

## Lecture 6: Three Moorean Themes

### I. Last Thoughts on Stroud's Argument

Stroud takes the second premise of his argument for external-world skepticism to follow from the following general principle about knowledge:

*Stroud's Principle:* For all propositions P and Q, if Q is an alternative to your knowing P, then you must know *that Q is false* in order to know P.

*problem #1:* Last lecture we saw that, given some minimal assumptions, Stroud's Principle entails the following principle, which some (though not all) epistemologists reject:

*the KK Principle:* If you know P, then you know that you know P.

*problem #2:* Since every simple alternative to P is also an alternative to your knowing P, Stroud's Principle entails Closure, and thus is just as demanding as Closure.

In passing, Stroud shows some sympathy for the following alternative to Stroud's Principle:

*Stroud's Restricted Principle:* For all propositions P and Q, if you know *that Q is an alternative to your knowing P*, then you must know *that Q is false* in order to know P.

*problem #1:* Given the additional assumption that you know *that your not knowing P is an alternative to your knowing P*, Stroud's Restricted Principle can also be shown to imply the KK Principle.

*problem #2:* Stroud's Restricted Principle can't explain our intuitions about a version of the suspect-in-Cleveland case in which you don't realize (and hence don't know) that the witnesses' lying is an alternative to your knowing that the suspect was in Cleveland.

### II. First Moorean Theme: Moore's "Proof" of an External World

Kant: "...it always remains a scandal of philosophy ... that the existence of things outside us ... should have to be assumed merely *on faith*, and that if it occurs to anyone to doubt it, we should be unable to answer him with a satisfactory proof" (*Critique of Pure Reason*, B xxxix).

Moore offers the following (in)famous proof of the existence of things external to the mind ("Proof...", p. 26):

*Moore's Proof:*

1. Here (holding up one hand) is one hand. [*premise*]
2. Here (holding up the other hand) is another hand. [*premise*]
3. So, there are at least two hands. [*follows from 1, 2*]
4. So, there are things external to our minds. [*follows from 3*]

Moore's conditions for a rigorous proof:

- i. The premises of the proof must be different from its conclusion.
- ii. The premises must be known to be true.
- iii. The conclusion must follow from the premises.

Moore insists that his proof meets all three of these conditions. So, he concludes, it is a rigorous proof.

*Moore's example of an equally rigorous proof:*

1. Here is one typo. [*premise*]
2. Here is another typo. [*premise*]
3. So, the paper has at least two typos. [*follows from 1, 2*]

### III. Second Moorean Theme: *Tollens-ing the Skeptic's Ponens*

Moore concedes that *if* he doesn't know that he's not dreaming, *then* he doesn't know that he's standing up. But, he insists, this premise "cuts both ways" ("Certainty," p. 32).

The skeptic can use the premise to argue as follows:

*the Skeptic's Argument:*

1. If I don't know that I'm not dreaming, then I don't know that I'm standing up. [*premise*]
2. I don't know that I'm not dreaming. [*premise*]
3. So, I don't know that I'm standing up. [*follows from 1, 2 by modus ponens*]

However, Moore offers the following rebuttal, using the same key premise:

*Moore's Counterargument:*

1. If I don't know that I'm not dreaming, then I don't know that I'm standing up. [*premise*]
2. I know that I'm standing up. [*premise*]
3. So, I know that I'm not dreaming. [*follows from 1, 2 by modus tollens*]

Common saying: "One philosopher's *modus ponens* is another philosopher's *modus tollens*."

### IV. Third Moorean Theme: Moorean Facts

Suppose a skeptic produces the following argument:

*General Skeptical Argument:*

1. [Some abstruse piece of philosophy]. [*premise*]
2. [Another abstruse piece of philosophy]. [*premise*]
3. So, I don't know that I'm holding a pencil. [*follows from 1, 2*]

Moore's response: I'm *more certain* that I *do* know that I'm holding a pencil than I am of the truth of either premise in this argument. (Compare "Four Skeptical Arguments," p. 30.)

*Moorean fact:* a fact whose truth we are more certain of than we are of the premises in any philosophical argument that might be given for its falsity.

The claim, then, is that it's a Moorean fact that I know that I'm holding a pencil. And if this is true, then it seems that the General Skeptical Argument must go wrong somewhere, even if we don't yet know where.

But what do we mean by 'certain' in our definition of a Moorean fact? Two possibilities:

You are *psychologically certain* that proposition P is true iff you are as confident as possible that P is true (or equivalently: iff you have no doubt whatsoever that P is true).

Proposition P is *evidentially certain* iff the evidence for P is so good that it's not possible to believe P on the basis of this evidence and be mistaken.

This leads to a (potential) dilemma for those who appeal to Moorean facts: either Moorean facts are defined in terms of *psychological certainty*, in which case they seem epistemologically irrelevant, or else they are defined in terms of *evidential certainty*, in which case it seems question-begging or excessively dogmatic to claim that something is a Moorean fact (unless it's a Moorean fact that that thing is a Moorean fact).