philosophical sceptic's doubts (and of his own responses to them) as philosophical in nature, Moore will seem blatantly dogmatic; if, on the other hand, we view Moore as a 'plain man', as conceiving of the philosophical sceptic's doubts (and his own responses to them) as plain in nature, Moore will seem to have had a 'philosophical lobotomy'[104]. Branding him the 'Inveterate Plain Man', Clarke quite unhesitatingly accepts Moore's 'philosophically lobotomized' condition.[105] His Moore is indeed someone who has 'overheard a discussion about philosophical scepticism and systematically misunderstands what the participants are driving at'[106]. Stroud concurs; according to him any interpretation that sets Moore up as having a shrewd grasp of what the philosophical sceptic is up to but refusing to let on (i.e. any interpretation that treats Moore's anti-sceptical affirmations as only an *apparently* simple-minded, but in fact subtle, well thought-out attempt to undermine the sceptic's views) is incompatible with well-known facts about Moore's character (his child-like honesty, lack of pretence, directness). Thus, concludes Stroud, 'Moore really did not understand the philosopher's assertions in any other way than the everyday "internal" way he seems to have understood them'. However, he goes on,

> [t]his brings us back to the question how [Moore] could ever have come to give only that everyday interpretation to the philosopher's remarks. I have suggested that his way of taking them involves no misuse of words and is perfectly acceptable even if it does not refute philosophical scepticism. I have even conceded that there might be nothing intelligible that Moore missed; perhaps there is no comprehensible 'philosophical' way of taking the philosopher's questions and assertions. But how could Moore show no signs of acknowledging that they are even intended to be taken in a special 'external' way derived from the Cartesian project of assessing our knowledge of the external world all at once?

[104] Clarke, p. 757.

[105] Clarke, pp. 757-758.

[106] Baldwin, 'Moore and Philosophical Scepticism', The Analytic Tradition: Meaning, Thought and Knowledge, David Bell, Neil Cooper, eds. (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1990), p. 135.

> That is the question about the mind of G.E. Moore that I cannot answer. Moore is an extremely puzzling philosophical phenomenon.[107]

Cook too presents Moore as oblivious to the philosophical nature of philosophically sceptical doubts. His technique of 'translating [philosophical theses] into the concrete', claims Cook[108], not only caused Moore (unwittingly) to deceive others about the nature of philosophically sceptical doubts but also (unwittingly) to deceive himself in this regard[109]; that this is so is clear from the fact that Moore's refutation of philosophically sceptical doubts *via* translating into the concrete would be successful (as Moore thought it was) only if it were directed at plain, non-philosophical epistemic doubts.[110]

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[107] Stroud, pp. 125-126.

[108] Cook, pp. 21-25.

[109] As a matter of passing interest, and perhaps as some degree of justification for my not having focused on the technique of 'translating into the concrete' (cf. Moore, 'The Conception of Reality', Philosophical Studies, p. 209) in my discussion of Moore's anti-sceptical method, it should be noted that this technique was more a feature of his anti-Idealist engagements than it was of his anti-sceptical engagements.

[110] Of course, not everyone reads Moore in this way. Baldwin rejects all such philosophically lobotomized, 'plain man' interpretations of Moore as little more than insulting: they simply do not take into account certain papers where Moore manifests a clear understanding of the philosophical nature of philosophically sceptical doubts (Baldwin, G.E. Moore, pp. 286-289.
Baldwin also suggests [though not explicitly] the interesting point [see G.E. Moore, pp. 279-280] that the 'plain man', interpretation of Moore lies behind Norman Malcolm's, Morris Lazerowitz's and Alice Ambrose's attempts in Philosophy of G.E. Moore [see Malcolm, 'Moore and Ordinary Language', pp. 345-368; Lazerowitz, 'Moore's Paradox', pp. 371-393; and Ambrose, 'Moore's "Proof of and External World"', pp. 397-417] to recast Moore as a defender of ordinary language. Working on the assumption that Moore's anti-sceptical affirmations were plain in nature, and that as such they get him no further than ineffective dogmatism, each of these philosophers went on to hypothesize that Moore's confrontation with the sceptic might be reconstructed as operating at the linguistic level: the sceptic is implicitly suggesting a revision of ordinary language, or claiming that certain knowledge claims couched in ordinary language are meaningless, Moore is implicitly refusing to admit such a revision [it would have no benefits] and implicitly maintaining that such knowledge claims are meaningful since they have ordinary, well-understood uses. [Neither Malcolm, Lazerowitz nor Ambrose, however, claim that their linguistic reconstructions capture Moore's own conception of his confrontation with the sceptic {see pp. 350, n. 6; 380-383; 404, 409-410}. This was a wise precaution on their behalf, seeing that Moore, in his 'Reply to My Critics', flatly rejected any linguistic reconstruction of

It is a curious fact that none of the above proponents of the 'plain man' interpretation attempt to justify their interpretation by appealing to specific textual evidence.[111] While it is true that it is *possible* to construe some specific passages as evidence for the 'plain man' interpretation[112], one may cogently argue that, at most, such passages can be taken as establishing that Moore's anti-sceptical affirmations were (in a special way) *dogmatic* but not necessarily *plain* in nature (i.e. the fact that Moore's affirmations may have been dogmatic does not imply that they were non-philosophical, given in response to what he took as non-philosophical theses), and that it is not terribly difficult to construe such passages as compatible with the 'philosophical man' interpretation.

Further, there are specific passages in the Moore corpus that are very difficult to interpret in any way other than as manifesting that Moore certainly did have a good grasp of the philosophical nature of the philosophically sceptical doubts he engaged, that he did not treat these doubts as merely plain. Consider the following passage from 'Four Forms of Scepticism' (1941), where he emphasizes a distinction between a form of

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what he was up to {see pp. 670-675}.])

Charles Raff, while expressing reservations about Baldwin's treatment of Moore's 1939 proof, nonetheless agrees that it is quite wrong to view Moore's anti-sceptical/-Idealist affirmations as updated versions of Dr. Johnson's 'cracked pronouncement' against Berkeley (Charles Raff, 'Moore's Arguments and Scepticism', *Dialogue*, Vol. XXXI, No. 4, Fall 1992, p. 700). Avrum Stroll's view of Moore's anti-sceptical affirmations is a little harder to place in the 'plain man'/'philosophical man' dichotomy, as he does treat these affirmations as dogmatic but suggests that such dogmatism was an important aspect of Moore's anti-sceptical campaign (Stroll, 'Max on Moore', pp. 156, 158-162).

[111] Perhaps the closest to attempting such a textual justification is Cook, who refers to Moore's technique of translating into the concrete as the major reason behind his (Moore's) taking the sceptic's doubts as plain. But (1) Cook's discussion of Moore's technique of translating into the concrete is not an examination of a *specific* piece or pieces of text; it is a general discussion of the technique as it appears throughout Moore's papers. And (2) Cook does not appeal to the technique as *justification* for treating Moore as a 'plain man'; he rather *assumes* that Moore is a 'plain man' and then appeals to the technique as the primary cause of this plainness.

[112] See, e.g., 'Some Judgements of Perception', p. 228; 'Defence of Common Sense', p. 41; 'Certainty', pp. 227-228.

scepticism that is accompanied by practical doubt about a given subject and a form of scepticism that is accompanied by no such doubt at all:

> ...I am so using the term 'scepticism' that anybody who *denies* that one ever knows for certain 'things' of a certain sort can be said to be 'sceptical' about our *knowledge* of 'things' of that sort. And I think that this is *one* correct usage of the words 'scepticism' and 'sceptical'. But it is worth noting that, if this is so, 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. I think it is worth noting because people seem very commonly to assume that doubt is essential to any form of scepticism. But, if I am right in my use of the word, it is obvious that this is a mistake. For a man who *denies* that we ever know for certain things of a certain sort, obviously need not feel any doubt about that which he asserts - namely, that no human being ever does know for certain a thing of the sort in question; and in fact many who have made this sort of denial seem to have felt no doubt at all that they were right: they have been dogmatic about it as any dogmatist. And also, curiously enough, a man who denies that we ever know for certain things of a certain sort, need not necessarily feel any doubt whatever about *particular* things of the sort in question. A man who, like Bertrand Russell, believes with the utmost confidence that he never knows for certain such things as that he is sitting down, may nevertheless feel perfectly sure, without a shadow of a 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 - scepticism about our knowledge of things of that sort...Even if, on a particular occasion, such a man remembers his philosophical view that such things are never known for certain, and accordingly says quite sincerely e.g. 'I don't know for certain that I am sitting down', it by no means follows that he doubts in the least degree that he is sitting down.[113]

Does the distinction Moore here makes between scepticism that is compatible with an absence of practical doubt and scepticism that is incompatible with an absence of practical doubt really indicate that he had a good grasp of the philosophical nature of the philosophically sceptical doubts he engaged? I think it does. It is quite reasonable to suggest that one very significant difference between plain and philosophically sceptical doubts is that whereas the former typically carry practical consequences, the latter typically do not; indeed, that it is a commonly accepted criterion for properly making a plain assertion about a lack of knowledge in a given domain that the asserter possess some

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[113] Moore, _Philosophical Papers_, pp. 198-199.

form of practical doubt. Accordingly, the fact that he recognized a distinction between scepticism that is compatible with an absence of practical doubt and scepticism that is incompatible with an absence of such doubt seems to be good evidence for saying that Moore well grasped the distinction between plain and philosophically sceptical doubts, and that he was quite aware of the fact that the doubts he often engaged in his anti-sceptical papers were of the latter sort.

One might think that the apparent grasp of the difference between plain and philosophically sceptical doubts manifested in 'Four Forms of Scepticism' was something that Moore came to late in his career - something discovered in that paper but not well understood in some of the earlier, more famous papers such as 'A Defence of Common Sense' (1925) and 'Proof of an external World' (1939), and thus that in these earlier papers Moore really was a 'plain man'. This view would be hard to accept even on the face of it, since one would expect Moore to have made more of his 'grand discovery' in 'Four Forms of Scepticism' of the *real* nature of philosophically sceptical doubts, and to have commented on his previous unenlightened condition and therefore on the ineffectiveness of his earlier anti-sceptical papers. But he does not do so. And if we take a step back to one of Moore's very early papers, 'Hume's Philosophy' (1909), we find that Moore seems even then to have had a good grasp of the philosophical/plain distinction. In agreement with Hume, he claims that there are some assertions, doubts, beliefs, etc. that make perfect sense while one is engaged in the philosophical enterprise but that may not make sense in ordinary life:

> [I]t by no means follows that, because we are not able to cohere consistently to a given view, therefore that view is false; nor does it follow that we may not sincerely believe it, whenever we are philosophising, even though the moment we cease to philosophise, or even before, we may be forced to contradict it. And philosophers do, in fact, sincerely believe such things as this - things which flatly contradict the vast majority of the things which they believe at other times. Even Hume, I think, does sincerely wish to persuade us that we cannot know of the existence of external material objects - that this is a philosophic truth, which we ought, if we can, so long as we are philosophising, to believe. Many

> people, I think, are certainly tempted in their philosophical
> moments to believe such things; and, since this is so, it is,
> I think, worth while to consider seriously what arguments can
> be brought against such views. It is worth while to consider
> whether they are views which we ought to hold as philosophical
> opinions, even if it be quite certain that we shall never be
> able to make the views which we entertain at other times
> consistent with them. And it is the more worth while, because
> the question how we can prove or disprove such extreme views
> as these, has a bearing on the question how we can, in any
> case whatever, prove or disprove that we really do *know*, what
> we suppose ourselves to know.[114]

Here the distinction between philosophical views held while philosophizing and non-philosophical views held at other times is as nearly an explicit recognition of the philosophical/plain distinction as is the above compatible-with-an-absence-of-practical-doubt/incompatible-with-an-absence-of-practial-doubt distinction. It is quite clear that the philosophical views Moore refers to here - Hume's conclusion that we cannot know of the existence of external material objects, for instance - are held without regard for commonly accepted standards for properly asserting that something is unknown. (As Moore himself points out, we all do ordinarily accept that one can [properly be said to] 'know of the existence of this man and of that, and even of this and that material object'[115]; hence any assertion that we cannot know such things must, in one way or another, reject commonly accepted standards for properly asserting that something is unknown.) The non-philosophical views referred to, on the other hand, obviously do respect commonly accepted standards for properly asserting that something is unknown.

I think, therefore, that there is a very strong case to be made against the 'plain man' and for the 'philosophical man' interpretation of Moore the anti-sceptic. At the very least the passages here examined place a very heavy burden of proof upon advocates of the 'plain man' interpretation; they would have to offer both an adequate account of such passages as well as produce some specific textual evidence for their own

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[114] Moore, *Philosophical Studies*, pp. 157-158.

[115] Moore, *Philosophical Studies*, p. 157.

interpretation in order to relieve themselves of this burden. But they do not do so. I thus conclude that the 'philosophical man' interpretation is correct and that Moore did in fact have a good grasp of the philosophical nature of the philosophically sceptical doubts against which he argued.[116]

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[116] Clarke will say, of course, that this leaves me with a Moore who is blatantly dogmatic in his attempts to refute philosophical scepticism. Stroud will say that I am left with a Moore who is either blatantly dogmatic or (contrary to all character reports) subtle and deceptive. In light of the passages I have examined, and in light of the absurdity of supposing that Moore was as philosophically unperceptive as Clarke, Stroud and Cook take him to be, I would be more willing to grasp the latter horn of Stroud's dilemma than the former. However, I hope to have offered enough reasons in my examination of Moore's anti-sceptical engagements to suppose that it is more than possible to walk between the horns.

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