# A Critical Examination of Moore's Proof of an External World

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# Contents

# Introduction

Moore's proof of an external world is one of the most befuddling and hard to interpret arguments one can find within epistemology. Moore himself states: "many philosophers will still feel that I have not given any satisfactory proof of the point in question".[1] However, it is quite difficult to pinpoint exactly why Moore's proof is unsatisfactory. While his proof is technically valid, it seems unconvincing. An argument is said to be cogent when it successfully convinces its audience. Crispin Wright defines cogency as the ability of an argument to persuade a previously unconvinced audience through its premises alone.[2] Thus, in order to determine whether Moore's proof is cogent, I will examine the justificatory structure of Moore's argument. If it turns out that Moore utilizes a proper justificatory structure, Moore's structure can be utilized to prove a host of previously difficult to prove hypotheses about the external world and metaphysics in general. If Moore's justificatory structure turns out to be improper, we will still have learned a great deal about the form of a proper justificatory structure.

Thus, while the broader philosophical issue to which this thesis speaks is whether Moore successfully argues for the existence of the external world, I will approach this topic through the specific case of the cogency of Moore's proof. Therefore, I will attempt to answer the following research question: Is Moore's proof of an external world cogent? On this question there exists already a lively debate. Many argue that Moore's justificatory structure fails since it ultimately begs the question. One of the most prominent philosophers arguing that Moore begs the question is Crispin Wright. Wright claims that Moore's argument is structured in such a way that the justification for his first premise depends on collateral information about the world. Included in this set of collateral information is ultimately also Moore's conclusion. Therefore, Wright concludes that Moore's argument turns out to be the " simple-minded *petitio* which it always seemed".[3] The dogmatists about perception disagree with Wright's conclusion. They argue that Moore does not need to assume his conclusion in order for his first premise to be justified. This justification for the premise is provided by our perception of the content that is represented by the premise. I believe both of these groups are misunderstanding Moore's argument. In this thesis, I will present two alternative ways of interpreting Moore's justification structure and I will examine whether these interpretations can deliver a cogent argument.

In order to answer this question, I will begin by providing the reader with some relevant background information. In my first chapter, I will give a detailed description of the Moorean proof itself, followed by my first personal interpretation of the proof. Moore claims that in order to prove the external world, one needs only to hold up a hand and exclaim "this here is a hand". However, Moore admits he cannot prove his premise. Even though he is not able to prove his premise, he still claims to know his premise to be true. My interpretation is such that Moore's notion of unprovable knowledge can be traced back to his extensive common-sense philosophy. Moore states that even though he cannot prove his knowledge of it, the common-sense view of the world is

[1] Moore, "*Philosophical Papers",* 148.
[2] Wright, "*(Anti-)Sceptics Simple and Subtle: G. E. Moore and John* McDowell", 331.
[3] Wright, "*(Anti-)Sceptics Simple and Subtle: G. E. Moore and John* McDowell", 337.

wholly true. Since the existence of his hands is included in this view, Moore can obtain unprovable knowledge. I will use this interpretation to prove that both the dogmatists and Wright misunderstand Moore. They neglect the central role played by common sense.

In my second chapter, I will begin my examination into the cogency of my proposed common-sense interpretation of Moore's justification structure. Moore uses the common-sense view to justify his first premise. He does so by employing two claims central to his common-sense philosophy. While the metaphysical claim states that the common-sense view is wholly true, the epistemological claim states that we know that the contents of this view are true. I will argue that Moore's arguments for these claims are insufficient and that he is unable to justify his claims about common-sense knowledge. This means that Moore is unable to justify his claim that common sense is able to transfer justification to his first premise. Since his antecedent ground for the first premise is not well justified, I claim that Moore is not able to persuade a previously unconvinced audience. Thus, the common-sense interpretation of Moore's proof is not cogent.

In my third chapter, I will present a second interpretation of Moore's justification structure. While the common-sense interpretation failed due to insufficient justification for the premises, my new procedural interpretation claims that Moore's premises justify themselves. Moore utilises what I will call the point-and-prove method. Moore argues that his justification structure is commonly accepted and that there should not be any specialised standards for the external world debate. Since his first premise is the application of a commonly accepted proof procedure, it does not require additional justification. However, I will argue that this procedural interpretation is still not cogent. I will do this through a contextualist theory of cogency.

Whether or not a certain method will lead to cogent arguments is dependent on the setting in which the arguments are made. While the audience in one setting might be convinced by an argument, the audience in another setting might not be convinced. The external world debate takes place in the theoretical setting. This audience does not expect a general description of what the external world is, but an answer to how the perceived external world should be interpreted. As such, this audience expects answers to their interpretative question to be absolutely certain. However, by employing the point-and-prove method, Moore is only able to give specific examples of perceived phenomena. The point-and-prove method is intrinsically unable to answer interpretative questions. Therefore, conclusions which are obtained through the point-and-prove method will not be absolutely certain and will not convince the audience of the external world debate. While there are settings in which the point-and-prove method is appropriate, Moore applies his method to the wrong debate. Therefore, I will conclude that both the procedural interpretation of Moore's proof and the common-sense interpretation are not cogent.

# Chapter 1: Moore's proof of an external world and some main responders.

In this first chapter I will begin by explaining Moore's proof of an external world in detail. In my explanation of the argument I will attempt to stay as close to the original text as possible. Following that I will present my common-sense interpretation of the proof. Then I will examine some of the main reactions to Moore – namely Crispin Wright and James Pryor – and lastly I will object to these reaction through the use of the common-sense interpretation.

## 1.1 Moore's proof

Due to its briefness, Moore's proof of an external world is inherently ambiguous. This makes it a notoriously difficult argument to understand completely and correctly. When responding to the argument, it is extremely easy to either fail to do complete justice to the hidden complexities within Moore's argument or to introduce elements from foreign epistemological theories that do not belong to Moore and he himself would not agree with. That is why I deem it important to begin with a very detailed explanation of the Moorean argument that stays as close as possible to the original text before giving my own response.

While Moore's argument is often misconstrued as a reaction against Cartesian sceptics who doubt our ability to gain knowledge about the external world, this is not actually the case. Moore is actually responding to a form of idealism that explicitly denies the existence of external material objects. In contrast to this form of idealism, scepticism is not about denying the existence of these objects, but is more accurately depicted as suspending any judgement whatsoever about their existence.[4] However, since Moore's argument for the existence of external objects actually ends up depending on him having knowledge about the external world, he refutes both positions. In the process of refuting idealism, he inadvertently refutes scepticism as well.[5] Thus, Moore's argument is ultimately also a response to the sceptic, but in order to completely understand Moore's argument it is important to know that Moore's intention was to establish the existence of an external world.

How does Moore establish the existence of material objects in an external world? Moore claims that there are a multitude of different proofs. Each one as rigorous as the last.[6] In logical form Moore's argument looks like this:

**P1.** This here is a hand.

**P2.** There are hands.

**P3.** If there are hands, then there must be an external world in which the hands exist.

**Conclusion.** There must be an external world filled with objects.

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[4] Hamilton, "*Wittgenstein and On Certainty*", 169.
[5] Hamilton, "*Wittgenstein and On Certainty*", 169-170.
[6] Moore, "*Philosophical Papers"*, 145.

Thus, as soon as someone argues that there is no external world, Moore claims that he merely needs to raise his hand, point towards it and exclaim “this here is a hand”.[7] Since it is a conceptual necessity that hands can only exist within an external world, the existence of Moore’s hands logically means that there must be an external world.[8]

After presenting his simple and glaringly obvious example of a proof of the existence of an external world, Moore insists upon it that this proof is rigorous, valid and perfectly conclusive.[9] There can be no doubt that the conclusion neatly follows from the combined premises of the argument. However, Moore does realize that his proof will be met with an almost universal dissatisfaction. According to Moore, this dissatisfaction is due to a confusion about what exactly it is that Moore is attempting to prove. Moore is merely interested in showing that the clear fact that he has hands, must mean that there is some external world. However, he claims that some people do not accept this as a proof of the external world. He has not proven what they require of a proof of the external world. What these critics demand is a proof of Moore’s premises.[10] They want Moore to prove that he actually has hands when he exclaims “here is a hand”. How does Moore know he is not merely dreaming that he has hands or that he is being tricked by an evil demon into falsely thinking that he has these appendages he calls hands. These sceptical scenarios might seriously undermine the credibility of Moore’s premises and until he can definitively prove his premises, these critics will not accept his argument as a definitive proof of the external world.

At this point in the argument, Moore shows some humility. He asserts that:

“I have conclusive evidence that I am awake: but that is a very different thing from being able to prove it. I could not tell you what all my evidence is; and I should require to do this at least, in order to give you a proof.”[11]

Thus, even though Moore holds himself to have good reasons to believe that he is not currently dreaming, he admits that he cannot definitively prove it. Since he cannot provide a clear formulation of all of his evidence for the premises of his argument, Moore claims that he cannot prove them.[12] However, the dissatisfaction with Moore’s proof is not only due to a confusion about what it is that needs to be proven. Moore claims that his critics will also argue that the conclusiveness of the proof he actually has given depends on whether Moore can prove his premises. Thus, if his critics are right and the proof of an external world can only succeed if the premises of the argument can be equally proven, Moore’s proof seemingly fails. Moore’s premise that he has a hand is seemingly merely based on good faith and – as the prevailing philosophical opinion points out – good faith cannot be a source for the premises of a convincing argument.[13]

[7] Moore, “*Philosophical Papers”,* 145-146.
[8] Coliva, “*The Paradox of Moore’s Proof of an External World”,* 235.
[9] Moore, “*Philosophical Papers”,* 146.
[10] Moore, “*Philosophical Papers”,* 148-149.
[11] Moore, “*Philosophical Papers”,* 149.
[12] Moore, “*Philosophical Papers”,* 149.
[13] Moore, “*Philosophical Papers”,* 149-150.

However, while Moore completely agrees with the statement that his premises cannot be proven, he vehemently believes that such a proof is not needed in order for his argument for the existence of an external world to be sound and conclusive. Moore claims that his premises are not merely based on faith. Instead, he knows his premises to be true. Moore claims that his premises are such that their truth can be known without the ability to prove this truth in any meaningful way.[14] Any attempts to prove that there really are such things as hands will end up being circular, since our knowledge of our having hands depends on our knowing external objects in an external world. However, even if we are not able to provide a proof of the premise that we have hands, we do know the premise to be true and since we know the truth of such premises we can use them in convincing and conclusive arguments.[15]

Moore's proof of an external world ends on this sudden and quite unexplained note. While the notion of unprovable knowledge seems integral to understanding the best version of the proof, Moore neglects to provide any further explanation of how this unprovable knowledge operates. However, I believe that we can best understand Moore's argument if the argument is placed in the broader context of the rest of Moore's writings. Moore's proof is not isolated. Instead, it is a consequence of Moore's common-sense philosophy. According to my interpretation of the proof, common sense plays a crucial role in understanding the proof itself. My interpretation states that the premises in Moore's proof do not depend on any deeper philosophical reasoning or any formal proof. They depend on common-sense knowledge. Since our common sense provides knowledge of the fact that we have hands, Moore is able to use this common-sense fact in order to demonstrate the existence of an external world.

In order to understand this common-sense interpretation, we must take a step back and examine Moore's earlier work "A Defence of Common Sense", which he wrote in 1925. In this text he presents his thoughts about the epistemological status of common-sense truisms. Moore is to be considered a common-sense realist. As such he holds our common-sense view of the world to be largely correct.[16] Moore fittingly starts his text by presenting a common-sense picture of the world. Through this picture he claims that he has a body in a pre-existing material world, that he knows that others have bodies and minds as well and that there are objects in this world with which he can interact.[17]

Following his list of truisms, Moore claims that he knows every item on his list to be true with certainty. Furthermore, Moore states that each and every one of us has also known this list to be true on at least one point in our lives.[18] However, how can Moore defend the claim that he *knows* his list of truisms to be true, instead of merely *believing* the items on his list. Moore maintains that he knows with certainty that every single item on his list is true and that he has had evidence these items, even if he cannot explain how he knows them or what the evidence is.[19] Furthermore, if Moore knows

[14] Moore, "*Philosophical Papers",* 150.
[15] Moore, "*Philosophical Papers",* 149-150.
[16] Baldwin, "George Edward Moore".
[17] Moore, "*Philosophical Papers",* 32-34.
[18] Moore, "*Philosophical Papers",* 34-35.
[19] Moore, "*Philosophical Papers",* 43-44.

the items on the list, it seems only natural that others know them as well. Moore claims that he can state his certain knowledge of these truisms due to their status as features of the common-sense view of the world.[20] He establishes the general principle: "If they are features in the Common Sense view of the world (whether 'we' know this or not), it follows that they are true".[21]

Thus, based on this general principle, we can deduce that any theory which contradicts Moore's common-sense view of the world must be mistaken. Moore broadly distinguishes two of these philosophical theories which are incompatible with the items on the common-sense list. While the first of these theories is a form of idealism, which explicitly denies the existence of any or all of the items on the list of common sense features of the world, the second kind of theory is of a sceptical nature. This sceptical theory denies that we have knowledge of any or all of the features on this list.[22] Since Moore established the truth of all genuine common-sense feature of the world, these two previously mentioned theories – which either deny the features themselves or our knowledge of them – are incoherent and unconvincing.

The refutation of idealism in "A Defence of Common Sense" already provides more context to Moore's proof. An idealist might say that there are indeed such things as hands, but that the existence of hands does not imply an external world. Even if there are hands, their existence is not based on any physical facts. Instead the existence of hands is dependent on our mind generating images or ideas of hands. While this kind of idealism refutes Moore's third premise, "A Defence of Common Sense" shows why Moore is not troubled by these idealist objections. Moore not only asserts the existence of common-sense features of the world, but he also explicitly states that there is no good reason to suppose that the existence of all these common-sense facts is logically dependent on some mental fact.[23] He claims that there is no good reason to suppose that a physical fact such as "this here is a hand" is dependent on a mental fact. Thus, the existence of these physical facts is independent of any supposed generative power of minds.[24] This illustrates why the third premise of Moore's proof can be called a conceptual necessity. Moore sees no reason to believe that the existence of hands would not imply the existence of an external world.

Thus, we have already seen how the context of Moore's comprehensive common-sense philosophy can aid our understanding of the proof. My common-sense interpretation uses this context to show how Moore defends his use of unprovable premises in his proof of an external world. Since Moore established his principle that any genuine common-sense feature of the world must be true, Moore has no need to provide any proof for his premises. As long as the statement that Moore has hands is reliably taken to be about an undisputed common-sense feature of the world – which seems uncontroversial – Moore can assume its truth and knowability. Since it is common-sensical that there are such things as hands, Moore knows that he has hands.

[20] Moore, "*Philosophical Papers",* 44-45.
[21] Moore, "*Philosophical Papers",* 45.
[22] Moore, "*Philosophical Papers",* 37-38.
[23] Moore, *"Philosophical Papers",* 45.
[24] Moore, *"Philosophical Papers",* 50-51.

Thus, under Moore's theory of common sense, his premises are sound and in no need of any further proofs or justification.

### 1.2 Wright vs. Moore.

When he was formulating his proof, Moore already expected that many would be heavily dissatisfied with his proof. One of the most prevalent objections to Moore's proof states that it is in some way circular or guilty of begging the question. One of the more sophisticated accusations of question-begging is provided by Crispin Wright. Wright begins by reaffirming the validity of Moore's proof and by agreeing with Moore that due to the plausibility of the first premise in the argument, there is no need to prove this premise.[25] Nonetheless, Wright claims that the proof still fails due to the justificatory structure of the proof.[26]

He argues that in order for a proof of something to be convincing, the proof ought to be cogent. According to Wright: "And a cogent argument is one whereby someone could be moved to rational conviction of – or the rational overcoming of doubt about – the truth of its conclusion".[27] An argument can only be cogent if someone who was not already persuaded by the conclusion, can be convinced by the premises of the argument to believe the conclusion of the argument. Thus, a cogent argument needs to contain a transmission of warrant. A warrant for the premises of an argument is transferred to the conclusion only if to receive a warrant for the premises entails that we thereby have a warrant to believe the conclusion. Someone who is entirely foreign to a certain argument but otherwise perfectly rational should be convinced of the conclusion purely by understanding the premises. Thus, in the case of question-begging arguments, transmission of warrant will fail. In these cases the warrant of a certain conclusion will not be based on the warrant of valid inferences within the premises, but it will instead be based on the conclusion itself.[28]

Wright will argue that the warrant Moore has for his premises is not transmissible to his conclusion. He compares Moore's proof to the following argument:

**P1.** Jones has just placed an X on a ballot paper.

**P2.** Jones has just voted.

**C.** An election is taking place.[29]

Within a cogent argument, a warrant for the first premise of the argument will provide defeasible evidence for the second premise which in turn entails the conclusion. However, in the case of the argument above this transmission of warrant does not take place. Wright argues that under normal circumstances the first premise of the election argument would provide evidence directly to the conclusion and thereby provide evidence to the second premise. If the circumstances surrounding this argument were

[25] Wright, "*(Anti-)Sceptics Simple and Subtle: G. E. Moore and John* McDowell", 331.
[26] Pryor, 351-352
[27] Wright, "*(Anti-)Sceptics Simple and Subtle: G. E. Moore and John* McDowell", 331.
[28] Wright, "*(Anti-)Sceptics Simple and Subtle: G. E. Moore and John* McDowell", 331-332.
[29] Wright, "*(Anti-)Sceptics Simple and Subtle: G. E. Moore and John* McDowell", 333.

abnormal, the first premise would provide no more evidence for the second premise. Imagine that the society in which Jones lives and presumably votes was such that it held practice elections as many times as normal elections. In these unconventional circumstances the first premise would no longer be providing us with any evidence for premise 2. Due to the high likelihood of Jones's participation in a practice election, we cannot assume that Jones has voted based solely on the first premise.[30] Therefore, in these unconventional circumstances, the first premise can only provide evidence for the second premise if we have antecedent reasons to accept the conclusion. The first premise depends on the conclusion for its justification. Thus, the warrants we have for the first premise are not transferred to the conclusion of the argument.[31]

As seen above, the transmission failure in the argument only occurs if we imagine a scenario in which the unconventional circumstances of the argument are possible. The example shows that evidence for the first premise in the election argument is not necessarily enough to transfer justfication to the conclusion. The warrant we have for the first premise is dependent on collateral information regarding the circumstances in which the argument is made. The evidence for the first premise only warrants the conclusion in the right circumstances and is thus dependent on our collateral information. While this is not necessarily problematic, transmission failure does occur when the conclusion of an argument contains elements of the relevant collateral information for the warrant. In these cases the warrant for accepting the conclusion of the argument depends on the conclusion itself.[32] This means that the argument begs the question and is not cogent.

In order to show that Moore's proof is vulnerable to transmission failure, Wright re-formulates the proof. He claims that a more appropriate and proper formulation of the proof looks like this:

**P1.** My experience is in all respects as of a hand held up in front of my face.

**P2.** Here is a hand.

**C.** There is a material world. (Since any hand is a material object existing in space.[33]

Wright claims that this formulation shows that Moore's warrant for believing in the existence of a material world depends on his experience. Moore supposedly believed that his experience provides him enough evidence to infer that he has a hand and that this justifies him to conclude that there must be a material world. However, Wright points out that the sceptic has more than enough possible scenarios in which Moore's experience proves insufficient to conclude that he actually does have a hand. Experience alone cannot rule out that an evil demon is making us foolishly and falsely believe that we have hands. Thus, the warrant Moore has for believing his conclusion is based on defeasible evidence. Wright grants Moore that this alone is not enough to create a transmission failure.[34] However, the defeasible evidence Moore has for his

[30] Wright, "*(Anti-)Sceptics Simple and Subtle: G. E. Moore and John* McDowell", 333-334.
[31] Wright, "*(Anti-)Sceptics Simple and Subtle: G. E. Moore and John* McDowell", 334.
[32] Wright, "*(Anti-)Sceptics Simple and Subtle: G. E. Moore and John* McDowell", 335-336.
[33] Wright, "*(Anti-)Sceptics Simple and Subtle: G. E. Moore and John* McDowell", 336-337.
[34] Wright, "*(Anti-)Sceptics Simple and Subtle: G. E. Moore and John* McDowell", 336.

first premise is only transferred to the second premise and the conclusion if we have the relevant collateral information to rule out these sceptical scenarios. Chief among these pieces of information is the hypothesis that there is a material world which is mostly in line with our experience. Without his conclusion already in place, Moore's premises do not have the evidential force to prove the conclusion. Thus, Moore's premises depends on his conclusion and therefore beg the question. Wright concludes that the argument is not cogent.[35]

### 1.3 Pryor vs Wright.

While James Pryor has his own share of issues with Moore's proof, especially with the dialectical power of the argument, he defends the justificatory structure of the proof. According to Pryor, the main question in assessing the justificatory structure of the proof is whether or not our perceptual justification to believe that we have hands enhances the credibility of the proposition that there is a material world.[36] He asserts that we are justified in believing a certain proposition when it is epistemically appropriate for us to believe this proposition. However, our justification for believing a proposition can be undermined by certain other propositions. If we have prima facie justification to believe a proposition, this justification can be defeated by these other undermining propositions. Thus, in order to be justified in believing a hypothesis, one must lack justification for its undermining propositions.[37] However, not every theory of justification treats the relation between justification and undermining propositions in the same way.

This brings us back to Moore's proof. Pryor states that Moore bases the justification he has for the premise that he has hands on his perception of his hands. As we have seen in Wright's reaction to Moore, there are plenty of propositions that undermine Moore's premise. Pryor calls these undermining propositions *non-perceiving hypotheses*.[38] For example, the hypothesis that Moore is hallucinating undermines the justification Moore has for his premise. Pryor distinguishes two ways of treating the relation between Moore's premise and the non-perceiving hypotheses. A conservative about perception would claim that in order for Moore to be justified in the premise that he has hands, he needs antecedent justification against the non-perceiving hypotheses. Thus, in order for us to be justified in believing the content of our perception, we ought to have prior justification for believing that our justification is trustworthy. According to Pryor, Wright falls into this category.[39] Since Wright argues that Moore can only derive justification from his experience if he is able to defeat any non-perceiving hypotheses, this conservative label seems appropriate. In contrast to the conservative, a liberal about perception would claim that we do not need any prior justification against the non-perceiving hypotheses in order for us to be justified in

[35] Wright, "*(Anti-)Sceptics Simple and Subtle: G. E. Moore and John* McDowell", 337.
[36] Pryor, "*What's Wrong with Moore's* Argument", 351.
[37] Pryor, "*What's Wrong with Moore's* Argument", 353-354.
[38] Pryor, "*What's Wrong with Moore's* Argument", 355.
[39] Pryor, "*What's Wrong with Moore's Argument*", 355.

believing the content of our perception. Pryor counts himself among the liberals about perception.[40]

Pryor bases this liberalism on his dogmatism about perception. As a dogmatist Pryor believes that when it perceptually seems that P is the case, we have immediate prima facie justification for believing P. This justification is not dependent on any collateral information, any justification for other hypotheses or even our awareness of our experience. We obtain justification for believing the content of perception purely by having the perception. While no evidence is needed for perceptual beliefs, this perceptual justification can still be undermined by other beliefs or propositions.[41] This only occurs when there is explicit evidence for these underminers. In the absence of this evidence our justification is sound and secure.

However, what quality does perception have that makes these kinds of immediate justifications possible? According to Pryor these epistemic powers are due to the phenomenological structure of perception. When we perceive something, we obtain the feeling of seeming to ascertain the truth what we perceive. The mental episode of perception represents its contents as though by having the episode we can thereby tell that the content is true. [42] Pryor explains that: "When you have a perceptual experience of your hands, that experience makes it feel as though you can just see that hands are present".[43] Thus, the perceptual experience itself shows us that hands exist.

However, it is important to distinguish what it is exactly that our perception shows us to be the case. We are liable to conclude more from our perceptual experience than is justified. Pryor states that perception merely justifies us in believing perceptually basic propositions. These are the propositions that only purport to represent the basic content of our perceptual experience. Pryor explains perceptually basic propositions as: "They are about manifest observable properties of objects in the world".[44] There is no good reason to think that our perceptual experience represents complicated concepts or that our perception justifies us in making inferences based on what is shown to us in perception. While our perception might show us blue uniformed men arriving, we cannot thereby conclude that the police are arriving. Based on perception alone we cannot know that the blue uniformed men are police.[45]

How does Pryor use this dogmatism about perception to defend Moore's proof? We have seen that Wright argues that Moore's justification for his first premise assumes his conclusion. This ensures that his premise cannot be used as evidence for the conclusion and that his conclusion is therefore unjustified. However, Pryor argues that while Moore's first premise is dependent on the conclusion, this is only in the sense that any evidence against the conclusion would count as evidence against the first premise.[46] Pryor claims that any argument with this kind of dependence relation is

[40] Pryor, "*What's Wrong with Moore's* Argument", 353-355.
[41] Pryor, "*The Sceptic and the Dogmatist*", 519.
[42] Pryor, "*What's Wrong with Moore's* Argument", 356-357.
[43] Pryor, "*What's Wrong with Moore's* Argument", 357.
[44] Pryor, "*The Sceptic and the Dogmatist*", 539.
[45] Pryor, "*The Sceptic and the Dogmatist*", 538-539.
[46] Pryor, "*What's Wrong with Moore's* Argument", 358-359.

epistemologically respectable.[47] Since Pryor is a dogmatist about perception he claims that Moore's argument does not beg the question.[48] This would of course mean that Wright's critique is unfounded. While Pryor does not explicitly state how this dogmatist defence of Moore will unfold, it is clear how this defence will go. Since Moore is justified in assuming his first premise based solely on his perception of his hands, he does not need any antecedent justification for believing his first premise. Therefore, the first premise of his proof does not depend on his conclusion and the proof in general is not question begging.

### 1.4 Are Wright and Pryor misunderstanding Moore?

So far we have seen two reactions to Moore. One was critical of the justificatory structure of Moore's proof, while the other defended it. While I disagree with Wright's critique of Moore, I do not believe that Pryor offers the strongest possible defence. While I have no pressing or relevant problems with dogmatism as an independent theory about perception, it is not well suited to defending Moore. Pryor argues that Moore obtains a warrant for his first premise through the perception of his hands. Any defence of Moore must be in line with his original theories and beliefs and I believe that Moore would vehemently disagree with any interpretation of his argument that bases the cogency of the argument on perception. To illustrate why Moore would disagree on this point, I will briefly take on the role of the sceptic.

Imagine a moderate sceptic. This relatively tame sceptic is fine with admitting the existence of a material external world. However, he still wants to obstruct our ability to speak in a meaningful and content-rich way about any objects existing in this world. I argue that this kind of sceptic could latch on to Pryor's dogmatism and use it as a foundation for his sceptical efforts. Pryor himself admits that our perception only justifies the belief in perceptually basic propositions. Pryor claims that these basic propositions do not only represent basic sense-data and experience. They are representations of actual observable properties.[49] However, the sceptic would argue that concepts do not belong in perceptually basic propositions. Based on perception alone we could not grasp the exact content of the concept of a hand, or any other concept for that matter. Perception merely justifies us in believing the actual content of our perceptual representation. Concepts of objects are always richer than what is actually found in perceptual representations. Instead, concepts are imported from our theoretical knowledge and used by us to combine our perceptual representations with our conceptual framework. Since concepts are not inherent to our perceptual representation and are thus not shown to be true, the sceptic would argue our perception does not justify us in believing any proposition that includes a general concept. Thus, the sceptic would argue that Moore is not justified in assuming the premise that this here is a hand. Instead, we are merely justified in believing the proposition that there is a flesh-coloured round surface with five appendages.

[47] Pryor, "*What's Wrong with Moore's* Argument", 361.
[48] Pryor, "*What's Wrong with Moore's* Argument", 361.
[49] Pryor, "*The Sceptic and the Dogmatist*", 539.

These kinds of basic propositions would still serve their purpose in Moore's argument. The fact that there is a flesh-coloured surface would still mean that there is a material world in which this surface exists. However, I argue that Moore would not be satisfied with this more basic version of his argument. While Moore sets out to prove the existence of an external material world, he also aims to establish the common-sense view of this world. According to this common-sense view, there exist such things as hands. Since we know that there are hands, we should be able to speak of them in meaningful ways. To only be able to speak about the flesh-coloured surfaces with five appendages would not make sense if we know that the proposition 'there are hands' is true. Therefore, Moore would argue that we should just be justified in believing that there are hands, instead of merely being able to speak basic propositions. Thus, while the dogmatist might believe that Moore's proof can be defended by basing the justification for his first premise on perception, Moore would be dissatisfied with this kind of interpretation of his proof.

As mentioned earlier, Moore's dissatisfaction with the dogmatic defence of his proof would be due to the central role of perception in the justificatory structure of his proof. Basing the justification for the premises on perception will open the door for the sceptic to propose analyses of perceptually informed propositions that conflict with the common-sense view of the world. Moore realises this risk in "A Defence of Common Sense". He claims that even though he knows that he is perceiving a proper hand, it remains unclear how propositions about the content of perception ought to be analysed. Moore states that he only knows two things certain about the correct analysis of propositions about the content of perception. When we claim "I see a hand" we only know for certain that we are perceiving some actually existing sense-data and that this sense-data is not itself a hand.[50] What the relation is between the sense-data and the actual hand we are claiming to perceive is uncertain. Moore claims that there are multiple possible answers to the previous question and that all of them are subject to serious objections.[51] Thus, it follows that if we do not know how these perceptually informed propositions should be analysed exactly, it is also unclear what types of perceptually informed propositions we are justified to believe in. I believe this to be the reason why Moore would be dissatisfied with any defence of his proof that bases the justification he has for believing he has hands on his perception of his hands.

Thus, I claim that this is the reason why Moore does not base his first premise on perception. Moore would argue that dogmatism or perception in general is not needed as a ground for his first premise. Moore does not need perception to justify his belief in the proposition that he has hands, because he has common-sense knowledge of his hands. Since the existence of hands is a feature of the common-sense view of the world, we know it to be true. According to my own Moorean interpretation the status of his first premise as a representation of the common-sense view grants him all the justification he needs to assume it in his proof, even if Moore is without the ability to provide a prove for the premise. I argue that neglecting this common-sense aspect of Moore's argumentation in any reaction to Moore shows a crucial misunderstanding of his proof. According to the common-sense interpretation, Moore's proof is based on

[50] Moore, "*Philosophical Papers",* 54.
[51] Moore, "*Philosophical Papers",* 55-58.

common sense. Since Pryor neglects the common-sense aspect of the proof in favour of his own dogmatic theory, Pryor misunderstands the central point of Moore's proof. However, is Moore's proof destined to be question begging without Pryor's dogmatic defence?

This is not the case. A much simpler reaction to Wright will suffice to defend Moore's proof. I claim that Wright misunderstands Moore in a similar way as Pryor does. However, while Wright also misunderstands the central role played by common sense in Moore's proof, he does it in a different way than Pryor. Pryor attempts to substitute common sense with perception, but Wright assumes that Moore's first premise depends on the collateral information that there is a material world. Otherwise he would have no ground for believing the first premise. I argue that Moore would most likely agree that the justificatory structure of a proof cannot feasibly be constructed in this way. The justificatory structure that Wright assumes Moore's proof to have clearly begs the question. Moore himself admits this since he claims that any evidence for his first premise would beg the question.[52] However, that is precisely why Moore does not base the justification for his first premise on either his experience or on any collateral evidence about the world. Wright's account of the proof interprets the first premise to explicitly report on experience. Yet, as I have just argued, Moore's first premise is not based on experience.

According to the common-sense interpretation, this mistaken reliance on experience is not necessary when interpreting Moore. Moore has another ground for the premise that he has hands. Since it is part of the common-sense view of the world that there are such things as hands and Moore claims that we know this to be true, he just needs to appeal to the common-sense status of the proposition that there are hands. Because we know that there are hands, Moore has more than enough justification for his first premise. While it is also part of the common-sense view of the world that there is a material world, this is not included in the antecedent ground of the first premise on. Moore's antecedent justification solely exists lies solely in the fact that it is a matter of common sense that there are hands.

Thus, I argue that Wright also misunderstands Moore's proof. Wright argues that in order to rule out sceptical scenarios which undermine his proof, Moore needs to assume his conclusion in order to be justified in using his premises. However, Moore claims that our common-sense view of the world rules out any sceptical scenarios that would undermine his first premise. Thus, just as Pryor does, Wright neglects the central role played by common sense and misunderstands Moore's proof of an external world. While Pryor and Wright draw different conclusions about the cogency of Moore's proof, both mistakenly interpret Moore's proof as being related to experience. Both Wright and Pryor view Moore's proof as an isolated argument requiring additional elements and concepts for it to make sense. However, according to my interpretation, Moore's proof is not isolated and is instead part of Moore's broader common-sense philosophy.

[52] Moore, "*Philosophical Papers",* 150.

# Chapter 2: Can Justification be Derived from Common Sense?

In this second chapter, I will begin my own critical examination of Moore's justificatory structure under the common-sense interpretation. I will dissect Moore's common-sense based justification for his first premise into two claims. In the first section I will argue that Moore's metaphysical common-sense claim is dependent on his epistemological common-sense claim. In the second section I will argue that this epistemological claim is not properly justified. I will conclude that Moore fails to show that common sense alone can justify his first premise.

## 2.1 Debunking Moore's metaphysical claim.

In the first chapter, I presented my interpretation of Moore which claims that Moore derives his justification for the premise that he has hands from the common-sense view of the world. Since the premise that this here is a hand – when we gesture towards it – is seemingly a part of this common-sense view, Moore has justification for assuming the premise. It is commonsensical that there are hands and therefore there is no further need to justify the premises. This interpretation allows Moore to circumvent basic objections that accuse him of begging the question. The justification for the first premise does not depend on the assumption of the conclusion, but instead depends on our knowledge of and the truth of the content of the common-sense view of the world. However, the mere fact that Moore now has a way to defend himself against the objections that he begs the question, does not mean that the cogency of his argument has been proven. If I were to claim that there is an external world, because a purple dinosaur appeared in my dream and told me so, no one would claim that my proof begged the question. However, no one would be convinced by this argument because purple dinosaurs in dreams cannot reliably justify beliefs. Thus, before anyone can decide whether Moore's proof is cogent, the question "can the common-sense view of the world transfer justification onto a premise" must be answered.

Firstly, one might wonder how the justification for a premise can be derived from a more comprehensive view that includes the premise itself. The question, "can the common-sense view of the world transfer justification onto a premise", might be somewhat misleading. The common-sense view does not transfer justification directly unto Moore's premises. It does so indirectly through the properties that propositions acquire by virtue of being part of the common-sense view. Moore claims that by being a component of the common-sense view, a certain proposition obtains specific properties.[53] It is these properties that justify our belief in common-sense propositions. Thus, while the common-sense view is ultimately the ground for our immediate justification in believing these propositions, this justification is derived from the properties of the proposition. However, if the common-sense proposition were not part of the common-sense view, we would lose our reason for believing it had these properties. The properties in question are: (1) the propositions of the common-sense view are wholly true ,and (2) we know them to be true.[54]

[53] Moore, "*Philosophical Papers*", 44-45.
[54] Moore, "*Philosophical Papers*", 44-45.

Thus, Moore clearly claims that he does not need any evidence for his first premise because he knows that his first premise is true. However, in claiming this Moore merely removes the burden of proof from his first premise and places it on his claim that he knows for certain that he has hands. As I have previously claimed, this claim is just a particular instantiation of his larger claim that the contents of the common-sense view of the world have the properties of being true and of us knowing them to be true. Thus, Moore's proof hinges on a rather bold claim about the nature of the common-sense view. In order to determine the cogency of Moore's proof, we must examine his evidence for this claim. His central claim can be divided into two parts. First, Moore claims that the contents of the common-sense view of the world are wholly true. The second part consists of the claim that we know for certain that these contents are true. I will begin my analysis with the first part.

Thus, Moore's metaphysical claim is that the common-sense view of the world is wholly true.[55] However, this metaphysical claim is seemingly secondary to his epistemic claim. Moore defends the truth of the common-sense view by stating "if we know that they are features in the 'Common Sense view of the world', it follows that they are true."[56] Moore introduced the common-sense view as a list of propositions which we all know to be true. Thus, to say that a certain proposition is a component of the common-sense view is to claim that we have knowledge of the proposition.[57] If we know something, it must be true. At first sight this argument is quite convincing. The proposition that we cannot know anything untrue is epistemically basic. Thus, if we know all the propositions whose content is representative of the common-sense view, they must be true. However, this argument does absolutely nothing to independently establish the truth of the common-sense view of the world. This is not necessarily problematic, but it does create a dependency between Moore's truth claim and his epistemic claim.

However, Moore does offer one independent argument in favour of his truth claim. He argues that any philosopher who claims that the common-sense view of the world is not wholly true will inevitably hold inconsistent views. Moore argues that if one holds that the common-sense view is false, one cannot convincingly admit the existence of other people or of the external material world. The existence of these material objects is a crucial element of the common-sense view. Thus, to be truly consistent in the denial of the common-sense view, one must deny these elements as well. However, Moore argues that deniers of the common-sense view have all postulated propositions alluding to the existence of material objects. As soon as one of these challengers incorporates the term 'we' in one of their propositions, they indirectly confirmed the existence of material objects and the external world. Thus, all who deny the existence of the common-sense view have held other beliefs inconsistent with their denial.[58]

I find this argument to be weak and unconvincing. The mere use of propositions which include terms alluding to the existence of the material world does not necessarily entail that the speakers of these propositions genuinely believe in the existence of the

[55] I call this the metaphysical claim since it describes Moore's view that the common-sense propositions accurately describe reality.
[56] Moore, "*Philosophical Papers",* 44.
[57] Moore, "*Philosophical Papers",* 45.
[58] Moore, "*Philosophical Papers",* 40-41.

material world. For example, one who denies the existence of other people might still adopt the term 'we' or any other term referring to other people for purely pragmatic reasons. According to this scenario, the propositions which Moore deems inconsistent are actually just useful and intentionally false ways of speaking. The mere use of a pragmatic way of speaking does not inherently mean that the speaker actually holds the content of this way of speaking to be true. One cannot determine which propositions another person holds to be true based solely on the terms they choose to use. There are a great many possible reasons for choosing to use a particular term besides attempting to refer to the truth.

Furthermore, as Thomas Baldwin points out, Moore does not actually engage with or meaningfully analyse any of the philosophers who he believes have inconsistent views on what is true.[59] Baldwin claims that there are many convincing ways in which one can deny the reality of matter while still allowing the existence of material objects. Moore defines 'real' as 'existent'. Thus, Moore claims that 'material things are real' just means that material things exist. However, there are many other ways in which the term real can be interpreted. Baldwin uses the theory of George Berkeley as an example. While Berkeley has no difficulties with admitting the existence of matter, he does not see matter as something real. Berkeley would claim that the term 'real' refers to the underlying structure of reality which is made of ideas instead of matter. While matter exists, it is not mind-independent and thus not real in the relevant sense. Thus, while he believes that there are such things as hands, chairs and other people, none of these things are real in the sense of being mind-independent. Thus, since Berkeley denies the mind-independent status of the common-sense view of the world – and thus denies that the common-sense view is wholly true - but still refers to the existence of material objects, Moore would claim that they hold inconsistent views. However, Baldwin points out that if one meaningfully engages with the theories of these challengers of the common-sense view, it becomes apparent that one can consistently believe that even though material objects are not mind-independent, they still exist. [60] Since Berkeley does not deny the actual existence of mind-dependent matter, he does not speak inconsistently when he refers to the existence of this matter. Thus, since the common-sense view holds matter to be mind-independent, Berkeley can consistently reject the common-sense view while still referring to actually existing matter.

Thus, the positive arguments in favour of the metaphysical basis for Moore's common-sense view is unconvincing. Besides the weak argument that those who deny the truth of the common-sense view of the world inevitably hold inconsistent views, Moore does not present any other positive arguments in favour of his metaphysical claim. This means that Moore has no satisfying independent evidence for his metaphysical claim. The justification for the metaphysical claim relies entirely on the epistemic claim. Therefore, in analysing whether Moore can derive justification for his first premise from the metaphysical claim, we must examine whether Moore is properly justified in asserting our knowledge of the common-sense view.

[59] Baldwin. "Moore and common sense", 115.
[60] Baldwin. "Moore and common sense", 115-116.

## 2.2 Debunking Moore's epistemological claim.

Moore's epistemological claim entails the proposition that we have certain knowledge of the contents of the common-sense view of the world. Once again Moore is frugal with evidence for his bold claim. The most straightforward positive argument in favour of the epistemological claim is remarkably similar to his argument for the metaphysical claim. However, instead of accusing his challengers of holding inconsistent beliefs, Moore argues that those who deny our knowledge of the common-sense view are self-contradictory.[61] He claims that these challengers maintain that no human being has ever known the contents of the common-sense view for certain. They state that matters of common sense are not matters of knowledge but are actually matters of commonly held beliefs. However, these claims imply the existence of other people who also did not have knowledge of the matters of common sense and the existence of other people who have held common-sense beliefs. Thus, Moore concludes that the deniers of his epistemological claim are destined to be self-contradictory.[62]

The argument that the sceptic denial of our knowledge of the common-sense view is self-contradictory – because it relies on references to these contents – can be easily refuted. As Thomas Baldwin rightly points out, Moore's central claim that the sceptical denial of common-sense knowledge implies the existence of other people is simply mistaken. Baldwin states that the sceptic merely has to say that if there were any other people they would not have any knowledge of the contents of the common-sense view. This formulation of the denial avoids any commitment to the existence of others and is thus not self-contradictory. Moore bases his argument against the sceptical challengers on a very specific and detailed formulation of the sceptical denial.[63] This formulation is unnecessary and more basic formulations of the denial do not have the same implications regarding the existence of other people. Once again Moore's attempts to show that those who challenge his common-sense philosophy are incoherent or self-contradictory fall short.

Does the failure of this argument mean that Moore is without any evidence for his epistemological claim? This would also mean that Moore is without any evidence for his metaphysical claim. However, Moore would maintain that he has no need for any evidence or argumentation for his claims. Just as he claimed to have unprovable knowledge of his first premise, he claims that his larger position on the epistemological status of the common-sense view requires no evidence. In 'a Defence of Common Sense' Moore presents his view that one can have unprovable knowledge with more context. Moore claims that the propositions of common sense are matters of knowledge and not of belief.[64] The fact that there is such a thing as common-sense knowledge shows itself to him. According to Moore he cannot provide any direct evidence for his epistemological claim. Instead he knows them indirectly through his other knowledge. While there is no available direct evidence for his knowledge of the propositions of common sense, Moore's knowledge becomes clear through his knowledge of other propositions which serve as evidence for the propositions of

[61] Moore, "*Philosophical Papers"*, 42-43.
[62] Moore, "*Philosophical Papers"*, 42-43.
[63] Baldwin, "Moore and Common Sense*"*, 120-121.
[64] Moore, "*Philosophical Papers"*, 44.

common sense. However, Moore cannot recall which other pieces of knowledge served as evidence for his common-sense knowledge. While it is abundantly clear that there must have been evidence for the common-sense knowledge, Moore does not know how he knows them.[65]

While this argument gives Moore's 'unprovable knowledge' thesis more context, it remains vague. the most reasonable interpretation is that Moore claims that the common-sense knowledge becomes clear to him through the vital role it plays in our personal collection of things we know. All of the things we claim to know for certain are built upon the propositions of the common-sense view. For example, to claim that I know that I am right now writing this sentence implies that I also know such things as people exist – since I am one. Thus, common-sense knowledge fulfils the role of foundational building blocks within our personal database of knowledge. Since we – seemingly – know an enormous amount of things and the propositions of common sense are embedded within this system of knowledge and thus form the foundation of this pile, it is an almost impossible task to figure out exactly what evidence we must have had for the common-sense knowledge. However, since common-sense propositions form the background of our entire system of knowledge, our knowledge of them remains clear to us. Thus, given the very structure of our knowledge, Moore is ultimately resigned to taking the existence of common-sense knowledge for granted, without being able to provide any definite justification for it.

This is the most appealing version of Moore's epistemological claim. I claim that Moore accurately depicts how actual human beings process and use information. It is a basic epistemological fact that some of these things we claim to know are built upon other things we take to be knowledge. From this, it follows that some propositions go so far back in this supposed chain of knowledge that it becomes unclear what our precise evidence for them was. However, I do not believe that this argument is strong enough to justify that Moore's epistemological claim can be used as a justificatory basis for premises in a cogent argument.

Moore claims that we must have had evidence for our common-sense knowledge at one point, but that our common-sense knowledge is so embedded and foundational in our system of knowledge that it becomes impossible to know which evidence we had. Moore seems to suggest that the reason for our inability to recollect evidence is temporal. He claims that "I only know them because, in the past, I have known to be true *other* propositions which were evidence for them".[66] Moore suggests that since our knowledge of common-sense propositions goes so far back temporally, that we are no longer able to recall which evidence we had. This is a dubious notion. If we were once able to justify our common-sense knowledge, we should be able to undergo the same justifying process all over again. The common-sense view is not something that undergoes many changes and the propositions that were evidence for them should be evidence still. Moore has not given any reasons why we cannot acquire the same evidence again. If proposition P1 once justified our knowledge of common-sense proposition C1, P1 should still be available to us if we again attempt to gain evidence

[65] Moore, "*Philosophical Papers",* 44.
[66] Moore, "*Philosophical Papers",* 44.

for C1. I could agree with Moore that we – temporally – lost the internal ability to readily recollect P1. However, beyond the mere triviality that we sometimes forget what our evidence was for a certain conclusion, Moore has simply not given any compelling reason why we cannot gain the same evidence again – whether or not this evidence is internal or external. The mere facts that C1 is the foundation of other beliefs and that the time at which we acquired knowledge of C1 is long ago, forms no conceivable reason as to why P1 should not be available any more.

Furthermore, if Moore is right in claiming that we were once at a point in the developmental stage of our system of knowledge that we had evidence for C1, someone who is at this earlier point in their development should be able to know which evidence they have for C1. Moore claims both that other people undergo the same development in their common-sense knowledge as he does and that there is a specific temporal moment at which he had evidence for C1. Thus, there must be people who have evidence for C1. However, Moore also claims that it is a general feature of our common-sense knowledge that we cannot prove it. Thus, there is a glaring inconsistency in his picture of how we attain common-sense knowledge.

I argue that these reasons as to why Moore's argument is not strong enough to establish common-sense knowledge provide us with a cause to seriously doubt the argument. However, this reason becomes amplified once it is realized that common-sense beliefs can fulfil the exact same role as common-sense knowledge within Moore's depiction. Moore claims that common-sense knowledge shows itself to us as the foundation of our system of knowledge. Moore's only evidence for this claim is that there appears to be a foundation to our presumed knowledge. However, this foundation does not need to consist of common-sense knowledge. The exact same role can be played more convincingly by common-sense beliefs. Thus, instead of common-sense knowledge, there can be such a thing as foundational common-sense beliefs.

According to Moore, common-sense knowledge forms the foundation of our collection of things we know. While our assumed common-sense knowledge does not provide direct evidence for some of our more sophisticated or scientific pieces of knowledge, it does establish concepts that are used within these scientific claims. However, this same function can be fulfilled by common-sense beliefs. According to this alternative, our strongly held beliefs would provide us with concepts upon which our other beliefs build. Our shared belief in the existence of a material world with material objects inhabiting it is still the foundation of other beliefs. Because I hold these common-sense beliefs, I am justified in believing more specific things about this material world. Thus, common-sense beliefs still show themselves through other beliefs. Therefore, since Moore's supposed evidence for common-sense knowledge entails that its shows itself as the foundation for all our knowledge, his evidence can also be explained by common-sense beliefs showing themselves as the foundation for all our other beliefs. While this alternative picture denies that common-sense beliefs provide the background for knowledge, it allows the existence of knowledge which is wholly independent from any common-sense beliefs. Of course, we can also have knowledge of the content of common-sense beliefs when there is independent evidence for the content of these beliefs.

I argue that the version of common-sense beliefs is actually more convincing than Moore's account of common-sense knowledge. While I have argued that Moore has serious difficulty in explaining how we are no longer able to recall our evidence for common-sense knowledge, this explanation is not at all difficult when it comes to common-sense belief. While the notion of unprovable knowledge is epistemically dubious and in need of justification, this is not the case for the notion of unprovable beliefs. The ordinary person holds many strong beliefs without any conclusive evidence for these beliefs. Thus, the notion that we cannot definitely prove our common-sense beliefs is unproblematic and more convincing than Moore's account of common-sense knowledge. Therefore, Moore's arguments for the epistemological claim fail to be convincing. Since the metaphysical claim depends on the epistemological claim, the latter's lack of credibility undermines the former.

### 2.3 Does the common-sense interpretation fail?

According to the common-sense based interpretation of Moore's proof I presented in chapter 1, the justification for Moore's first premise is derived from its cohesion with the common-sense view. Since Moore's premises are part of the common-sense view and since we know for certain that the content of this view is true, we have knowledge of the first premise. Moore is able to successfully use his common-sense philosophy to circumvent the accusations that his proof begs the question. This has the consequence that the believability of his proof now depends fully on Moore's ability to convince an audience of his common-sense philosophy. However, in this second chapter we have seen that Moore has been unable to convincingly argue that the mere inclusion in the common-sense view automatically means that we know a certain proposition to be true.

According to Wright's definition of cogency, the cogency of an argument is determined by its ability to convince previously unconvinced readers of the truth of the conclusion through independent premises. However, Moore has offered very little argumentation for his theory that a proposition being commonsensical implies that we know this proposition to be true. The few arguments Moore did offer turned out to be unconvincing. While most ordinary people obviously believe that they know that we have such things as hands, Moore's arguments for his common-sense philosophy do nothing to convince those who were not already convinced of his conclusion. I argue that Moore presents no arguments that would reasonably persuade a previously unconvinced audience. Without any compelling or persuasive evidence, Moore has not given those who are sceptical of his conclusions any reason to believe that a proposition being commonsensical gives us any immediate justification for believing the proposition to be true. Thus, while not question begging, I do not believe that the common-sense interpretation of Moore's proof is cogent.

# Chapter 3: A Contextualist Response to Moore's Procedural Claim.

In this chapter I will present one more interpretation of Moore's proof. This interpretation is centred on the particular method Moore applies. I will present my interpretation by explaining the hidden procedural claim within Moore's proof. Then I will examine whether Moore's proof is cogent under this procedural interpretation. I will start by presenting my own contextualist theory of cogency as an alternative to the basic definition of cogency we have used so far. I will argue that this contextualist theory can be used to prove that even under the procedural interpretation, Moore's proof is still not cogent. Finally, I will address and reject an important Moorean objection to my contextualist theory.

### 3.1 The possibility of a new interpretation of Moore's proof.

In the last chapter, we saw that under the common-sense interpretation of Moore's proof, Moore still fails to deliver a cogent argument. The common-sense interpretation removes the burden of proof from Moore's first premise and places it on the claim that if a proposition is part of the common-sense view, then we know it to be true with certainty. However, we have seen that – at least in the texts we have included in this examination – Moore appears either unable or unwilling to argue for this new hidden premise. Thus, Moore's proof is still not cogent. However, not all is lost for the proponents of Moore's proof. So far we have seen that the briefness and ambiguity of "A Proof of an External World" can cause a lot of interpretations of the proof to misunderstand the point Moore is trying to make. Nonetheless, this ambiguity can also be a gift for the Moorean defenders. The ambiguity inherent in Moore's proof opens the door to many differing interpretations. So far I have only examined my common-sense interpretation. Now, I aim to switch gears and examine the procedural interpretation of Moore's proof.

First, I will offer a brief meta-philosophical note about judging the plausibility of differing interpretations of the same text. While there are many factors that determine the plausibility of an interpretation, interpreters should attempt to deliver the strongest possible version of an argument. Thus, if one interpretation fails to present a cogent argument, an alternative interpretation might solve the issues and present a stronger version. If we apply this interpretational methodology to Moore's proof, we could end up with the strongest version of the proof yet.

The main interpretative factors which led to the plausibility of the common-sense interpretation were (1) its cohesion with Moore's comprehensive common-sense philosophy, (2) its non-question begging nature and (3) the clear meaning it gave to Moore's notion of unprovable knowledge. Due to Wright's objections, it has become clear that interpretations of Moore's argument should attempt to provide an antecedent ground for Moore's first premise. However, in order for the interpreted argument to be cogent, the antecedent ground needs to be argued for in a convincing way. This has proven to be difficult for the common-sense interpretation and was ultimately the reason for its failure. Thus, a stronger interpretation would be an interpretation of the proof which does not attempt to provide a traditional antecedent ground for the first premise. Instead it could argue that the proof has no need for such an antecedent ground or any further justification. This argument would deny the objection that Moore

needs to further justify his first premise by relying on experience, common sense or any other philosophical notion. I argue that such an interpretation is possible by highlighting the – hidden – procedural claim within "A Proof of an External World".

### 3.2 Moore's procedural claim.

The extent to which an argument is unconvincing because its premises lack justification depends on the standards we apply to what counts as a cogent argument. Since Moore has not been able to provide a convincing antecedent ground for his first premise, his only non-question begging option available is to say that no such antecedent ground is necessary. The basic definition of cogency we have used so far says that an argument or proof is cogent when it is able to reasonably sway an audience. However, it is not entirely clear when it is reasonable to presume a previously unconvinced audience will be swayed by an argument. Is it possible for a premise to be structured in such a way that it is just intrinsically justified? This would mean that the premise justifies itself and does not need to rely on any antecedent ground. We saw that Pryor argued that premises based on perception justify themselves. However, Moore's proof is not based on perception or experience. Is there another way in which Moore's premises can be intrinsically justified?

Moore needs to argue that the premise "this here is a hand" is inherently reasonable when one points towards their own hand and there is no need for any further justification. This is not necessarily an easy task to accomplish. As soon as Moore proclaims his first premise, the sceptic will object to this premise being justified. The sceptic would issue the familiar sceptical argument which claims that we cannot merely assume that our visual input of external objects is correct. The sceptic would argue that such an assumption cannot be made in a cogent argument. The sceptic would use the familiar undermining scenarios to prove that merely pointing towards a hand does not justify one to proclaim "here is a hand". Since there are a multitude of sceptical scenarios that would explain the perception of pointing towards a hand and none of these scenarios include there actually being a hand, we cannot conclude for certain that there is actually a hand when we point towards it. Thus, the sceptic would conclude that due to its dependence on an uncertain assumption within the premises, Moore's proof cannot be convincing to a reasonable audience.

Moore is clearly aware of this kind of argument against his case. Within the background of "Proof of an External World", he argues against the sceptic's demand for absolute certainty. Moore claims that his proof and its premises are perfectly in line with ordinarily accepted proofs in everyday scenarios. He claims that in our ordinary lives we constantly accept proofs of Moore's sort as absolutely conclusive evidence for particular conclusions. Furthermore, Moorean proofs can be counted on to persuade reasonable people in ordinary situations.[67] Moore presents an ordinary example of a certain person questioning if there are indeed three separate misprints on a particular page. Moore states that:

[67] Moore, "*Philosophical Papers",* 147-148.

"Surely he could prove it by taking the book, turning to the page, and pointing to three separate places on it, saying 'There's one misprint here, another here, and another here': surely that is a method by which it might be proved!"[68]

Moore's point here seems to be that since this method for proving things is perfectly acceptable in ordinary life, it should be acceptable in the specific external world debate. Furthermore, his point-and-prove method is not only acceptable in ordinary life, according to Moore, his method has been proven to work. Then, if the point-and-prove method is effective in these situations in which we ordinarily rely on it, it should be equally acceptable in the debate surrounding the existence of an external world. This gives us insight into what I call Moore's procedural claim. This claim simply states that the point-and-prove method is a proven and effective way of proving conclusions and should therefore be accepted as a procedure for proving philosophical conclusions as well.

The procedural interpretation of the proof I suggest places this procedural claim front and centre. Since the actually existing misprints are not really part of the common-sense view, the common-sense interpretation has no real use for these passages in which Moore presents his procedural claim. However, the procedural interpretation can easily make sense of them. I will now explain how my procedural interpretation frames these passages and makes them coherent with the rest of Moore's text.

The passage in which Moore presents his procedural claim begins with Moore stating that his proof satisfies some of the obvious conditions for rigorous proofs. He states that (1) the conclusion of his proof is not included in the premises, (2) he knows his premises to be true, and (3) his conclusion follows from his premises.[69] Then he claims that he does not know whether there might be more conditions. However, he maintains that his proof procedure is generally accepted as a way of proving conclusions.[70] I interpret this as Moore stating that his procedural claim is not about whether or not his proof procedure satisfies the standard conditions for proof procedures in academic debates. As such, Moore is not arguing that such standards should be lowered or altered. He is simply not very concerned with what the conditions on rigorous proof procedures are. He is merely concerned with pointing out that it is an obvious matter of fact that the point-and-prove method is an inherently reasonable way of proving conclusions. If Moore is correct and the point-and-prove method is an entirely reasonable way of proving things, why should he not be allowed to use this method in the external world debate?

Since we frequently rely on the point-and-prove method in our everyday life and in these ordinary situations we believe that the point-and-prove method provides us with certain evidence, the method itself is obviously sound and effective. Therefore, since the point-and-prove method is effective, yet not accepted by our philosophical and academic demands for absolute certainty, it seems logical to conclude that our artificial demands on the justification structure of proofs are simply unreasonable. Thus, I interpret the procedural claim as meaning that the sceptic's demand for absolute

[68] Moore, "*Philosophical Papers",* 147.
[69] Moore, "*Philosophical Papers",* 146-147.
[70] Moore, "*Philosophical Papers",* 147.

certainty is too strong. The sceptics can win any debate by placing artificially high demands on the premises of their opponent. However, in doing so they ignore the ordinarily accepted method of proving conclusions. By making his procedural claim, Moore denies the sceptic their usual reply of placing almost impossible demands upon Moore's proof procedure. Moore's own premise is perfectly in line with the precedent set up in ordinary circumstances and for this reason, the cogency of his proof should not be questioned. Since premises that can be proven through the point-and-prove method are ordinarily taken to be justified, why should this be different in the case of this one specific debate.

According to my procedural interpretation it is the use of the point-and-prove method which makes the first premise inherently justifiable. Since the point-and-prove method is a reasonable way of proving conclusions and the first premise utilizes this method, the first premise is inherently reasonable. This signifies how my procedural interpretation of Moore's proof circumvents Wright's accusation of begging the question. Wright interprets Moore's first premise as being based on the experience of seeming to perceive a hand. In order for us to be justified in believing this experience-based premise we would require prior confirmation that there is an external world. However, under the procedural interpretation, Moore's first premise is not based on experience. Instead the first premise is the mere application of a commonly accepted proof procedure. The reasonableness of this proof procedure is based on prior successes and its widespread use, not on the existence of an external world. Thus, Moore's proof does not beg the question.

### 3.3 Cogency contextualism.

According to the procedural interpretation, the cogency of Moore's proof depends on the procedural claim. Thus, in order to conclude whether Moore's proof is actually cogent, we must evaluate the procedural claim. Before examining my own reaction to the claim, it is worthwhile to consider some other plausible reactions. One of the more obvious ways the sceptic can react to Moore's procedural claim is to deny the general soundness of the point-and-prove method itself. As we have seen, the procedural claim consists of two parts. The first part is the confirmation of the soundness and effectiveness of the point-and-prove method in general and the second part is the logical deduction that the method will also prove to be sound and effective in the external world debate. If the sceptic were to successfully reject the first part of the claim, the point-and-prove method would no longer be admissible to the external world debate and Moore would lose that which justifies his conclusion and premises.

One way for the sceptic to reject the overall effectiveness of the point-and-prove method is to claim that Moore has not actually provided us with any evidence of this effectiveness. The sceptic would say that Moore's main argument is the statement that "we all of us do constantly take proofs of this sort as absolutely conclusive proofs of certain conclusions—as finally settling certain questions, as to which we were previously in doubt."[71] Thus, Moore attempts to validate his method through its

[71] Moore, "*Philosophical Papers",* 147-148.

established use and popularity. However, the sceptic would be eager to argue that the mere fact that a certain method is popular and often used does not necessarily mean that the method is in any way effective. The history of science is full with scientific methods which were widely used, but turned out to lack effectiveness. According to this sceptic, Moore is conflating the effectiveness in convincing with the effectiveness of results. Since there are no other accepted and justified ways to definitely prove that the results of the point-and-prove method are indeed correct, there is no definitive way to prove that point-and-prove method delivers any actually correct conclusions. Thus, the sceptic would reject Moore's procedural claim, arguing that the effectiveness of the point-and-prove method cannot be demonstrated in any domain — let alone in the debate over the external world.

This way of arguing against Moore's procedural claim misunderstands the general point Moore is attempting to make. Any argument which intends to undermine the general effectiveness of the point-and-prove method in ordinary domains is destined to be weak. It is generally unreasonable to demand of a proof procedure that it can prove the absolute correctness of its results. While logic and math are accepted to be generally effective ways of producing conclusions, proving the absolute correctness of their results is a dubitable task at the least. For example, in order to prove that the results of *modus ponus* as a proof procedure, one would most likely have to utilize *modus ponus* itself. This would not prove anything since the proof itself would beg the question. Comparable arguments can easily be made for any other proof procedure. In order to prove the soundness of math as a proof procedure, one would need to utilise mathematical concepts and in order to prove the soundness of the point-and-prove method one would need to point out specific examples of the success of the method. Thus, proving the absolute soundness of specific proof-procedures cannot be done. However, we obviously still rely on and trust mathematics and logic as proof-procedures. Our historical experiences show that even though we cannot formally proof the effectiveness of their results, their results are nonetheless effective and useful. We rely on mathematics and logic because the results of mathematics and logic have proven to be reliable. Thus, their results are as certain as they can be under the circumstances.

Exactly the same argument applies also to the soundness of the point-and-prove method. Except for very specific scenarios such as hallucinations, the results of the point-and-prove method are as reliable as the results of any other established proof-procedure. The soundness of the method is not something that can be proven through any formal or theoretical means, but it shows itself to us every day through our personal experiences. Our everyday experiences show us that to point at a certain object and to proclaim its existence is a generally reliable way of convincing ourselves and others of its existence. If I were to ask someone on the street if they could show me what time it was and they would point to their finely tuned watch and say that it is currently 19:49, it would be unreasonable for me to doubt their conclusion. If I were to say that they cannot know that it is 19:49 because an evil demon could have given them a false perceptual input, I would be too demanding of their method of proving which time it is. Anyone using the point-and-prove method in an everyday scenario could reasonably expect their audience to be convinced by their evidence.

Furthermore, if we can clearly see an object and demonstrate its existence through the point-and-prove method, we can reliably use this object for certain purposes or procedures. It is safe to assume that it has never once happened that we can clearly point towards a table which then suddenly disappears as soon as we attempt to place a cup on it. Since we can clearly rely on the point-and-prove method and we have yet to be proven wrong, the results of the point-and-prove method are as certain as they can be. Moore agrees with this point and argues that if the conclusions of arguments which use his method could ever be certain, then his method can prove them for certain.[72] By stating this, Moore implies the rejection of the demand for absolute certainty and establishes his own kind of Moorean certainty.

Thus, I believe that Moore makes a valid point about the ordinarily accepted procedures of providing evidence. Since no proof procedure can ever be proven with complete certainty, it is safe to assume that the point-and-prove method is a reliable proof procedure under the right circumstances. For these reasons, I argue that it is futile to object to the first part of Moore's procedural claim. However, this does not mean that Moore's entire procedural claim is valid. I believe that the second part of Moore's procedural claim does not hold up under scrutiny. I argue that Moore's deduction from the general soundness of the point-and-prove method to its particular soundness within the external world debate can be proven to be false. In order to successfully make this argument I will first have to lay some groundwork on what I call the contextualist theory of cogency.

So far we have used Wright's definition of cogency which states that cogency is determined by an argument's ability to persuade a previously unconvinced yet reasonable audience. I believe that this definition captures the basic essence of cogency. However, if this definition is fully examined, it has some unforeseen implications. If cogency is determined by an argument's ability to persuade audiences, it entails that whether or not arguments and proofs are cogent is dependent on the sensibilities and expectations of people. If cogency is defined as such, the particular cogency of an argument is not determined by any objective standards or rules, but by whether or not an argument is actually able to sway any actual persons. This brings up an interesting query. To what degree is the cogency status of an argument a subjective matter. If the cogency of an argument is determined by its power to sway actual individual persons, it seems intuitive that cogency is subjective to at least some degree. After all, we ought to keep in mind that we are dealing with actual persons and not everyone is convinced by the same arguments.

Someone more radical might argue that an argument's cogency is completely subjective. This entails that whether or not an argument is cogent varies from person to person and that its cogency is fully dependent on an individual's expectations and standards. This radical subjectivist would argue under the assumption that everyone has different rational capabilities. This would mean that an argument which has a contradiction in its premises might be cogent to someone with no logical education and very low standards. My intuitions indicate that this conclusion is too extreme. I believe one can reasonably assume that in general people have comparable rational

[72] Moore, "*Philosophical Papers",* 147.

capabilities. Thus, a more reasonable and practical approach is to assess what the general expectations and standards of people are and to assume these general expectations as the standards for cogent arguments. This approach would allow us to ignore individuals and their particular sensibilities and instead judge the cogency of an argument based on a general assessment of what would convince the average person. Thus, while the cogency of arguments is still subjective, it does not need to be relative to the sensibilities to individual persons.

However, according to my proposed definition of cogency, whether or not arguments are cogent remains dependent on the general sensibilities of the average audience. This property has some unforeseen consequences for when arguments can be considered to be cogent. While the extremities of individual outliers should not be a deciding factor in whether or not an argument is cogent, we should still take into account that whether or not the average audience will find an argument to be cogent is to some extent dependent on the context in which the argument is made. Our experiences show us that whether or not an argument is able to convince us depends heavily on the context of the debate. For example, while an argument might be able to convince us during a casual conversation with a friend, the very same argument might fail to convince us if it is brought up during a professional discussion. In the latter setting we might judge the argument according to a different metric or put the argument under more scrutiny. Thus, it is not the case that an argument can be generally cogent. There cannot just be one standard to which every argument must adhere in order to be cogent. Since cogency is determined by its ability to sway an audience and audiences are very sensitive to the environment they find themselves in, the cogency of arguments is influenced by its environment and setting.

Thus, whether or not an argument is able to sway an audience is dependent on a multitude of extraneous factors. Until now, I have highlighted the importance of the setting in which an argument takes place, but this importance can be boiled down to the different expectations people have in different settings. What we happen to expect of a supposedly cogent argument will influence our decision on whether or not an actual argument manages to live up to these expectations. It is these expectations which determine whether an argument is able to convince an audience. While having a casual conversation with a friend, my expectations of what constitutes a good argument are lower than they would be if I were in an academic environment. Thus, it would take less for an argument to sway me. So far, the picture I have established is that within different settings people generally have different expectations of what constitutes a satisfying proof or argument and this influences whether or not an argument is able to convince us. While one can easily argue that there exists a whole array of different settings in which an argument can take place, all of them with different expectations and standards, for the sake of this argument I will limit myself to distinguishing two alternate settings.[73] These settings are the pragmatic setting and the theoretical setting.

The pragmatic setting encapsulates casual conversations and generally more everyday situations. The aim of the debates that take place within the pragmatic setting

[73] In the section 3.5 I will give the distinction between the two settings more nuance.

is not to discover the absolute truth about a certain matter, but to gain information which is deemed good enough for the purposes of those that participate in the debate. Our expectation of arguments and proofs within the pragmatic setting is that they offer us useful conclusions. We do not need to know that the conclusions we are offered are absolutely certain, we just need to know that we can rely on these conclusions for further actions and inferences. Arguments are made in the pragmatic setting when the conclusions of these arguments are to be used for further ends or when we are just not interested in the absolute certainty of the conclusions. The participants of debates in the pragmatic setting might just be interested in getting an approximation of the truth. For example, when someone argues that the time is 13:39 because they saw it on their finely tuned watch, I will be convinced of their argument. The reason for my conviction was that I was simply not interested in finding out the time with absolute certainty. Instead I might have needed the time to make an appointment and I had enough faith in the reliability of the conclusion of the argument. In conclusion, our expectations of what constitutes a good argument in the pragmatic setting involve the ability to rely on the conclusion of the argument. We do not require absolute certainty of pragmatic arguments.

The theoretical setting is in stark contrast with the pragmatic setting. The theoretical setting encapsulates academic debates or generally debates between those who have a genuine interest in the truth of what they are debating. Instead of being focused on the utility of the conclusions, the participants of debates within the theoretical setting have an intrinsic interest in the truth of the conclusions themselves. While these conclusions might still be used for further ends, actions or reasonings, this is no longer the primary reason for our interest in the argument. The audience of theoretical arguments holds a stake in the truth itself. Since this kind of audience has an intrinsic interest in the truth of the matter at hand, a mere approximation of the truth does not suffice as the conclusion of an argument. Even if a definitive answer to a certain question might seem impossible, the audience of theoretical debates is still solely interested in the definite truth. Since an approximation of the truth is not interesting to those in the theoretical setting, a greater emphasis is placed on the absolute certainty of conclusions. Since the aim of the theoretical debate is to obtain this absolute certainty, the participants attempt to come as close to absolute certainty as possible and do not settle for anything else.

While this twofold distinction is overly simplified and there are of course many settings in between these to two extremities, the distinction does offer us a valuable insight. We have so far differentiated these two debate settings from each other by the differences in the expectations and intentions of the participants of the debate. However, the differences of the interests and intentions of the participants have effects on the precise nature of the questions that are asked. The same exact question can have radically different interpretations. While the question is linguistically identical in all the settings, according to the appropriate interpretation of the question, different kinds of answers might be expected. For example, the question “what is a table” can be interpreted in at least two ways. First of all, the question might be interpreted as inquiring into a general description of the object that we call a table. This kind of general question can be answered by a generic description of the attributes of tables which can be supported by specific examples of things around us which we call tables.

However, according to the second interpretation of the same question, we are instead inquiring into the precise – metaphysical – nature of the object ordinarily called a table. Answers to these interpretative questions move beyond the ordinarily accepted descriptions of tables. Answers to interpretative questions are instead supposed to give insight into the phenomena that hide behind the veil of ordinary descriptions. For example, an interpretative answer to the question “what is a table” might theorise that a table is actually nothing but a social construct or even a simulation conjured up by a brain in a vat. These interpretative questions and answers are often metaphysical or highly scientific in nature and cannot be easily supported through specific everyday examples.

As to which kind of question is more suited to either the pragmatic setting or the theoretical setting, the answer is quite simple. Since the audience of the pragmatic setting is primarily interested in useful answers or in approximate truth, they simply have no interest in or need for the interpretative answers. In order for us to be able to use a table for further ends, there is no immediate relevance in knowing the exact metaphysical nature of a table is. Whether or not a table is merely a collection of the smallest particles or an illusion conjured up by an evil demon, it doesn’t matter to the pragmatic audience as long as an argument is able to convince them that they are able to place something on the table. The audience in the pragmatic setting expects a cogent argument to be able to teach them how to recognize and use tables. For these ends, a general description of the ordinarily perceived properties of tables is perfectly sufficient.

However, the audience within the theoretical setting aims to obtain as much knowledge as possible about the subject of their debate. Theoretical audiences debate because they want complete knowledge on a certain matter. This means that they want to truly understand the nature of what they debate. While they are generally not interested in knowing how many molecules are in a table, they are interested in knowing that a table is indeed composed of molecules. These audiences have no use for ordinary descriptions. If they discuss tables, they do so in order to gain a complete understanding of tables. Thus, since these theoretical audiences aim to understand their topic of choice completely, interpretative questions are extremely relevant to their aims. As I have explained, the interpretative questions inquire into the hidden nature of an object. In order to understand an object completely, these interpretative questions are essential.

### 3.4 cogency contextualism as a critique to Moore

How does this contextualist picture apply to Moore’s proof of an external world? I argue that, my contextualist theory of cogency provides a partial objection to Moore’s procedural claim and the procedural interpretation of Moore’s argument. In order to evaluate whether Moore is right in asserting that the point-and-prove procedure offers convincing arguments in all debates, it is important to examine whether his proof procedure is cogent in all available settings.

Examining the ability of the point-and-prove method to convince an audience within the pragmatic setting is not that difficult. The pragmatic audience expects a useful answer, in the form of a general description of the phenomenon in question. As such they do not demand their answers to be absolutely certain. I claim that the point-and-prove method is perfectly able to provide answers which fulfil these expectations. Through the use of the point-and-prove method, one can provide explicit examples of certain phenomena. These examples can exemplify general descriptions of phenomena. If an audience expects to learn what a table is, a specific example will help the audience understand the general attributes belonging to tables. Thus, answers which are generated through the use of the point-and-prove method can suitably contribute to answering general description questions.

However, we have not yet determined whether the point-and-prove proof structure will be considered cogent in the pragmatic setting. Since the audience in pragmatic settings has no demands for absolute certainty, the point-and-prove method can be used to obtain sufficiently certain conclusions. Since the point-and-prove method is not able to reject any undermining scenarios, it doesn't obtain conclusions with absolute certainty. The Moorean concept of certainty views certainty as coherence with our previous experiences. I claim that this kind of certainty – although not absolute – is sufficient to convince an audience in the pragmatic setting. Thus, within the pragmatic setting the point-and-prove method will be considered cogent.

Thus, assuming most everyday debates take place in the pragmatic setting, Moore is correct in asserting that the point-and-prove method is cogent in everyday scenarios. However, Moore takes this previous assertion as evidence that the point-and-prove method can be applied to the external world debate. I claim this to be mistaken. Firstly, we need to understand that the external world debate is firmly placed in the theoretical setting. The sceptic has no interest into an ordinary description of easily observable phenomena. Instead, the sceptic inquires into the exact possibility of the existence of the external world. They desire to know whether we can have knowledge of the observable phenomena, not how these phenomena would generally be described. The sceptics are not asking the external world question for pragmatic reasons. Most sceptics would agree that in our ordinary actions, we can depend on the existence of an external world filled with material objects. The sceptic does not support total passivity and inaction. Most sceptics would agree that – due to pragmatic reasons – we can simply assume the existence of the external world in ordinary situations. However, the sceptic aims to question our ability to know anything about the external world with absolute certainty. Any answers to the sceptic's inquiries are expected to at least strive for absolutely certain.

Furthermore, due to the sceptic's inquiries into our exact abilities to know for certain anything about the external world, they are implicitly asking about the exact nature of this perceived external world. The metaphysical origin of the external world influences our ability to gain knowledge about it. Our ability to obtain knowledge of the external world is greatly dependent on whether our perceived notions of the external world are all illusions or respond to actual material facts. Thus, the sceptic is asking an interpretative question. Therefore, since the external world debate consists of

interpretative questions which are expected to be answered with absolute certainty, I claim that this specific debate takes place in the theoretical setting.

However, my main claim in this chapter is that the point-and-prove method is not appropriate for this theoretical setting. The point-and-prove method delivers proofs through the assertion of – and the literal pointing towards – everyday facts. The method asserts the existence of tables through literally pointing out an actual table. In doing so, the point-and-prove method is only able to assert general descriptions of phenomena. By offering specific examples, the point-and-prove method successfully proves our ordinary conception of phenomena, but it does nothing to address the underlying reality of these conceptions. By its nature, the point-and-prove procedure is fundamentally unable to give clarity on the metaphysical or hidden nature of the phenomena it addresses. Thus, the point-and-prove method cannot give appropriate answers to interpretative questions. This inability means that the point-and-prove method cannot address the undermining scenarios the sceptic applies to deny our ability to gain knowledge about the external world. Consequently, by not addressing these undermining scenarios at all, any answers obtained through the point-and-prove method fail to meet the demands for absolute certainty that are required by the sceptic. While it depends on the particular persons within the theoretical audience to judge whether an argument or proof is able to deliver its conclusion with absolute certainty, by not even attempting to live up to these demands and expectations at all, any user of the point-and-prove method ensures that no theoretical audience will ever be convinced by the conclusion. Therefore, since the proof procedure of Moore's proof solely makes use of the point-and-prove method, no theoretical audience will be swayed by Moore's conclusion that there is an external world. This is why the proof is not cogent.

The above is not to say that Moore's proof can never be cogent. Its cogency is well established in any pragmatic setting. Thus, the first part of Moore's procedural claim still obtains. However, Moore's crucial mistake is thinking that cogency in one setting implies cogency in all settings. Thus, Moore uses a correct method, but he applies it to the wrong debate. Moore might still argue that the sceptic's demand for absolute certainty is futile. He will object that this kind of certainty can never be reached and that all debates in the entire theoretical setting are therefore mere pointless endeavours. However, whether or not the debate is worthwhile does not change the fact that Moore's proof does nothing to address the specific issues or demands raised by the audience of the debate. The debate is at its core metaphysical and Moore is simply not participating in metaphysics. Thus, by the rules of cogency I have established, Moore's proof according to the procedural interpretation is simply not cogent.

There is only one open end still remaining. In chapter 2, I used Wright's basic definition to argue that the common-sense interpretation of Moore's proof is not cogent. Is this claim still plausible under my new contextualist theory of cogency. Since the contextualist theory of cogency is grounded in Wright's definition, I argue that my refutation of the common-sense interpretation is still sound. The audience of the external world debate expect arguments to be absolutely certain. Since Moore does not have any genuinely plausible arguments for his supposed common-sense ground,

the audience of the theoretical setting will not be convinced. Thus, the common-sense interpretation is still convincing.

### 3.5 Possible objection to cogency contextualism

I will now briefly discuss a pressing objection to my contextualist theory of cogency. I have established that there are different debate settings and that there are some proof procedures which are incompatible with some of these settings. However, one might argue that a proof procedure which is universally admissible to all settings is not inconceivable. A proof procedure might be such that it is useful in all settings. A plausible example of such a proof procedure is logic. While a metaphysical debate in a theoretical setting might use contradictions as a tool for proving that a certain philosophical theory is not possible, someone at a bar might argue that you cannot play darts and billiards at the same time and that a choice should be made. Fallacies are always fallacies and there is a great variety of ways these fallacies can be used in different settings. The objector might argue that the point-and-prove method has a similar wide variety of uses and that the method is also useful in theoretical settings. If I were to argue that a similar mathematical mistake is made and I point to the mistake and proclaim "this here is the mathematical mistake", am I then not using the point-and-prove method in a theoretical setting? Furthermore, can the point-and-prove method not be used to read off results of experiments? Can it not be used to give specific examples of scientific theories? Thus, the objector would argue that the supposed incompatibility between the point-and-prove method and the theoretical debate setting is false.

At first sight, the above seems like a plausible objection to my critique of the procedural interpretation of Moore. If the point-and-prove method is indeed universally useful, it should be applicable to the external world debate. However, a more accurate portrayal of both the contextualist theory of cogency and the objection would reveal that this counterargument is not as powerful as it seems. I will begin by examining the claim that some proof methods are universally useful. I believe that there is no intrinsic contradiction between the contextualist theory of cogency and these universally admissible methods. The primary principle of my theory is that whether an argument is convincing depends on the expectations of its audience. This principle is perfectly compatible with the existence of a method whose nature is such that it will always convince an audience. For example, our rational faculties might be structured in such a way that we can never be truly convinced by fallacies, even if some people might pretend otherwise. [74] However, I do not believe that the point-and-prove method is universally useful to all debate settings.

Some of the counter-examples against my claim that the point-and-prove method is incompatible with the theoretical setting can be explained by adding more nuance to my distinction between the two settings. I distinguished between the theoretical setting and the pragmatic setting for simplicity's sake. However, a specific debate setting is

[74] I am not hereby arguing that logic is actually universally admissible to all debate settings. I am merely using logic as an example of what this could reasonably look like.

characterized by the expectations of the audience. Since these expectations can vary from topic to topic, or even depend on the specific question asked, there is very likely a great amount of different settings. While most debates can generally be characterized as taking place in either the pragmatic or the theoretical setting, there might be certain debates that do not fit neatly into either the theoretical or the pragmatic category. For example, biological or astronomical debates do not answer pragmatic questions. They want to completely understand their respective topics. However, they answer their questions by giving general and observable descriptions of material phenomena. Thus, while these debates share characteristics with debates taking place in the theoretical setting, they take place in their own outlying setting. In these specific settings it is very possible that the point-and-prove method is useful. However, this does not mean that the point-and-prove method is useful in debates that are more clearly rooted in the theoretical setting.

This explains some counterexamples to my claims about the incompatibility between the theoretical setting and the point-and-prove method. The rest of the counterexamples can be proven false. While one might think that reading test results and the act of pointing out mistakes are ways in which the point-and-prove method is used convincingly in the theoretical setting, this is not actually the case. In these examples, the point-and-prove method is still used to answer questions in the pragmatic setting. While the field of study in which these questions are asked and answered is usually situated in the theoretical setting, not all of the debates within this field of study are in the theoretical setting. Mathematical or physics research entails many different kinds of questions. Some are clearly theoretical, while others are pragmatic. If I were to argue that a certain mathematical formula is mistaken, I would be arguing in the theoretical setting. However, if I am merely pointing out that this mistake occurs on page four of an essay, I am arguing in the pragmatic setting. The act of pointing out that a mistake of a certain kind appears on a specific page is just using a general description for a pragmatic end. Likewise, while debates that are attempting to understand test results take place in the theoretical setting, the mere argument that a certain result occurs at this moment in the experiment takes place in the pragmatic setting. Thus, these kinds of arguments take place in the pragmatic setting.

Thus, debates that take place in neither the pragmatic nor the theoretical setting and a more careful account of when a question belongs in the theoretical setting, explain the supposed counterexamples to my claims. Any debate that fully takes place in the theoretical setting has no real significant use for the point-and-prove method. Therefore, the point-and-prove method is not universally admissible. Besides, the notion that the point-and-prove method might be useful in certain theoretical debates, does not entail that the point-and-prove method is useful in the external world debate. The objector has given no reason to believe that the point-and-prove method can help us obtain absolutely certain knowledge about the hidden metaphysical nature of material objects such as tables or hands. Since the audience of the specific external world debate expects this kind of absolutely certain knowledge, the point-and-prove method is simply not admissible in this debate.

# conclusion

Moore believes that philosophical arguments – such as those within the external world debates – should not be constrained by specialized standards or pre-existing philosophical frameworks. Instead, we should be able to instinctively grasp whether an argument is correct or not. This is reflected in the intentional simplicity of Moore's proof of the external world. The two interpretations of this proof I have proposed account for this anti-theoretical spirit of the proof. According to the common-sense interpretation, Moore's proof cannot be fully understood and appreciated if it is not placed in Moore's common-sense philosophy. While Moore is unable to provide us with any theoretical or logical justification for his premises, they are nonetheless known by any reader of the proof. This knowledge is due to the simple fact that the premises of the proof express a feature of the common-sense view of the world. Since we simply know that the common-sense view of the world is correct, any premise which is in accordance with this view is justified through its commonsensical nature. Thus, even though Moore cannot formally prove his premises, they are justified by being part of the common-sense view.

In the second part of this thesis we have critically examined the common-sense interpretation of Moore's justification structure. In order to be cogent, an argument must be able to convince its audience. Moore's proof is supposed to convince audiences by appealing to their common-sense knowledge. Since the audience knows that they have hands, they are justified in believing Moore's first premise. Moore's method of justification rests on the concept of unprovable knowledge. However, I have argued that Moore's arguments for his claim that propositions that are part of the common-sense view are automatically true and known by us are unconvincing. Since a previously unconvinced audience has no reason to believe these claims without the proper argumentation, the common-sense interpretation is not cogent.

However, according to the procedural interpretation, Moore has no need for further justification for his premises. By demanding absolutely certain premises, we are once again needlessly applying a formal and theoretical framework to a debate that does not need it. In my third and final chapter, I presented this procedural interpretation based on Moore's implicit procedural claim. The fact that we have hands is such that in order to prove them we merely need to point towards our hands and assert their existence. The mere act of pointing out the existence of hands is sufficient to convince an audience.

Moore states that this point-and-prove method is effective in ordinary situations and it should therefore be effective in the external world debate. However, while I agreed that the point-and-prove method will lead to cogent arguments in ordinary situations, this is not the case in the external world debate. According to my proposed contextualist theory of cogency, whether a certain proof structure will be convincing depends on the setting in which the proof structure is applied. I have argued that the audience of the external world setting expects a cogent argument to assert absolute certainty and to answer an interpretative question. Since the point-and-prove method is only able to provide us with specific examples of certain phenomena, it is only suited to provide the audience with approximations of the truth. Furthermore, by its nature, the point-and-

prove method is unable to provide answers to interpretative questions. While there are settings in which the use of the point-and-prove method will be sufficient to convince an audience, this is not the case for the setting in which the external world debate takes place. Thus, the procedural interpretation of Moore's proof of an external world is not cogent. While there could be other interpretations of the proof, I conclude that under the two most plausible interpretations, the proof is not convincing.

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