# Recent Work on Moore's Proof

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**Abstract**

Recently, much work has been done on G.E. Moore's proof of an external world with the aim of diagnosing just where the Proof 'goes wrong'. In the mainstream literature, the most widely discussed debate on this score stands between those who defend competing accounts of perceptual warrant known as *dogmatism* (i.e. Pryor and Davies) and *conservativism* (i.e. Wright). Each account implies a different verdict on Moore's Proof, though both share a commitment to supposing that an examination of premise-conclusion dependence relations will sufficiently reveal what's wrong with the Proof. Parallel to this debate on Moore stands perhaps an equally interesting (though less discussed) debate within which the Proof is critiqued as it stands in the context of the skeptical debate. On this score, Michael Fara and Ernest Sosa have weighed in with a markedly different take on Moore's anti-skeptical ambitions and on the nature of skeptical challenges more generally.

The aim of this paper will be to critically evaluate these two very distinct strands of recent work on Moore's Proof. Part I of the paper will focus on the mainstream debate, and in Part II of the paper, I'll focus on the parallel debate about skepticism. My critical discussion will be aimed throughout at showing how the various proposals I've taken as representative of these two parallel debates surrounding Moore's Proof ultimately fall short—each for different reasons—of what a satisfactory diagnosis of the Proof would require.

## Part I: Dogmatism, Conservativism, and the Mainstream Debate

## 1. Moore's Proof

There is something intellectually unsatisfying about G.E. Moore's (1959) proof of the external world. However, it is not especially obvious just what it is about the Proof that fails to satisfy. No one outside the spell of Cartesian enchantment would deny the conclusion, and additionally, one would be hard-pressed to identify premises more suited to establishing that particular

conclusion than Moore's.[1] Even so, it is widely thought that Moore's Proof, in some troublesome sense, is inept to convince us, or perhaps 'begs the question'. Here's how Moore tries to prove the existence of an external world:

MOORE'S PROOF

M1.  Here is one hand (he says, raising it).
M2.  Here is another hand (he says, raising the other).
M3.  If there are hands, then there are external things.
M4.  Therefore, there exist some external things.

The validity of the argument's form and the presumably true premises seem to render it, as Moore himself thought, a perfectly rigorous proof. So just what is wrong with Moore's Proof? This seemingly innocuous question has paved a battleground for two distinct diagnoses of the Proof that have drawn much attention recently. There is Crispin Wright's (2007) diagnosis, according to which Moore's Proof suffers from what Wright calls transmission failure; on Wright's view, you could accept the conclusion by deducing it from the premises only if you already had the conclusion as "collateral." Wright thinks that although the conclusion is something you're entitled[2] to accept, it's not something that you could come to know on the basis of Moore's premises, even if you're doxastically justified (warranted)[3] in believing the premises and that

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[1]  It is plausible to suppose that there could be no premises for establishing the conclusion better than Moore's, but also (interestingly) that no perceptually-based evidence could be *less* conclusive of the conclusion than Moore's. I don't try to defend these claims here.

[2]  This is meant to capture the idea of non-evidentially based warrant, which I discuss more later.

[3]  It is no help for the purposes of presenting competing diagnoses of Moore clearly that the terminology used by authors talking about presumably the same thing varies according to which author you're reading. I debated whether to, in this paper, include a section that argues for one term as preferable to others, but I've since been convinced that that wouldn't be needed so long as two points are made clear: (1) Because the heart of the transmission debate between Wright and Pryor concerns the transmission of some epistemic property you have with respect to a proposition only if you have rational conviction for believing it to be true, the property they're concerned with is some type of doxastic justification of the sort more akin to the internalist than the externalist. Ram Neta tries to be consistent by using the term 'evidentially-based doxastic justification' in all references to the property, but I'm concerned that this is not only a bit tedious but also perhaps too narrow—at least, Wright seems concerned mostly with warrant simpliciter. That said, my game plan will be to use 'warrant', 'justification', and 'doxastic justification' interchangeably, at least for the purposes of making the sort of points the authors use these different terms to make. And so the reader should not suppose I have in mind any relevant difference when using them. (2) The second point that should be made clear at the outset is that I do distinguish between doxastic justification and propositional justification; references to 'justification' should be understood as 'doxastic' unless stated otherwise.

they entail the conclusion. And that's what's wrong with Moore's Proof—doxastic justification for the premises would not "transmit" to the conclusion, even though the conclusion is entailed by premises we think we know.

A competing diagnosis is offered by what Ram Neta (2008) has coined the 'New Mooreans',[4] in particular, James Pryor (2004, 2007) and Martin Davies (2003).[5] Pryor and Davies, unlike Wright, think that you can come to know Moore's conclusion by deducing it from the premises. The Proof's 'catch', according to the New Mooreans, is that you can do this only if you don't already doubt[6] that the conclusion is true. And so, if you doubt that there are external things, then the Proof is no good to you; it is, in Pryor's parlance, dialectically ineffective.[7] That particular quirk, and not a failure of the Proof to transmit doxastic justification from premise(s) to conclusion is, according to Pryor and Davies, the vice whereby we are led to think the Proof is problematic.

Fortunately, we have more to go on than brute intuitions to adjudicate this dispute. For example, Davies makes the case the Wright's approach reaches an inevitable 'dilemma' with respect to which neither available choice is in alignment with everyday thinking, and since they take it that their dogmatist approach (regarding perceptual warrant) faces no such dilemma and implies their verdict on Moore's proof, a presumptive case is made for thinking that dogmatism gives the right diagnosis of the Proof—that is, that the conclusion can be known on the basis of the premises so long as the conclusion isn't

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[4] I distinguish Neta's locution 'New Mooreans' from Duncan Pritchard's (2002) locution 'Neo-Mooreanism'. Neta uses 'New Mooreans' to pick out authors who defend Moore's Proof as capable of transmitting doxastic justification from premises to conclusion, while offering an alternative explanation for why the proof is, as Pryor puts it, "dialectically ineffective." Pritchard's use of 'Neo-Mooreanism' refers to a particular strategy for responding to radical skeptical arguments in the spirit of Moore. See his (2002), (2005b), and (2007a).

[5] Although Pryor's and Davies' views are substantively different at points, my references to them as the 'New Mooreans' is meant to reflect their point of unison that Moore's proof transmits warrant to the conclusion but cannot rationally overcome doubts, and secondly, that they both hold the 'dogmatist' account of perceptual justification, by which we can have justification for believing perceptual appearances so long as we have no reason to doubt them to be truthful. When giving more substantive articulations of these positions, I rely more heavily on Pryor's exposition than Davies'.

[6] It is not entirely clear whether the operative notion for the dogmatists should be 'doubt' or 'have reason to doubt', where the former consists in the possession of a doxastic attitude whereas the latter consists in a state wherein some proposition is justified for one, in virtue of one's possession of some reason, regardless of whether one believes the proposition. Because the point of dispute between Wright and the dogmatists does not turn on whether we read 'doubt' or 'have reason to doubt' as operative, I'll remain neutral with respect to which reading is correct.

[7] Beebee (2000) has raised a similar criticism.

antecedently held in doubt.[8] The brand of dogmatism that unifies the New Mooreans is one that allows that you can have evidentially grounded justification for perceptually based beliefs so long as you have no undermining reasons for thinking your perceptual appearances are misleading. Dogmatism about perceptual justification thus implies the New Moorean verdict that Moore's proof transmits warrant but fails to convince doubters of the conclusion.

Ram Neta (2008) has recently argued that the New Mooreans are upon closer inspection faced (coincidentally) with essentially the same, as it were, counter-intuitive dilemma that they claim is forced on Wright; and so, Neta's take on the landscape is this: the New Mooreans are right about where Wright goes wrong only if they (the New Mooreans) fall prey to the same dilemma they pin on Wright. Rather than to side with Wright, though, Neta thinks that both sides of the dispute have missed what it is about the Proof that is suspicious, and further, that once the culprit is identified, the resultant take on the Proof will be precisely the opposite of the New Moorean's pronouncement: that although we can't come to know the Proof's conclusion by deducing it from its premises, Neta argues, the Proof actually does provide us with what would be needed to rationally overcome doubts about its conclusion. Neta's reasoning for why the New Mooreans have got it backwards is creative and draws on insights about the Proof not discussed by his opponents.

In what follows here in Part I, I'll present (somewhat concisely) the move Wright makes in his diagnosis of Moore, the unsavory 'dilemma' the New Mooreans think Wright's proposal faces, followed by the structurally analogous dilemma Neta (2008) thinks the New Mooreans face. Having located by this point some serious worries that face Wright and Pryor, I turn to Neta's own quite original diagnosis of the Proof. I conclude Part I of the paper by arguing that Neta's preferred diagnosis of Moore falls into a two-pronged dilemma just as he thinks the other two camps' proposals have.

In Part II of the paper, I'll consider and critique recent diagnoses of Moore offered by Michael Fara (2008) and Ernest Sosa (2009) who, unlike the other commentators considered, approach the proof with a careful eye to how it stands within the skeptical context.

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[8] There is a third sort of diagnosis of Moore's Proof by Wittgenstein in *On Certainty* (1969) and Strawson in *Skepticism and Naturalism: Some Varieties* (1985), which would fault Wright and the Neo-Mooreans equally for mistakenly thinking that conclusions such as Moore's are the sort for which justification should be sought. At present, my focus will be with Wright's, the New Moorean's, and Neta's diagnoses, although in my critique of Neta, I will draw a parallel to the sort of objection advanced by Wittgenstein and Strawson, and consider Wittgenstein further toward the end.

## 2. Wright's Dilemma

Crispin Wright (2007) claims that whenever we believe some proposition for a reason, there will usually be a justificational triad in place of the following sort:

> WRIGHT'S JUSTIFICATIONAL TRIAD
> 1. A kind of evidence that P that constitutes the reasons for believing it.
> 2. The proposition that P itself.
> 3. An authenticity condition (Wright 2009, 6)

Wright explains the authenticity condition in (3) as follows:

> …a thinker who doubted 3 could not rationally believe 2 just on the basis of evidence 1.

The authenticity condition element of a triad is such that, were it false, the evidence in 1 would not count in favour of the premise 2. In the curious case of Moore's Proof, the authenticity condition is entailed by (1) and (2) on Wright's 'justificational triadic' version of the Proof:

> MOORE'S PROOF (WRIGHT)
> WM1.  It perceptually appears to me that there are two hands.
> WM2.  There are two hands.
> WM3.  There is an external world (authenticity condition)

Wright's having made (WM1) explicit is fair: the appearance of hands is surely what leads Moore to accept (WM2). Now, since Moore infers (WM3) from (WM2), he had better at least be in a position to believe (WM2) rationally—for you can't know something (i.e. the conclusion) if all you're basing it on is a belief you can't rationally hold. Wright offers that whether or not (WM2) can be rationally inferred from the evidence in (WM1) depends importantly on whether we already take it that an external world exists. Suppose, for instance, that Moore had doubted (WM3) and believed some fiction instead. Wright shows how the Proof's support for (WM3) would subsequently dissolve:

> Replace (sic) [Moore's presumption that there is an external world] with reason to believe that he is instead a handless brain in a vat, whose every experience is controlled by a computer-program designed by an evil scientist, and the experience [in (1)] supports instead [of (2)] the claim that: The computer is right now implementing a phase of its program which requires me to suffer the illusion of having a hand and holding it up in front of my face. (Wright 2009, 3)

This example shows, rather convincingly, that we can rationally believe we have hands on the basis of it appearing to us that we have hands only if we—at

the very least—don't bring to the table a slew of doubts about whether there even exists a world for hands to occupy. Granted, if we really doubted that there is an external world, then perceiving what look like hands—things we know we are seeing only if there is an external world, which we doubt there is—is a perceptual appearance from which you could rationally infer something, but whatever you could rationally infer, it is certainly not that you have a hand. And so doubting the conclusion here would leave you in no position to deduce the conclusion from (WM2).

But to rationally accept Moore's premise that there are hands from the perceptual evidence that there appear to be hands, is more needed than simply not doubting that there is an external world? This is perhaps the key point of disagreement between the dogmatists and Wright. Whereas the dogmatists say no, Wright says yes. According to him,

> to take it that one knows [the Proof's] premise (on occurrent perceptual grounds) is to presuppose that one already knows (or possesses warrant for) the conclusion. (Wright 2007, 3)

Wright's diagnosis of the Proof—at least at this point—seems to paint a nasty picture: The premise can transmit warrant to the conclusion only if we can have some rational basis for accepting the premise on the basis of the evidence, and we can do this only if we already know that there is an external world. So how do we know (or possess warrant) that there is an external world? Indeed, it would seem that, paradoxically, we could be warranted in believing there is an external world only if we can rationally believe that there is on the basis of evidence, but the sort of evidence that we'd need from which to deduce that there is an external world is such that we could rationally believe it only if we already presuppose that there is an external world.

Of course, Wright recognises the apparent circularity; it is this paradoxical relationship between the premise and the conclusion of Moore's Proof that Wright thinks is the culprit for why it is that the Proof fails to satisfy us— or as he puts it—why the proof is not "cogent." Put precisely, the Proof's lack of cogency arises from a transmission failure: the Proof is such that, even though valid, the premise cannot transmit warrant to the conclusion. This worrisome point at the fore of Wright's analysis implicates two distinct skeptical challenges: Firstly, it's not clear how we could ever come to know the conclusion, as it's not clear how we could ever deduce it from some premise we can rationally hold without already knowing the conclusion; secondly, justification for believing we have hands falls into jeopardy as well—we could rationally believe we have hands on the basis of our perceptual evidence of hand appearances only if we already know (or accept, as granted) the conclusion.

Against these threats of circularity and skepticism, Wright argues that the conclusion of Moore's argument is one for which we can possess entitlement, which on his view is non-evidentially based warrant.[9] While I will not go into the details of Wright's defence of entitlements here, his suggestion is that our entitlement for (WM3)—which we don't possess by deducing (WM3) from some evidentially-held (WM2)—gives us the "collateral"[10] we need to then rationally hold (WM2) on the basis of the evidence that there appears to us to be hands.

Davies (2003), as well as Neta (2008), argues that Wright's approach to Moore faces a dilemma: Wright, qua defending the conclusion to be an entitlement, must accept one of the following two horns:

DILEMMA FOR WRIGHT (DAVIES)
 1. Reject that evidentially based justification (warrant) is closed under known entailment.
 2. Allow that non-evidential entitlement that there are external things can be converted into evidentially-based justification (warrant).

As a point of clarification, the first horn does not imply that Wright would reject closure (full stop). What the first horn precisely implies is that Wright would have to reject what Duncan Pritchard (2008) calls the transmission principle, which I'm construing as a principle concerning justification (warrant).

> TRANSMISSION PRINCIPLE: If S is warranted in believing that p on the basis of supporting grounds G, and S completely deduces q from p (thereby coming to believe q while retaining her warrant that p), then G is sufficient to support S's warrant that q. (Pritchard 2008)

As Pritchard points out: "The key difference between the closure principle and the transmission principle is that, whilst the former simply states that the known [warranted] to be entailed proposition is itself known [warranted], the latter specifies the manner in which this proposition is known [warranted]" (2008, 21) by specifying what grounds would be sufficient to support it.

Setting aside whether and why each horn is 'bad', it seems clear that if Wright wants to avoid rejecting that evidentially-based justification is closed under known entailment (i.e. the transmission principle), then he has to allow that the justification (warrant) for the belief that he has hands will transmit to what is known to be entailed by this—that there is an external world.

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[9] For a detailed discussion of entitlement, see Wright (2004).
[10] Wright uses this terminology in his 2007 paper "The Perils of Dogmatism."

But preserving evidentially-based closure for warrant this way is costly: given that the evidentially-based warrant for the belief that he has hands depends on antecedent non-evidential entitlement that there is an external world, it would seem like pulling a rabbit from a hat to then, by closure,[11] convert the non-evidential entitlement that there is an external world into an evidentially-based warrant for believing there is an external world. The second horn, then, isn't 'bad' because getting non-evidential entitlement is itself too magical, but because the further 'boot-strapped' evidentially based justification (warrant) for the conclusion that entitlement affords you if you don't reject that warrant transmits across known entailment looks like epistemic theft.

Wright opts to take the first horn. Whether or not denying that justification for Moore's premise is closed under known entailment is a 'worse' horn than the horn that licenses him to pull the magic rabbit, I'll set aside. It suffices for the present purposes to point out that Davies, Pryor and Neta seem to be right to think that, at minimum, taking the first horn doesn't align with our everyday thinking that whatever the supporting grounds are for some claim A we're justified in believing on the basis of these grounds, would also serve as supporting grounds for some other claim B that we know A entails.

## 3. Ram Neta's New Critique: A Dilemma for the New Mooreans

### 3.1 Dependence Relations

Like Wright, James Pryor and Martin Davies think that Moore's Proof doesn't accomplish what (they thought) Moore meant it to. As Pryor starkly puts it, "Something about [Moore's Proof] sounds funny" (Pryor 2004, 1). Unlike Wright, Pryor and Davies (the 'New Mooreans', as Neta labels them) don't identify the funny business as an inability of the proof to transmit warrant from premise to conclusion. They both maintain that the Proof does do this but add, quite importantly, that it is at the same time incapable of persuading someone who already doubts that the external world exists.[12] The Proof's 'funniness' stems from its failure to meet a condition of a cogent argument which is, as Wright puts it, the condition that it be such that one could be moved to the "rational overcoming of some doubt about… the truth of the conclusion" (Wright 2002, 332). Now one might be tempted to ask the New Mooreans: how is it that the Proof—or any proof for that matter—could both (i) transmit

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[11] In the sense that Wright is concerned with, which includes supporting grounds.
[12] See Pryor (2004), 368–70.

warrant from premise to conclusion and (ii) not be capable of moving one to rationally overcome doubts about the truth of the conclusion? It seems, as Neta points out, intuitive to think that a warrant-transmitting proof would also be capable of rationally overcoming any antecedent doubts one has about the truth of the conclusion.

But this is precisely about what the New Mooreans have a bone to pick. I'll focus, as Neta does, on Pryor's reasoning here, which makes use of two distinct ways that premises can depend on a conclusion. These are what Pryor calls, Type 4 and Type 5 dependence.

> TYPE 4 DEPENDENCE: The conclusion is such that evidence against it would (to at least some degree) undermine the justification you have for the premises.

> TYPE 5 DEPENDENCE: Having justification to believe the conclusion is among the conditions that make you have the justification you purport to have for the premise.[13]

Pryor takes it that Type 4 dependence is compatible with knowledge transmission but Type 5 is not, and further, that Type 4 does not entail Type 5. Consequently, if Moore's Proof suffers from Type 4 but not Type 5, then the Proof preserves knowledge transmission, even whilst owing to Type 4 (and as such not being capable of overcoming rational doubts).

With a critical eye, we should ask: is Wright's rejection of knowledge transmission in the Proof a result of his mistakenly thinking Moore's Proof to suffer from Type 5 dependence (perhaps just because it seems to suffer from Type 4?) or, alternatively, is Pryor wrong in thinking either that (i) Moore's Proof admits of Type 4 but not Type 5 dependence; or that (ii) Type 4 Dependence does not (in fact) entail Type 5 dependence?

A starting point for sorting this out is to make clear the sort of theory of perceptual justification that Pryor endorses, and which leads him to think that the Proof is a Type 4 but not Type 5. Pryor—like Davies and unlike Wright—is a dogmatist about perceptual justification. Wright is dubbed by Pryor as a conservativist on this score. Where these positions differ is precisely with respect to what epistemic standing must be held toward, in our case, Moore's conclusion (which is, as Wright would say, an authenticity condition), in order to rationally believe there are hands on the basis of the perceptual evidence that there appear to be hands. To see how dogmatism and conservatism come apart, consider again Wright's characterization of Moore's Proof:

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[13] I paraphrase from Pryor (2004) and Neta (2008).

<u>MOORE'S PROOF (WRIGHT)</u>

WM1.  It perceptually appears to me that there are two hands.
WM2.  There are two hands.
WM3.  There is an external world. (authenticity condition)

According to dogmatism:

> DOGMATISM: You are justified in believing WMII on the basis of perceptual evidence WMI so long as you have no reason to doubt WMIII.

According to Wright's conservativist position:

> CONSERVATISM: You are justified in believing WMII on the basis of perceptual evidence WMI so long as you've got (at least) positive, independent reasons (or warrant) for believing WMIII.[14]

If dogmatism is correct, then it would follow that Moore's Proof exhibits a Type 4 dependence but not a Type 5. Dogmatism allows you to have evidentially-based warrant (justification) for II on the basis of I just so long as you don't doubt III. After all, since the dogmatist doesn't reject transmission over known entailment, she (the dogmatist) is committed to saying that, so long as you don't doubt Moore's conclusion, your evidentially-based justification for believing WMII transmits to the conclusion. But if you did doubt the conclusion, then you would at the same time undermine your justification for believing WMII on the basis of WMI—and thus, the proof would be inept to win you over.

Dogmatism, then, implies a Type 4 dependence, but not a Type 5 dependence, and subsequently, a diagnosis of Moore's Proof in which justification (warrant) transmission is preserved, while at the same time, doubting the conclusion would render the Proof incapable of persuading anyone of its truth, specifically, by making impossible evidentially-based justification for the premise (that you have hands). This response is a 'New Moorean' response in that it allows that Moore's proof does transmit warrant to the conclusion, and 'dogmatist' in the sense that it allows you to dogmatically suppose that perceptual appearances are what you take them to be, so long as you're free from defeaters. The New Moorean take on the Proof, as Neta has noted, relies then on the following sort of reasoning.

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[14]  See Wright (2007) for a detailed discussion of conservatism.

NEW MOOREAN DIAGNOSIS[15]

1. Moore's Proof fails to rationally overcome doubts about the conclusion if it exhibits Type 4 dependence.
2. Moore's Proof fails to transmit warrant from premises to conclusion only if it exhibits type 5 dependence.
3. Type 4 dependence does not entail Type 5 dependence.
4. If dogmatism about perceptual justification is correct, then Moore's proof exhibits Type 4 dependence but not Type 5 dependence.
5. Dogmatism about perceptual justification is correct.
6. Therefore, Moore's Proof fails to rationally overcome doubts about the conclusion even though it does not suffer from transmission failure.

It is important to note that the New Moorean dialectic does not establish a dogmatist reading of Moore's Proof by first demonstrating the Proof to exhibit Type 4 but not Type 5 dependence. Rather, it's the other way around: Dogmatism, if true, would imply a Type 4 but not Type 5 dependence. Since whether or not the Proof suffers from Type 5 dependence is crucial to whether the Proof suffers from a transmission failure (rather than just an inability to overcome doubts), the New Moorean diagnosis depends importantly on the assumption that the dogmatist account of perceptual justification (Premise 5) is correct.[16]

But why should we prefer dogmatism to Wright's entitlement-laden conservativism? Perhaps because, as Davies showed, Wright's position faces the dilemma of accepting either one of the two counter-intuitive horns discussed in the last section, and given that the dogmatist position does not require facing such a dilemma, there is therefore a presumption in favour of dogmatism.

It is precisely this line hidden at the heart of the dogmatist's thinking that Ram Neta has recently challenged at length.[17] Neta suggests that the New Moorean diagnosis of Moore's Proof relies on dogmatism in an interesting (and precarious) way: for their Type-4-but-Not-Type-5 dependence claim about the Proof is contingent on dogmatism being preferable to Wright's anti-dogmatist account, and for all the New Moorean has told us[18]—argues

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[15] This is my construction, based in part on Neta's (2008) discussion of the New Moorean response to Wright.

[16] Neta (2008) notes this point.

[17] See Neta (2008).

[18] Neta also mentions that Pryor's other suggestion is only that it is possible that dependence could be of Type 4 but not Type 5. But Neta argues that the "introspective awareness" example

Neta—the dogmatist account is preferable only because it, unlike, Wright's view, is "dilemma-free." Neta's challenge to the New Moorean is that, in sum: the New Moorean is faced with (virtually) the same thought-to-be counter-intuitive dilemma they pin on Wright. If Neta is correct, then the prima facie case for accepting Premise 5—that dogmatism is correct—evaporates; for the presumptive case in favor of the premise relied on Wright's facing an unsavoury dilemma not faced by the New Mooreans; but as Neta wants to argue, the New Mooreans could attack Wright for facing such a dilemma only if at the same time turning that very sword on themselves.

## 4. Neta's Argument Against the New Mooreans

Neta makes two important assumptions about what the dogmatist is committed to. First, he claims that the dogmatist must allow that, for Moore, the perceptual appearance of having hands—so long as he doesn't doubt there's an external world—provides evidentially-based justification for not only the belief I have hands, but also the belief It appears to me that I have hands. Secondly, Neta argues that, by closure, the dogmatist would also have to allow that Moore could gain an evidentially-based justified belief that (My) perceptual appearance was not misleading. But here Neta calls a boot-strapping foul:[19]

> [The dogmatist must allow that] by means of nothing more than deductive inference from beliefs that one holds on the basis of a bit of perceptual evidence, one can acquire an evidentially-based doxastically justified belief that that very bit of evidence is, in this case, not misleading… how could Moore have an evidentially-based doxastically justified belief that his perceptual experience is, in this case, not misleading, if the only evidence that he has in favor of that proposition is the fallible perceptual appearance itself? (Neta 2008, 24)

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Pryor gives to demonstrate this possibility doesn't work. I'll not weigh in on whether it does work because, even if it did, the relevant and separate question would be whether Moore's Proof itself constitutes such an example.

[19] Thanks to an anonymous referee for noting that this particular point of contention Neta raises against the New Mooreans resembles in important respects the problem of bootstrapping. The boostrapping problem (e.g. Bergmann 2004, Cohen 2002) though regarded as especially problematic is not in principle unsurmountable. For a recent attempt to circumvent this problem, see Sosa (2009, Ch. 8). It is beyond the scope of this paper to provide an argument that either proposes a solution to the bootstrapping problem or maintains that no solution is promising. It suffices to point out that, the extent to which the bootstrapping problem is problematic will be indicative of the force of this aspect of Neta's critique of the New Mooreans.

Neta is quick to point out that the dogmatist can avoid this counterintuitive commitment only if willing to deny that the evidentially-based justification enjoyed by the premises transmits to the known-to-follow conclusion that the perceptual experience is, in this case, not misleading. But the justification for the premises would have to transmit if, as the dogmatist wants to have it, evidentially-based justification (warrant) is closed under known entailment. Neta proposes accordingly a counter-dilemma for the dogmatist.

### NETA'S COUNTER DILEMMA AGAINST THE DOGMATIST

1. Reject that warrant transmits across known entailment; or
2. Allow that by means of nothing more than deductive inference from beliefs that one holds on the basis of a bit of perceptual evidence, one can acquire an evidentially-based doxastically justified belief that that very bit of evidence is, in this case, not misleading.

The dilemma the dogmatists pin on Wright and the dilemma Neta pins on the dogmatists are substantially similar. One horn requires rejecting warrant transmission over known entailment, and the other horn requires committing the crime of, loosely speaking, smuggling in evidentially-based justification (warrant) for the conclusion through the back door. Wright, as we said, takes the first horn of his version of the dilemma, and Neta suspects that the dogmatist will take the second. It is beyond my present intention to speculate whether the dogmatist would in fact choose the second horn, or whether one horn is worse than the other.[20]

I want to offer only that it's plausible to think that neither of these dilemmas looks very good, and that there seems to be no clear way to adjudicate the prospects that one side might have to safely pin the 'dilemma' charge on the other whilst not incurring the same charge. This is a good reason, I think, to look elsewhere for a more promising diagnosis of Moore. What we want to know is, first, in what sense Moore's Proof is problematic, and secondly, whether this is something we can explain within the modus operandi considered thus far—that is, by answering the question by appealing to considerations of transmission failure and the notion of rationally overcoming doubts. Ram Neta's recent work provides us with rather surprising answers to each of these questions, and I'll consider now whether they are any better than the ones Wright or the New Mooreans gave us.

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[20] Admittedly, I'm inclined to think the second is worst. It more clearly wears its philosophical inappropriateness on its sleeve than does the first. But I don't aim to defend this contentious suggestion here.

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## 5. Neta's Meta-epistemological Diagnosis of Moore's Proof

Neta's position with respect to transmission failure and whether the Proof can rationally overcome doubts is simple enough: the New Mooreans have it backwards. Neta argues that the Proof fails to transmit warrant from premises to conclusion, even though it is capable of overcoming rational doubts. That he holds these positions is a consequence of his rather unconventional explanation for what exactly is funny about Moore's Proof. I'll turn first to Neta's explanation and then to why it promotes reversing the dogmatists' verdicts.

### 5.1 Neta on Displaying versus Proving

The previously considered positions are unified in assuming that Moore's Proof is meant to prove that there is an external world; after all, that's the conclusion, right? On this fundamental point, Neta demurs. He writes:

> Moore's goal in giving the proof is not to give us knowledge of the existence of external things, but rather to display our knowledge of the existence of external things, and thereby to give us knowledge that we already have knowledge of the existence of external things. (Neta 2008, 24)

Neta's suggestion here resembles Pritchard's point that

> What (1925) Moore is at least trying to do with his claims to know, however, is not state some contentious philosophical thesis, but rather simply affirm commonsense. (Pritchard 2008, 13)

Now to affirm commonsense, as Pritchard suggests Moore's intention is, seems akin to Neta's thinking here—that the Proof's purpose is to display or confirm what is presupposed to be commonly known, rather than to prove it to be true. According to Neta, Moore's giving the Proof displays to us that we know that there are external things, even though as he admits, "the proof is not about our knowledge" (2008, 24).[21] But if it displays[22] to us that we know that there are external things, then wouldn't it also prove to us that there are external things? Neta thinks not, and that Moore would agree.[23] Neta writes:

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[21] Thanks to an anonymous referee for pointing out that Neta's locution here lends itself to potential confusion. What, after all, is it for a proof to be "about" something? I take it that Neta's figure of speech here is used as a lead in to his more substantial point that Moore's Proof is not aimed at establishing its own conclusion, and in this sense, is not 'about' the proposition stated in the conclusion.

[22] Neta is arguing here in a way that takes display to be factive.

[23] It's not entirely clear at times to me whether Neta, when providing textual support from Moore that coincides with his own verdict, takes it that facts about what Moore had intended

> On Moore's view, knowing that there are external things—or at least having learned that there are external things—is a necessary condition of knowing that here are two hands, so whatever epistemic properties the Proof might transmit, it cannot transmit knowledge. (Neta 2008, 30)

So Moore's Proof does not—by his own apparent admission—transmit knowledge, says Neta, and further, he argues that there's no good reason to think that the Proof transmits justification (or that Moore would have thought it would, given Neta's infallibilist reading of Moore's view of justification).[24] So how can the Proof overcome rational doubt, then, if unable to transmit justification (warrant)? It does so according to Neta by reassuring us—even if we rationally doubt that there are external things—that we already knew that there are external tings. It "enhances our epistemic status" concerning our knowledge of the existence of external things, even though the conclusion of the Proof is not about knowledge (Neta 2008, 28).

But wait—how can Neta maintain that the Proof rationally overcomes doubts when, (i) if you doubt the conclusion, it follows that you don't know the conclusion; and (ii) the Proof overcomes doubts precisely by displaying that you already knew the conclusion—a conclusion you couldn't know if you doubted it?

Neta happily swallows the bullet here. He says that doubting some proposition is perfectly compatible with knowing it,[25] so long as the doubt is unreasonable (Neta 2008, 29). He offers an example:

> … if a philosopher talks me into doubting whether or not the universe has existed for more than 5 minutes, it doesn't follow that I no longer know that the universe has existed for more than five minutes. I still know that I ate breakfast 3 hours ago, even if I harbor silly philosophically induced doubts concerning the reality of the past. (Neta 2008, 29)

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count are supposed to count in favor of Neta's particular way of assessing the proof, or if rather, his appeal to what he takes to be Moore's take is intended primarily to show that the proof's author's purpose was different from what Neta's opponents have assumed it to be, in assuming it to be a proof meant to prove its own conclusion.

[24] See Neta (2008), 29–33. Just as a point of curiosity, the infallibilist account of justification that Neta reads Moore as offering borrows from passages of Moore in which Moore speaks of justification in a radically strong way, stronger than some contemporary accounts of knowledge. I think it would be helpful to understand clearly how it is that Moore takes knowledge to differ from justification, if at all.

[25] A perhaps troublesome implication of Neta's reasoning here is that he must allow someone who doubts p in such a way that she is maximally confident that p is false nonetheless knows p, so long as her reasons for doubting that p is true are reasonable, and p is some proposition (like Moore's conclusion) that her other beliefs imply (or at least, in his example, that's what him to be thinking it is about the sort of propositions you can doubt but still know. Also, as Pritchard has noted, it's also plausible to think that the doubt in question here never really occurs.

Instead of challenging Neta here on this on this contentious point about the compatibility of doubting a proposition and knowing it, I'll move forward with the aim of charitably organizing his position. That being said, his diagnosis (put straightforwardly) of why Moore's argument is unsatisfying seems to be, first, that you aren't permitted to deduce the conclusion from the premises given the Proof's inability to transmit warrant from premises to conclusion. Secondly, the Proof is not intended to provide you with knowledge of the conclusion—yet if you are moved by the reasoning advanced by the Proof, then it follows that you must have already known its conclusion, so as to have that fact displayed to you.

If the Proof really was as Neta says, then it would not be surprising that we think something funny is going on with it. These are a lot of strange things he thinks are going on all at once. And further, if Neta is right, then the Proof's eccentricities are yet not enough to prevent it from convincing, and rationally so, a prior doubter[26] of the Proof's conclusion, that she knows it.

Although Neta's take on Moore relies on ideas quite disparate from his opponents, I will show now why Neta's view straightforwardly falls into the relevantly same sort of 'dilemma' the New Mooreans pin on Wright and Neta himself pinned on the New Mooreans.

### 5.2 An Inconsistency Objection to Neta

I'll present here the central objection I want to raise to Neta and then defend the premises accordingly.

INCONSISTENCY OBJECTION

1. When confronted with Moore's proof, either one doubts the conclusion or does not.
2. Either way, at least one of Neta's positions (i) that the Proof suffers from transmission failure; or (ii) that the proof is capable of rationally over-coming doubt, must be rejected.
3. Therefore, Neta's account is internally inconsistent.

The first premise is analytically true. The second contains the crucial substance. In defending (2), I'll first defend that one of his two theses in (2) must be rejected if one were to approach Moore's proof with doubt. My claim is:

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[26] As Neta notes, the relevant sort of doubts here would be unreasonable ones. See Neta (2008), 29. Thanks to an anonymous referee for drawing attention to this point.

*First Inconsistency Thesis*
If when confronted with Moore's proof, one doubts the conclusion, then Neta's view that the Proof overcomes doubt by displaying that one knows the conclusion, is false.

The point I want to make here will require that we construe the Proof so that it functions as Neta thinks it does. On Neta's view, the Proof, qua "displayer," seems to function as evidence to us that we know that there are external things. (Neta 2008, 28) It is displayed to us in a way that, as he says, "enhances our epistemic status concerning our knowledge of external things" (2008, 28). Since our epistemic status concerning our knowledge of external things is presumably an epistemic status we have (i) in virtue of having the evidence constitutive in what the Proof displays,[27] and which (ii) serves to support a belief about what we know, we have a case in which we believe some proposition for a reason—the sort of case that, as Wright suggests, is able to be characterized within a justificatonal triad. What Neta implies we would have is something like this:

1. **Evidence**: What Moore's Proof displays to me. (I go through Moore's Proof and thereby I display to myself that I know that there is an external world.)
2. **Belief/Premise**: My belief that what the Proof displays to me is that I know there is an external world.
3. **Conclusion**: My belief that I know there is an external world.

Now, as was said, when confronted with Moore's Proof, either I already doubt that there is an external world or I don't. If I do doubt that there is an external world, then problematically, I couldn't rationally believe that what the Proof displays to me is that I know there is an external world on the basis of the evidence I acquire by being confronted with Moore's proof. If, for example, when confronted with the Proof, I doubted the external world and believed I was a BIV, then the evidence constitutive in what the Proof displays to me would support not (2), but rather, that the Proof has a false premise—namely, Moore's premise that he knows what he's waving is a hand. And so, importantly, if I doubted there was an external world, then I couldn't rationally believe that the Proof displays to me that I know there is an external world on the basis of the evidence constitutive in what the Proof displays.

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[27] To be clear: I take the evidence constitutive in what the Proof displays (as Neta sees it) to be different from the evidence that would consist in the rational adoption of the proof's conclusion. This is because, pace Neta, the Proof displays that you *already knew the conclusion*—evidence that is itself distinct from the evidence that would consist in rationally adopting the proof's conclusion, *that there is an external world.*

Doubting that there is an external world, thus, implies that (2) can't be rationally held on the basis of (1), and therefore, any move from (2) to (3) would be blocked. Both Wright and the Dogmatist could respond to Neta this way: by pointing out that a doubt in the existence of the external world undermines the justification one could have for believing that the Proof displays to me that I know there is an external world on the basis of the what the Proof displays to me. Indeed, an outright acceptance of an external world is required for the Proof to display to you that you know its conclusion; otherwise, it would simply display to you that someone incorrectly believes he has a hand. Therefore, if when confronted with Moore's proof, one doubts the conclusion, Neta has to give up his "overcoming doubt" thesis: for if you doubted the conclusion, your epistemic status with respect to your 'knowledge' that there are external things (if you indeed have such knowledge) would not be enhanced.

Now, for the other side of the coin:

*Second Inconsistency Thesis*
If we were to suppose that I was confronted with Moore's proof and didn't already doubt the existence of the external world, then Neta's other thesis—that Moore's Proof does not transmit justification (warrant)—must be rejected.

Let's look again at the picture Neta gives us:

1. **Evidence**: What Moore's Proof displays to me. (I go through Moore's Proof and thereby I display to myself that I know that there is an external world.)
2. **Belief/Premise**: My belief that what the Proof displays to me is that I know there is an external world.
3. **Conclusion**: My belief that I know there is an external world.

Suppose now that I am confronted with Moore's proof and believe full well in an external world. If this were so, then I could rationally believe, on the basis of being confronted with the Proof, that it displays to me that I know there is an external world. If I am thus justified in believing my prior knowledge of an external world has been displayed to me, then my justification would transmit to the known-to-be entailed belief that I know there is an external world.[28]

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[28] This would not necessarily be warrant acquired for the first time. However, when warrant transmits, it doesn't always do so only if for the first time. Consider a case of a lawyer who attempts to establish his clients innocence on the basis of two separate arguments, each which independently sustains the lawyer's belief "My client is innocent." The first argument gives the lawyer warrant for his belief, and this wouldn't preclude the fact that the second argument does as well (though not for the first time).

Problematically for Neta, if for some p I am justified in believing that I know p, then I am also justified in believing p—in this case, that there is an external world. The latter is conceptually implied by the former; part of what being justified in the former is to be justified in the latter. Knowledge is factive. And so, Neta's picture implies that if you don't already doubt the conclusion of Moore's argument, then you could rationally believe, on the basis of being confronted with it, that it displays to you that you know there is an external world, from which you would be justified in believing the known-to-be entailed belief that: you know that there is an external world and the conceptually implied there is an external world.

In sum, then: if you don't already doubt the conclusion, then Neta is wrong that his view does not imply that Moore's Proof suffers from a transmission failure. But if you do already doubt the conclusion, then Neta is wrong to think his view does imply that Moore's argument overcomes doubts by displaying to you that you know the conclusion. Either way, one of Neta's theses must be given up.

## Part II:  Moore versus the Skeptic

Perhaps, by this point, it might seem as though neither of two main lines of diagnosis—the dogmatists and the conservativists—offer a plausible diagnosis of Moore's Proof, and that—unfortunately—we can't evade the dilemmas facing the two main accounts by taking Neta's "meta-epistemological" line because (as it was shown), this line runs into a vicious dilemma itself—an internal Sophie's Choice. Despite the very different diagnoses made by Wright, Pryor and Neta, one thing is common to the strategies each pursued—a modus operandi common in the mainstream debate: that diagnosing Moore's Proof is something we must do by (i) appealing to premise-conclusion dependence relations, and then (ii) saying whether, in virtue of these relations, the fault of the proof involves a failure to overcome rational doubt or alternatively to transmit warrant from its premises to conclusion.

Perhaps we can better understand what's wrong with Moore's Proof if we leave the mainstream modus operandi behind and approach the Proof from a different angle. Here—in Part II of this paper—I will accordingly switch gears and consider two more recent proposals—one by Michael Fara (2008) and (in less detail) another by Ernest Sosa (2009). Fara and Sosa diagnose Moore's Proof not in terms of the transmission of epistemic properties (as a result of premise-conclusion dependence relations), as the previous authors did, but in terms of how the proof functions as an anti-skeptical device. We'll see that,

once the Proof is located squarely within the framework of the skeptical debate, the questions we find ourselves asking in an effort to diagnose Moore's Proof will be markedly different than the ones we've been asking so far.

## 6. Michael Fara on Moore, Skepticism and the Plea for Proof

Michael Fara (2008) in his essay "How Moore Beat the Skeptic" offers a rather simple, but thus far unconsidered, diagnosis of Moore's Proof—one sharply different from what Wright, Pryor & Davies and Neta have supposed. It is a diagnosis that, at the same time, highlights a sense in which the Proof is problematic even though it provides a proponent of it a comparative leverage against the skeptic.

As a starting point for his discussion, Fara revisits the three criteria Moore thinks a perfectly rigorous proof must satisfy.

MOORE'S THREE CONDITIONS FOR A RIGOROUS PROOF

An argument constitutes a proof of its conclusion if and only if:
1. Its conclusion is different from each of its premises.
2. Its conclusion follows from its premises; and
3. Each of its premises is known.[29]

Fara claims that, pitted against Moore:

> The skeptic denies… that Moore's utterance of Here is a hand, made while making certain gestures, expressed a proposition that was known, at the moment of utterance, to be true. (Fara 2008, 2)

This idea seems somewhat fair, at least upon first consideration, and it will be worth reflecting upon in some detail. The skeptic's point that Moore lacks knowledge that he has a hand—an admission that would require he give up that his Proof satisfies rigour condition (3)—gains plausibility when we consider that, if we're supposing that what is at issue between Moore and the skeptic is whether we can know there is an external world, then the skeptic would seem within her right to point out that whether Moore knows he has a hand would be a matter at issue no less than the conclusion. But this suggestion, one might offer, doesn't seem to capture an entirely different worry than those expressed by Wright and Pryor. Once we press the thought a step further and consider why Moore seems to commit a foul by claiming to know that he has a hand, the salient explanation is that Moore, pace Wright, could know he

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[29] See Moore (1959).

has a hand only if he knows the conclusion; alternatively, pace Pryor and Davies, Moore could know he has a hand only if he didn't already doubt the conclusion.

If Moore doubted the conclusion, then, a consequence would be that his proof fails condition (3) for the reason that his premises would not be ones he knows to be true. But maybe Moore did know the conclusion! If he did, then setting aside whether he could convince someone else of the truth of it by offering his premises, there would no longer be grounds (granting that he knows the conclusion) for objecting to his claiming to know the premise. Interestingly, then, Moore would seem to meet all three conditions of a rigorous proof only if he already knew the conclusion of the proof (which for all we know he did).

Here some interesting results follow. Consider that if I am seeking to be convinced that there is an external world, and Moore offers me his Proof, the following is certain: whether the Proof brings me to conviction of its conclusion on the basis of the premises will be a matter that is not determined by whether his giving of the Proof satisfies the third condition of rigour. Because his satisfying that condition—that he knows the premises to be true—is one he'll satisfy only if he knows the conclusion, it follows that whether or not Moore's premise was known by him is something that I could know only if I knew he knew the conclusion, and thus, only if I knew the conclusion is true. But if I'm seeking to be convinced of it—and thus don't already know it—it follows that I can't know if Moore knew his premises to be true, and thus, whether it is rigorous.

More relevant for the purposes of bringing an inquirer to a rational conviction that there is an external world, then, is not whether Moore knows he has a hand, but whether the inquirer knows this (regardless of whether Moore does). A surprising consequence then is that the effectiveness of Moore's Proof does not depend on whether he knows he has a hand.

### 6.1 The Skeptic's Challenge

Given that it is the inquirer, and not offerer (Moore), who needs to know the premise in order for the Proof to be sufficiently rigorous, let's consider now that either of the following will be the case prior to my inquiry into the matter of whether there is an external world, which leads me to Moore's Proof:

1.  I already know that Moore (or I) have a hand.

or;

2.  I do not already know that Moore (or I) have a hand.

Wright would point out that (1) is off limits; I already know I have a hand only if I already know (or pace Pryor, don't doubt) that there is an external world. Thus, I am legitimately inquiring into whether there is an external world only if I don't already know I have a hand. If I don't already know I have a hand, though, then presumably I will need some proof that I do in order to know that I do;[30] only then, will the Proof be such that I know its premises are true. It is at this point that Fara proposes what he takes to be the key line that the skeptic runs against Moore, a line he thinks is at least tacitly shared by those who Moore's Proof fails to convince.

### SKEPTICAL LINE AGAINST MOORE (FARA)

1. Premise (1) [of Moore's main argument] cannot be proved.
2. Proof is required for knowledge.[31]
3. Therefore, Premise (1) is not known. (Fara 2008, 3)

It was already said that a legitimate inquirer could not already know the premise. That said, if the skeptical line is correct that an inquirer, who didn't already know the premise, cannot have the premise proved to her, then it follows that the inquirer could not know the premise, and thus the Proof could not convince her of its conclusion—and the skeptic beats Moore. It is at this point that Fara notes some interesting nuances in the present dialectic. He points out that the skeptic assumes against Moore that a proof of the premise is required in order to know it. This is however a specific point where Moore and the skeptic disagree. Fara refers here to Moore's own admission at the end of his lecture[32] that:

> I can know things which I cannot prove and among things which I certainly did know, even if (as I think) I could not prove them, were the premises of my… proof. (1959, 150)

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[30] I suggest this only as an available line to take here; Moore himself, as well as John Greco and Thomas Reid, reject this idea that proof is necessary for knowledge.

[31] Thanks to an anonymous referee for point out that the plausibility of this premise depends in part on how we are to understand 'proof'. On an especially strong conception of proof, according to which a piece of reasoning counts as a proof only if all deductions are explicitly articulated, the claim the knowledge requires proof looks less plausible. It looks more plausible if proof requires merely the ability to justify a claim. I take it that Fara likely has in mind something in between explicit articulation of formal proof (with explicit deductive steps) and mere possession of doxastic justification. Fara is not entirely clear on this point. Surely though a necessary condition for having proof, as operative in the premise's condition that "knowledge requires proof," is that one be in possession of strong inductive grounds on which one bases a belief, grounds to which one can (and would) appeal to justify the belief.

[32] From "Proof of an External World," from the *Proceedings of the British Academy* 25 (1939). Reprinted in Moore (1959).

Moore's thinking here supports what Fara calls Moore's Secondary Proof.

### MOORE'S SECONDARY PROOF

1. Premise (1) cannot be proved.
2. Premise (1) is known. Therefore,
3. Proof is not required for knowledge. (Fara 2008, 3)

Moore's Secondary Proof and the Skeptic's Line take the form of what Fara takes to be a "standoff." Moore, in his Secondary Proof, is assuming what the skeptic denies, in order to argue that proof is not required for knowledge. The skeptic is doing the reverse: assuming what Moore denies, in order to argue that a premise in Moore's Primary Proof is unknown (2008, 3).

As was noted, it doesn't matter for the purposes of persuading an inquirer of the Proof's conclusion whether Moore knows his premise to be true, but instead whether the inquirer does, and so this philosophical standoff should be approached with this in mind. That said, the gist of the disagreement is whether or not a proof for Moore's premise is required for knowing it. The skeptic says yes. Moore says no. Who wins?

According to Fara, Moore wins. His reasoning is that the standoff between the Skeptical Line and Moore's Secondary Proof only appears to be a deadlock, and that there's actually a significant difference, namely: the skeptic's argument does not constitute a proof of its conclusion. I take the line of reasoning here to be:

### FARA'S ANTI-SKEPTICAL ARGUMENT

1. The skeptic's argument constitutes a proof of its conclusion only if the premises are known.
2. The skeptic's second premise—that proof is required for knowledge—is known only if there would be a proof for it.
3. The skeptic is not in a position to give a proof for the premise that proof is required for knowledge.
4. Therefore, the skeptic's argument does not constitute a proof of its conclusion.

Fara's thought behind premise (3) is that, were the skeptic able to prove that Moore's premise is not known, then she would have given it immediately upon being presented with Moore's Primary Proof, and Moore would have gone home defeated (2008, 4). The landscape as Fara sees it is thus this: Moore and the skeptic are both adhering to the same standards of what constitutes a rigorous proof, and both agree that Moore's premise—his claim to know he has a hand—is not something he can prove. The skeptic though by her own

criteria (i.e. that proof is required for knowledge) must admit that the skepti-cal line doesn't constitute a proof of its conclusion (that Moore doesn't know he has hands); but Moore, by claiming that proof is not required for knowl-edge, would have to admit that his Secondary Proof fails to establish its con-clusion only if premise (2) in Moore's Secondary Proof (that Premise 1 is known) is false. But, says Fara:

> why should we think that the skeptic is right on this point? We have just seen that the Skeptic's Argument for the falsity of (1) does not constitute a proof, by the skeptic's own lights. (2008, 4)

If Fara's thinking is correct, then we learn two things: first, what it is about Moore's proof that incites skeptical response, and secondly, why it is that this sort of skeptical response is mistaken.

### 6.2  Contra Fara

Fara's take on the proof aligns with some key points with John Greco's (2002) diagnosis of Moore. What Greco explicitly defends is a reading along the lines of Thomas Reid, who also approaches the Proof in a way that is sympathetic to Moore's thought that proof is not required for knowledge.[33] Although Fara's critique takes a refreshingly new angle, and on key points is not without a philosophical precedent, it won't suffice as an adequate diagnosis of Moore, setting aside the matter of whether Moore wins or loses. I turn now to what I think are some pressing diagnostic problems.

First, consider that Moore was not unaware that, despite what he took to be the rigorousness of his Proof, "many philosophers will feel that I have not given any satisfactory proof of the point in question" (1959, 136). He was right. At least, Wright, Pryor and Neta aren't buying what he's selling. But that said, it should also be pointed out that Wright, Pryor and Neta aren't skep-tics—either about the external world, or (presumably) about whether Moore knew he had a hand. What this shows is that, at least for several prominent philosophers working on Moore, an admission that Moore knew he had a hand is perfectly compatible with having at the same time deep worries about the satisfactoriness of the Proof. Unless these writers are wildly unrepresenta-tive of most, the problem of the Proof must lie elsewhere. Fara, however, tries

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[33] A further idea Greco draws from Reid is that *perception* rather than argument is what it is that proves an external world. As Greco supposes, Moore's ambition with the proof is to show just this—by demonstrating through an argument for the existence of an external world that argument itself is insufficient for proving this.

to isolate the problem with the Proof by assuming first, as he says, that in giving the Proof, Moore was concerned to refute a certain type of skeptic.

> The skeptic [Fara has in mind] denies, that is, that Moore's utterance of Here is a hand, made while making certain gestures, expressed a proposition that was known, at the moment of utterance, to be true. (2008, 1)

If Fara is right, then Moore's intent in giving the Proof would have been to make the case that there's an external world in an effort to persuade, and indeed with a special focus to, those who reject or would reject that Moore knows he has a hand. But this claim is suspect. First off, Moore's philosophical acumen would have prevented him from thinking that it would be fruitful to convince those who doubt he knows he has hands by simply telling them, waving his hand, that he does. It's worth noting that Neta had drawn directly from Moore's writings in an effort to suggest this—that Moore's goal was to finally settle not the matter of whether there is an external world, but the matter of whether it is legitimate to entertain doubts that there is. Of course, what Moore intended is a matter separate from the actual persuasiveness his Proof would have for a legitimate inquirer into the truth of its conclusion. Nonetheless, it is a mistake to think first that Moore was targeting hand-doubters, and secondly, that the predominant cause for 'skeptical' reactions to Moore's proof is an antecedent skepticism about hands or the world as opposed to a more general skepticism about the Proof itself.

## 7. Sosa on Moore

### 7.1 The Idealist versus the External World Skeptic

Let's turn finally now to a different approach—one recently offered by Ernest Sosa (2009)—for locating and diagnosing Moore's Proof within the skeptical debate. Sosa supposes from the outset that the satisfactoriness of Moore's Proof (and hence, what would make it unsatisfactory) will be relative to the party of persuasion, or "for whom the premises might function as proper reasons" (Sosa 2009, 7). Here he contrasts two parties to whom the Proof might plausibly be directed: the idealist and the external-world sceptic. Following Sosa, we may distinguish these positions as follows: the idealist thinks "that there is no external world, that empirical reality is internal (to our minds)" as opposed to the external-world sceptic, who wants "evidence for the proposition that there are indeed such things as hands, whether external or not, evidence that will establish that proposition just through our use of reason and of what is given to us in experience" (Sosa 2009, 10).

On Sosa's view, Moore's Proof counts as sufficiently persuasive against the idealist at which he directed it even though, at the same time, he takes it to be entirely unpersuasive against the widely presumed target of the external-world sceptic. Why is this? Take the idealist: Bishop Berkeley. Berkeley and the external world sceptic both doubt (3). But Berkeley can agree with Moore that (1) is true. Says Sosa:

> Moore and Berkeley might even find it obvious that they are right in saying "Here is a hand" while leaving it open whether hands are internally or externally constituted. (Sosa 2009, 6)

Because Moore's Proof was preceded in his essay by a long and elaborate defense of (2),[34] the Proof might just be enough to persuade the idealist. Sosa at least supposes this much. Importantly, the idealist lets Moore take for granted that there are hands, whilst the external world sceptic does not:

> Whatever may be the right ontology of hands…our skeptic will in any case want their existence demonstrated through reasoning from the given. What the traditional external-world skeptic puts in doubt is precisely the existence of such objects beyond the mind of the subject. Therefore, one cannot just assume as a premise that there are such objects. Such objects beyond the mind of the subject remain in doubt for our sceptic, moreover, regardless of whether they are external or socially mind-constituted. (Sosa 2009, 10–1)

That the skeptic wants (1) demonstrated by reasoning from the given ups the burden considerably. After all, from just what is given to us in experience, how can we establish conclusively that there is a hand? This should be tough, given that we can't well reason by inference from only what is given in experience that we are not dreaming. Insofar then as Moore's Proof is taken as a response to the external-world skeptic, we see where it lacks: says Sosa:

> …in order rationally to believe that here is a hand, based on one's relevant perceptual evidence, one would have to presuppose with independent justification that there is an external world, on one or another proper conception of the external. (Sosa 2009, 19)

On this point of explaining why the Proof is no good against the external-world sceptic, Sosa begins to sound like Wright. Though rather than to make his point about the need to "presuppose with independent justification that there is an external world" in some effort to motivate an argument about

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[34] On this point Sosa writes: "Crucial to his anti-idealism is his painstaking inquiry into the very meaning of *externality*, which turns out to be a kind of mind-independence, so that the question whether there is an *external* world is that of whether there is a relevantly *mind-independent* objective reality" (2009, 6).

transmission failure, Sosa lets the observation about the premise-conclusion dependence relation stand at face value—on his view, the fact that the Proof fails against the external-world sceptic shouldn't have troubled Moore because Moore's actual target was the idealist in the first place. It was the idealist, not the external world sceptic, for whom Moore offered his proof, and at least with respect to the idealist, Sosa takes the Proof to be on comparatively much more solid footing.

### 7.2  Two Worries for Sosa

Sosa's take on Moore is quite clever and raises thus-far ignored questions about the varieties of skepticism, and further, it invites us to reconsider to whom the Proof was designed to convince. It would take us too far afield to trace out all these points of interest. Instead, I'll consider briefly two objections to Sosa's diagnosis—one minor and another major.

First the minor worry. This concerns Sosa's claim that the Proof really might be effective against the Berkeleyan idealist, his target. It might be, he thinks, because the idealist can agree with Sosa that here is a hand (on the basis of perception) and then—as Sosa sees it—the idealist is at this point open to persuasion as to whether the hand she agrees is here is externally or internally (mentally) constituted. And, as we said, this is what Moore tried to prove in the majority of his paper in which the Proof at the end has received all the attention. Says Sosa:

> Crucial to [Moore's] anti-idealism is his painstaking inquiry into the very meaning of externality, which turns out to be a kind of mind-independence, so that the question whether there is an external world is that of whether there is a relevantly mind-independent objective reality. (Sosa 2009, 6)

What I fail to understand is what you could ever say—no matter how painstakingly thoroughly you tried to say it—to convince Bishop Berkeley that the hand you both purport to see is something outside of his mind. Suppose for reductio that Berkeley has a maximally clear understanding of the meaning of externality and grants you all that you say about it. As I see it, the more clearly you explain externality (as Sosa lauds Moore for having done), the more precisely Berkeley will be inclined to identify his idealist view as a denial of it. Contrary to what Sosa supposes, it would seem that Moore's inquiry into the meaning of externality would not be an effective tool against any idealist who properly understands her own idealism as it stands to be a denial of externality. Indeed, (for example) the idea that things that seem to be met with in space really are met with in space is something that the idealist already denies. And so Moore won't persuade the idealist either by explaining to her the meaning

of externality or by showing to her things that appear to be met with in space, like hands.

The major worry for Sosa's diagnosis of Moore's Proof, though, is that he ultimately shies away from telling us what's wrong with it—what makes the Proof intellectually unsatisfying. Instead, Sosa's manoeuvre is to turn his focus on the premise (Here's a hand) and suggest how it is I could gain justification for believing this. In particular, what Sosa's interested in is what he calls reflective justification as opposed to mere animal justification.[35]

> Reflective justification is web-like, not transmissively linear. The web of belief attaches to the world through perception and memory. But each of its nodes depends on other nodes directly or indirectly. The web is woven through the rational basing of beliefs on other beliefs or experiences. There is no reason why such basing must be asymmetrical, however, no reason that precludes each belief from being based at least in part (perhaps miniscule part) on other beliefs. Each might thus derive its proper epistemic status from being based on others in a web that is attached to the world by causation through perception or memory. (Sosa 2009, 19)

From here, Sosa makes a final passing remark on Moore's Proof, at the conclusion of his essay:

> Reflective endorsement may now take its place in the web without any special problems. This is the key to the Pyrrhonian problematic faced when we reflect on Moore's Proof. (2009, 19)

Notice that Sosa's discussion has shifted topics. We began by considering what's wrong with Moore's Proof—a question that led us to distinguishing the proof's effectiveness against the idealist as opposed to the radical sceptic—and then Sosa shifts to have us evaluate Moore's Proof through the lens of evaluating the epistemological problem we face when trying to justify our claim to know the Proof's premise—that I have hands. Even if it's true that I could be doxastically justified in believing this (after all, Wright allows this), it wouldn't follow that I'd be doxastically justified in believing Moore's conclusion on the basis of it—and this is precisely Wright's point. Ultimately, then, Sosa's interesting discussion about the Proof's effectiveness against different kinds of skepticism, and (later) about we might conceive differently the structure of justified belief in a way that is useful for the purpose of defending our belief in the premise, there remains no compelling story for why Moore's Proof fails to satisfy us intellectually. Ultimately, then, Sosa's attempt to locate Moore's

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[35] See Sosa (2007) and (2009) for a comprehensive defense of this distinction in the theory of knowledge.

Proof in the skeptical debate, like Fara's, fails to illuminate clearly what it was we originally wanted to know.

## 8. Concluding Remarks

Our survey of recent work on Moore's Proof revealed an array of competing and illuminating diagnoses, none of which (unfortunately) was ultimately satisfactory—each come up short—some more than others—with respect to the goal of providing a compelling, defensible diagnosis for why Moore's Proof fails to satisfy us. I divided here these diagnoses into two categories—those which, in Part I, I considered as representing the 'mainstream' debate, and those which, in Part II, I considered as representing an alternative approach to Moore—whereby the Proof is assessed in the context of the skeptical challenge. Do the failures of recent work within these two strands of Moorean diagnosis count in favour of pursuing an entirely different strand of critique, and if so, what would this be? I'll take no stance here—and say only that despite the benefits gained from the current work on Moore's Proof, the lack of a satisfying diagnosis to be found invites further work and analysis.

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