

## G. E. MOORE AND OUR CONSCIOUSNESS OF AN EXTERNAL WORLD

### ABSTRACT

In this paper, I argue in favor of the success of G. E. Moore's "Proof of an External World." Contrary to many interpretations of his lecture, I claim that 1) the proof poses a direct challenge to Kant's Idealism, rather than Skepticism; 2) Moore's conclusion is often misrepresented in formalisations of his proof, and furthermore that it is strikingly similar to Kant's, as expressed in his *Critique of Pure Reason*. I achieve this by closely examining Moore's setup to his proof, his expression of the relationship between the premises and conclusion of his proof, and by arguing that the kind of proof that Moore presents demands a kind of evaluation different from that which we normally use to evaluate formalised proofs. Furthermore, I examine the "lossiness" inherent in formalisations of informally constructed proofs.

### KEYWORDS

G. E. Moore, Idealism, Skepticism, Proof of an External World, Kant

#### *1. Introduction*

G. E. Moore's "Proof of an External World" (1939) is not as follows:

Premise 1: Here is one hand.

Premise 2: Here is another hand.

Conclusion: There exist objects that are external to my mind.

Many commentators represent Moore's Proof similarly, though Moore does not offer two formalised premises and a conclusion as his proof. Certainly the statements are about Moore's Proof, but they are no more the Proof than my statements: "Premise 1: Moore ran one mile in 8 minutes; Premise 2: Russell ran one mile in 10 minutes; Conclusion: Moore ran faster than Russell" prove that Moore did, in fact, run faster than Russell. When I conclude that "Moore ran faster than Russell" I say something about an event, namely that Moore ran faster than Russell at some point. Saying something about the event – in this case, expressing what happened as premises and a conclusion – differs from actually being involved in the event or from witnessing the event. Moore's

proof is an event. The premises and conclusions listed above are about his proof. The proof itself takes a different form.<sup>1</sup>

One reason to undertake a close study of Moore's proof is to investigate the relationships between certain kinds of informal proofs and their formalisations. I will argue that in at least some cases, formalisations of informally constructed proofs fail to capture the force of their informal inspirations. We can sometimes, or perhaps often, characterise the process of formalisation as “lossy.”

### *1.1. Formalisations of Moore's Proof*

Others render a formalisation of Moore's Proof slightly differently, but above I have tried to keep a formal version as close as possible to what Moore might have said were he to offer a proof in such a way. Two of the most influential, somewhat-recent commentators on Moore's Proof are James Pryor (2004) and Crispin Wright (2002). Each formalise Moore's work slightly differently:

<i>Pryor</i> <sup>2</sup>	<i>Wright</i> <sup>3</sup>
(1) Here are two hands. (2) If hands exist, then there is an external world. (3) So there is an external world.	II Here is a hand III There is a material world (since any hand is a material object existing in space)

Expressed as *modus ponens*, we immediately see Pryor's version of the Proof as valid, leaving him to investigate whether we know the premises to be true, or in a mysterious shift from Moore's vocabulary, whether we are justified in believing them. For his purposes, Pryor “assume[s] that Moore knows premise (2) to be true” and instead first considers “what epistemic relations Moore has to premise (1) and to his conclusion” (2004, 349). Much that follows in Pryor's paper involves Moore's perception of his hands, his justification in believing that he has hands, and the “justificatory structure” of Moore's proof. Pryor concludes that the proof “*does* offer us a piece of reasoning by which we can acquire justification to believe the external world exists,” but that the “reasoning that Moore's argument articulates” will not satisfy a skeptic (2004, 370). I note this as a contrast to my approach to Moore's Proof: Pryor's interest is in the evaluation of proofs in general, using Moore's as an extreme case

whose analysis might yield some insights into how we evaluate seemingly-simple proofs. Here my focus is on how we construct informal proofs, and how conversion to standard, recognisable forms might affect the persuasive force of such proofs.

To some extent, I will agree with Pryor that Moore offers a piece of persuasive reasoning, but without making reference to acquisition of justification to believe some proposition. Since Moore does not employ those technical terms, I think it wise to avoid imposing them on his proof. Also, though clearly aware of skeptical concerns, the *feelings*<sup>4</sup> of the skeptic did not motivate Moore to give a proof of an external world. Moore tried to defeat a certain kind of Idealism through his critique of the elephant-in-the-proof that the secondary literature seems content to avoid: Kant.

For reasons different from Pryor's, Crispin Wright finds fault with Moore's Proof. In his "(Anti-)Skeptics Simple and Subtle: G. E. Moore and John McDowell" (2002) he argues that Moore's Proof suffers from "transmission failure," meaning that one's warrant to believe the truth of the first premise does not "transmit" to the conclusion. His is an argument about the structure of a particular formalised version of Moore's Proof – a formalisation that, again, fails to capture the force of the proof itself.<sup>5</sup>

I disagree with Wright's assertion that "The greater part of the essay [Moore's Proof] is devoted to exasperatingly slow ruminations on what it means to describe objects as 'external', or 'outside our minds' or 'presented in space' or 'to be met with in space'. Nothing particularly consequential emerges" (2002, 330). Wright omits: Moore devotes the greater part of his essay to showing that two phrases Kant uses in his proof of an external world, as added to the second edition of *Critique of Pure Reason*, do not convey the same things. In order for Kant's proof to work, Moore thinks, these phrases would have to convey the same things, and since they do not, his proof does not work. Moore thinks he can right this wrong. Moore extends his criticism of Kant's equivocation to an indictment of the latter's peculiar form of Idealism, a point to which I will return. Moore's early work in the essay, then, is "particularly consequential," and I will treat it as such here.

Wright leverages his particular interpretation of Moore's Proof to answer "under what circumstances a valid argument is indeed at the service of proof" (2002, 331). In this essay I will address a similar, yet importantly distinct, question: to what extent can

*formalisation* of physical proofs adequately convey the force of physical proof. Given this difference, directly engaging with Wright's specific question would distract from my current purposes.

### 1.2. *Scope and Goals*

First and foremost, we must dislodge the idea that often-cited formalisations of Moore's Proof *are* Moore's Proof. In Moore's text, the Proof itself reads as follows:

I can prove now, for instance, that two human hands exist. How? By holding up my two hands and saying, as I make a certain gesture with the right, 'Here is one hand,' and adding, as I make a certain gesture with the left, 'and here is another.' And if, by doing this, I have proved *ipso facto* the existence of external things, you will all see that I can also do it now in numbers of other ways.... (1939, 144).

I take it as uncontroversial that in its original presentation, Moore does not offer a list of premises followed by a conclusion. His is a demonstration with accompanying narration – a different kind of proof than most philosophers are likely accustomed to, but, as Moore argues in detail, a legitimate proof nonetheless.

When we attend to the details, and take Moore's setup to the proof as seriously as he presents it, we must agree that: 1. He is not directly addressing the Skeptic; his primary goal is to show a deficiency in Kant's form of Idealism; 2. Though he does not directly address what Kant offers as his proof, Moore would endorse Kant's conclusion, which is: "[T]he consciousness of my own existence is simultaneously a direct consciousness of the existence of other things outside of me" [B 276].

Moore accomplishes point 1 by distinguishing "things to be met with in space" from "things presented in space," wherein he argues that we know more about objects than merely how they appear to us. Point 2 is more subtle and requires that we pay close attention to Moore's use of "*following*" and Kant's use of "simultaneously." In the end, Moore and Kant both claim that our knowledge (to use Moore's preferred vocabulary) of an external world arises simultaneously with our consciousness of that world. It is not that our knowledge of an external world follows from anything, as a reconstruction with premises and a conclusion suggests. Moore reaches this conclusion by a different route than Kant, but their respective conclusions are compatible.

## 2. Moore vs. Kant<sup>6</sup>

Moore does not directly attempt to address skepticism, rather he directly addresses Kant's Idealism and a few phrases upon which Kant's proof of an external world depends. Given that Kant addressed skepticism in his proof of an external world, we can reasonably say that Moore secondarily addresses the Skeptic as well, but first and foremost, he takes aim at Kant's attempt to prove an external world.

Kant calls it “a scandal in philosophy” that we, professional philosophers who should be able to produce such a thing, had yet to produce a proof of an external world (cited in Moore 1939, 126). Contra Kant and Descartes, who both think they had succeeded in the task, Moore argues that neither the Skeptic (Problematic Idealist, in Kant's terms) nor the (Transcendental) Idealist had produced a satisfactory proof. Employing a Common Sense methodology, Moore thinks his admittedly-odd demonstration finally eliminates Philosophy's long-standing scandal.

In a puzzling exegetical move, many commentators do not address the bulk of Moore's lecture, which consists of his attempt to refute a caricature of the (Transcendental) Idealist's position: that *we only know things as they appear to us*.<sup>7</sup> This should conjure thoughts of his earlier “Kant's Idealism” (1903a) and “Refutation of Idealism” (1903b), and suggests that his Proof is one in a series of arguments against the Idealist, as opposed to a more typical analysis of the Proof as directly addressing the Skeptic. Of course, Moore is aware of the Skeptic's concerns, mentioning Descartes twice in the Proof<sup>8</sup>, and repeatedly addressing the significance of dreams as experiences<sup>9</sup>. But a significant amount his life's work was anti-Idealist, and we are right to expect his Proof of an External World to fit this pattern.

The beginning of Moore's Proof follows a form almost identical to the argument that Moore constructs in “Kant's Idealism.” There, he argues that a single question Kant proposes to answer, namely “how can we know that certain predicates do attach to things which we have never experienced” (1903a, 132), resolves into two distinct questions. Details aside, he employs the same strategy in his Proof. Moore complains that Kant conflates “to be met with in space” and “presented in space,” two phrases upon which Kant's proof depends. In an effort to demonstrate these phrases as not

interchangeable, Moore offers examples of things that would fall into one or the other category, but not both. The significance of Moore's examples and distinctions is simple: we often know more about what appears to us than its mere appearance. We know, for example, that an after-image is not "to be met with in space," though it is "presented in space" and this is to know something about the after-image beyond its appearance; *you* cannot see *my* after-image, and we never expect that you can.<sup>10</sup> The same goes for bodily pains, drunken double-vision, itchiness, and so on. We also know that we cannot chase down the pot of gold at the end of the rainbow. Though the rainbow is "presented in space," it is not "to be met with in space," and we know that as we take a step toward the rainbow, it will retreat a step. Moore's point is that there are plenty of examples of our knowing more about things than how they appear to us. So much, then, for the caricature of the Idealist's claim<sup>11</sup>.

In his discussion of the distinction between "to be met with in space" and "presented in space," Moore suggests that we use the word "know" in ordinary talk to include a broader range of phenomena than we give it credit in philosophical talk.<sup>12</sup> I know, but do not have to prove or demonstrate in any philosophical way, that you cannot feel my pain, or see my after-images. Though these phenomena (things) *appear to us*, we know more than their appearance, and this is clear from his analysis of how we regularly use "know" and various similar terms.<sup>13</sup> With this point, we must agree if we are to both take Moore's Proof seriously and regard it as successful. This partly explains why Moore carefully picks Kant's phrases apart, and a sensitive analysis of Moore's Proof must pay as close attention to Moore's analysis of Kant as it does to the physically-demonstrative proof itself.

Early in the Proof, Moore argues that all he has to do in order to prove the existence of an external world is to prove that two objects exist *outside of his mind*.<sup>14</sup> On the surface, his claim seems straightforward (though a clearer argument in its favour would likely help allay some philosophical concerns), and we should wonder why, after such a simple claim, he does not simply point to a chair and say "here is one chair," point to another chair and say "there is another chair." Certainly there were two chairs present at his lecture. But following Descartes' concerns, to which Moore is attentive, if only because Kant was as well, the chair might be a false chair. It might be a

holographic chair. It might be a projection of a chair, and so on. Similar with trees, desks, dogs, books, etc. For a demonstration-as-proof to work, something has to happen, and this hints at why Moore uses his hands as part of the Proof.

I introduce the hyphenated phrase “demonstration-as-proof” in order to distinguish what Moore attempts in the Proof from what Kant attempts in his *Critique of Pure Reason*. Moore argues from the beginning of the lecture that, contrary to his claims, Kant has not provided a defensible proof of an external world. Of course, Moore does not mean that he rejects Kant's conclusion; on the contrary, Moore embraces Kant's conclusion. In the case of “Proof of an External World,” Moore attacks the premises from which Kant's conclusion follows. He does not attack the conclusion itself, for to do so would be self-defeating in some sense, given that Kant felt that he had proven the existence of an external world, and Moore thinks the same of his own work.

Moore rejects Kant's methodology. He rejects Kant's unstated notion that he can prove the existence of an external world without doing anything (besides writing philosophy). Moore complains that Kant tries to formulate the wrong kind of proof<sup>15</sup>, and rejects his claim that there can be only one such proof. Moore thinks otherwise, and he thinks otherwise because he re-conceives what it must be like to prove the existence of an external world. Though we, especially as philosophers, report the exercise in words, proof of an external world, for Moore, is more than a linguistic, or perhaps “philosophical” exercise. It is a performance.

Moore does not directly address and analyze Kant's proof – a peculiar move on his part – but it is relevant to examine it briefly in this context. Moore concerns himself with the footnote in the second edition of *Critique of Pure Reason* where Kant mentions his proof, which he has added in this new edition. Kant refers the reader to the proof itself, which concludes: “[T]he consciousness of my own existence is simultaneously a direct consciousness of the existence of other things outside of me” [B 276]. Moore's complaint is, roughly rendered, that Kant gets to this conclusion in a manner similar to the reconstructions we see above. Kant relies on logical connections, premises, theorems, and the like, and moreover renders some of his own terms sloppily. Moore thinks that this is the wrong sort of proof, and to reconstruct Moore's proof in terms of asserted premises that lead to a conclusion is to betray his assertion that this is not the

way to go about proving the existence of an external world. Yet Moore's demonstration-as-proof leads to a conclusion similar to Kant's: when Moore “makes a certain gesture,” he knows that it is his hand – and of this he is “certain” – where knows substitutes for Kant's technical notion of consciousness. And so simultaneously, Moore knows, directly, the existence of other things outside of his mind.

The issue I am drawing attention to is this: to merely show his hands is to do little more than offer an object *as it appears* to the audience. The formalisation “here are two hands” fails to capture Moore's movement, which, by his account, is part of the premise. By his own standards then, Moore needs to do more than simply show his hands<sup>16</sup>.

When Moore makes the “certain gesture” with his hand, he demonstrates something in addition to the existence of this “object.” He demonstrates that he is responsible for its movement. The hand is his. He moves the hand; the audience does not. When the audience sees the hand move, they know that they do not control the hand (barring any obvious delusions on the part of the audience members.) This suggests a re-working of our formal expression of the Proof, though I maintain that a formalization of the Proof is *about* the Proof, and no substitute for the demonstration-as-proof itself:

*Premise 1:* Here is one hand.

*Premise 2:* If Moore controls his own hand, then it is external to me.

*Premise 3:* Moore controls his own hand.

*Conclusion:* Moore's hand is external to me.

Or we might put it this way:

*Premise 1:* Here is one [Moore's] hand.

*Premise 2:* If I cannot control this hand, then it is external to me.

*Premise 3:* I cannot control the [Moore's] hand.

*Conclusion:* The [Moore's] hand is external to me.

To perform this twice, once with the right hand and once with the left, shows that there are two objects outside of Moore's mind (or outside of an audience member's mind), satisfying his aims. This analysis also explains why Moore does not choose a chair to demonstrate the existence of two things external to himself.<sup>17</sup> Chairs do nothing on their own (not consciously anyway, in the sense that we typically apply “conscious” to beings like us<sup>18</sup>); it always might be that I am the source of my perception of the chair. The same applies to pieces of paper, coffee mugs, trees, dogs, etc. When Moore makes a

motion, his audience must know that they are not in control of that motion. They must know that some other conscious being is in control, and this should be sufficient to satisfy the Skeptic, while at the same time defeating the Idealist. Again, we can say that they know this in the same way that we can say that they know nobody else in the room will see their after-images, feel their pain, etc. To see Moore move the hand is to know that you are not moving the hand; you know more about the hand than how it appears to you. You know that it is not your hand, you know that you cannot control it, feel its pain, etc. All of this amounts to: you know that the hand is external to you (or that it exists outside of your mind).

It is more appropriate, if we want to express the Proof in words only, to do so as above, because Moore's self-assigned task is to show that two things exist outside of his mind. Again, if we express his "conclusion" as "So there is an external world," we ignore the fact that he requires of himself to demonstrate that there are at least two objects external to his mind. When he displays and waves his right hand, that proves that one object exists outside of his mind (also giving significance to his saying "here is *one* hand" as opposed to the familiar misquote "here is *a* hand"); when he displays and waves his left hand, he proves that another object exists outside of his mind. Repetition gives the proof its force; repetition is essential to the Proof's success.<sup>19</sup>

### 3. *Following*

Consistent with Kant's conclusion, Moore argues that our knowledge *of* an external world arises simultaneously with our consciousness of our own actions *in* the world. Moore does not argue that we know the existence of things outside of us *from* the premises he expresses. Rather, he argues that we know the existence of things outside of us *by* the premises he expresses. I take this to be an important distinction, partly because it would have been so natural for Moore to use "follows" in his proof rather than "ipso facto," and I take it that "ipso facto" suggests simultaneity, similar to what Kant has in mind. Moore nearly obsessively *italicises* the word "follows" in the pages leading up to the Proof itself, and uses the word alarmingly-frequently. This makes it all the more striking that he does not use the word "follows" to describe the relationship between the conclusion he draws and the premises he expresses in the first formulation of his proof.

Here I aim to account for this often-overlooked peculiarity.

Saying “*ipso facto*,” or “by the fact itself,” is quite different from saying “from the fact itself.” The latter suggests that the conclusion follows the fact – that there is a fact first, then (at some later point, though it may be nearly instantly) we figure out the conclusion *from* that fact. Instead, Moore argues that we know the existence of things outside of us *by* the fact of knowing that two hands exist. That is: to know that two hands exist is to know that things exist outside of us. To know something “by the fact,” I assert, is to grasp the truth of the premises and the conclusion simultaneously, which is precisely what Kant tries to demonstrate. And to come to know what we call the conclusion simultaneously with what we call a premise is not to beg the question, as Moore is often accused of doing in his proof. In the paragraphs that follow, I intend to show how this is possible and how it works.

Moore notes often that the sort of proof he offers differs from the sort of proof that Kant offers, which is a clear indication that the ways we treat the premises and conclusions of their respective proofs should differ as well. From this it follows that we, philosophers, should not use the same standards of evaluation on Kant's and Moore's proofs in exactly the same ways. And this implies that there is more than one set of standards that we use to evaluate proofs. In this case, we must use the right standards. Since Moore's Proof is physical, our evaluation must include judgment of whether the physical act is effective, not whether it is true or false. We rarely, if ever, apply “true” or “false” to physical acts.

We might say that we evaluate “true” or “false” when we talk *about* an act, often flagged by “that.” For example, “*That* Moore waved his hands” is the kind of statement we might characterise as “true” or “false.” But the waving itself admits of other characterisations instead, often flagged by adverbs. For example, we might say “Moore waved his hands vigorously” or “Moore waved his hands obviously.” These two cases are akin to what judges say of physical performances such as we see in Olympic events; imagine how odd it would sound to say “Mary Lou Retton's routine was true.” “*That* Mary Lou Retton performed a routine” is true, but this makes it sound as if we wonder who performed the routine. Who performed an act is typically not what interests us when we evaluate physical demonstrations; typically, and Moore's Proof is one of these

cases, we evaluate the performance independent of who performed.

Moore's proof resembles a physical challenge (a physical proof) more than a philosophically-familiar set of propositional premises that lead to a conclusion. Our example of a physical proof above involved a race to demonstrate who runs faster. If Moore runs one mile in a shorter time than Russell, then Moore is the faster runner, *ipso facto*. It is not that we evaluate premises in order to determine the conclusion. In the race, we can see clearly that Moore finished ahead of Russell, and *that* is the conclusion, though it looks suspiciously like a premise in the formalisation of the event. To evaluate the premises is to say something about the race, but we already know the conclusion, having seen the race – Moore finishing ahead of Russell *is* the conclusion. (We knew the two possible results before the start of the race: Moore runs faster or Russell runs faster. Knowing what the conclusion might be is not begging the question.)

Moore's Proof is similar: we do not evaluate the premises in order to determine the conclusion; in this case, we already know what conclusion we want, namely that things exist outside of us, though there is another possible conclusion, namely that no things exist outside of our minds. When we want to prove that something is the case, there is no question about the conclusion, obviously enough; the question is whether we can show that the thing we want to prove actually is the case. So in Moore's Proof, it is not precisely that the conclusion *follows* the premises – in fact, it is perhaps more accurate to say that the conclusion preceded the premises, in some important sense. A true premise is what we seek in order to confirm the already-given conclusion. And so when we grasp the truth of the premise, we simultaneously confirm the conclusion. Given this, when we perform the “proof” we do not say that the conclusion follows the demonstration; we simply know that we have grounds to assert the conclusion. And also given this, it is essential to exercise caution when expressing what the conclusion is and what it is not. Though touted as Proof of an External World, Moore tells us early on that his task is to show that at least two objects exist outside of his mind. When we characterise his proof for the purposes of formal evaluation, we must use this as the conclusion, not that “there is an external world.” The reader might think that I am splitting hairs with this point; the reader might think that Moore treats “external world” and “outside my mind” as interchangeable. But given Moore's penchant for hair

splitting, we should think that if he found it important to use two different expressions, then those expressions do in fact express different things. As a gesture toward one possible difference I offer this: “external world” does not imply that a conscious being need experience any object, whereas “outside my mind” does.

If I am right and Moore does in fact embrace Kant's conclusion, especially the “simultaneity” of self-consciousness and consciousness of objects outside of the mind, then it is even easier to understand why Moore would not say “at least two objects exist outside of my mind” *follows* from “here is one hand.” To know “here is one hand” is to know “one object exists outside of my mind.” And to know “here is another” is to know “another object exists outside of my mind.” To know these two things is to know that at least two objects exist outside of my mind. Consider how we might express the demonstration with “follows”: From the fact that I know that here is one hand and another hand, it *follows* that I know that two objects exist outside of my mind. The latter is a re-phrasing of the former, at best, and this is why the conclusion about external objects arises simultaneously with self-consciousness. The realisation of self-consciousness *is* Proof of an External World, and Moore realises self-consciousness when he makes certain gestures with his hands. If we express the Proof in terms of premises and conclusion, as Moore does in his first formalisation, then we can say, trivially, *that* the first premise is true, but this is hardly all we can or should say. It is, perhaps, this triviality that causes many commentators to think that Moore's Proof is ineffective, but the triviality is an artifact of formalisation.

Some might read the last few paragraphs as a betrayal of my assertion that the proof is successful, insofar as I might seem to be suggesting that the premises and the conclusion do not differ in Moore's Proof, which would of course immediately render the proof a failure. But this would be wrong for the following simple reason: the premises include a gesture, whereas the conclusion does not. Moore expresses this by calling the premises “more specific” (1939, 145) than the conclusion, and this seems to me a perfectly acceptable way to express the difference. We should continue to keep in mind that the premises and the conclusion might look the same when spelled out in words – when formalized that is – because when written on the page, they cannot include the necessary gestures that give the premises their force. They can, at best, only

include a description of the gesture as a sort of stage direction. All of this is to say that it might seem as though Moore begged the question about the existence of things outside of his mind if we take the formalization of his proof to be his proof. Alas, the formalization is not the proof itself, and so this objection fails.

#### 4. Conclusions

I have argued that formalisations of Moore's Proof, as presented in the secondary literature, inadequately reflect its strength, as they fail to account for the Proof's physical nature. Specifically, Moore's Proof gains its force as he "makes certain gestures," and analyses that neglect this aspect of the Proof fail to appreciate its success. More generally, we must be sensitive to the informational losses inherent in formalisations of physical proofs, and we must be careful to evaluate physical proofs appropriately given the circumstances under which they are performed.

I have also argued that Moore's Proof does not directly address Skepticism, as is usually assumed and pursued in recent literature. Rather, Moore spends the majority of his Proof dismantling a form of Idealism that he attributes to Kant. Again, discussions of the Proof that ignore Moore's analysis of Kant's own Proof of an External World fail to appreciate both its success and its point. Moore's Proof is a targeted reaction to Kant's Proof, and one cannot illuminate the significance of Moore's claims without stepping out of Kant's shadow, as Moore tries.

Finally, I have argued against analyses of Moore's Proof that claim he has begged the question by investigating the relationship between his gestures (premises) and his conclusion, a relationship he refers to as *ipso facto*. This parallels a notion of simultaneity crucial to understanding Kant's Proof. In the end, Moore does not reject Kant's conclusion. Moore rejects that Kant's method of proof can yield a convincing argument that, in fact, there is an external world.

This said, the secondary literature on Moore's Proof has mostly employed his proof as a way to exercise ideas on such topics as justification, belief, and warrant. The arguments that I make here do not deny the value of such work. Rather, since this is an investigation of Moore's Proof, as opposed to an employment of it, I emphasise different aspects of his work than the majority of the secondary literature. My employment of the

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secondary literature is strictly to show that formalisations of physical proofs are “lossy,” meaning that they necessarily cannot convey the persuasive force that one feels when experiencing a demonstrative proof such as Moore's.

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- 1 Moore's Proof was originally delivered as a lecture, and so he had the opportunity to give a *physical* proof, whereas in print, that possibility is curtailed.
- 2 Originally in Pryor's (2004, 349). In Pryor's "The Skeptic and the Dogmatist," he refers to Moore's first proposition "that there is a hand," and goes on to roughly formalise the proof as: "Here is one hand, and here is another; hence there are external objects" (2000, 518). We will see that there is more to Moore's Proof than these phrases. Moore also does not express the conclusion as Pryor renders it here; this will figure importantly into my arguments in this essay. To be fair to Pryor, he does make clear in his first endnote that his article is "not a serious attempt at Moore exegesis" and that he is "just using Moore to introduce some ideas [he wants] to develop" (2000, 541). However, he does take the time to call the proof "unsatisfying", and "question begging", mostly on the grounds of this formalisation. These characterisations have, unfortunately, stuck in the literature. Here I will argue against both.
- 3 Wright refers to this as the "essence" of Moore's Proof (2002, 330).
- 4 At the end of his lecture, Moore notes that "many philosophers will still feel that I have not given any satisfactory proof of the point in question" (1939, 147). He devotes the next paragraph to diffusing the complaints we usually attribute to a skeptic, namely that Moore still needs to prove his premises, i.e., that he knows (to be true) that "here is one hand." He even names Descartes for the second and final time in the lecture. But in his brief setup to this defense, Moore attributes a "feeling" to the philosopher in question, not a "thought." This is a stark shift in his vocabulary: typically Moore discusses what he and others "think," not what they "feel," reserving "feel" as derogatory reference to a position not well-thought-out. This is a point that I pursue elsewhere (forthcoming), but worth pointing out here, insofar as it indicates that he did not think himself to be directly addressing (radically) skeptical concerns about the existence of an external world.
- 5 As a further consequence, I will not engage the literature that has sprouted up as a response to analyses of Moore's Proof, including analyses by Davies (2004), Pryor (2000), Sosa (1997), and Wright (1991), and commentators on these such as Brown (2004), Coliva (2008), and Tucker (2010). Here I confine myself to the work of the most commonly cited formalisers of the Proof, namely Pryor and Wright.

- 6 Following Moore's lead, this section does not engage in any significant Kant exegesis. Moore focused on a footnote in *Critique of Pure Reason* without being particularly exegetical. This section only modestly expands the amount of analysis that Moore provides. More elaborate analysis would require at least an additional article-length treatment; here I aim to provide just enough to keep my argument in Moore's favor moving forward.
- 7 These words do not appear verbatim in Kant's work, but they are a rough paraphrase that captures the spirit of a few remarks in his Preface, the section of *Critique of Pure Reason* to which Moore confined his analysis. In particular: "...our rational cognition applies only to appearances, and leaves the thing in itself uncognized by us..." [B xx]; "For in a priori cognition nothing can be attributed to objects except what the thinking subject takes from itself" [B xxii]; "...we cannot have [speculative] cognition of any object as thing in itself, but can have such cognition only insofar as the object is one of sensible intuition, i.e., an appearance" [B xxvi]. The last of these examples is closest to the terse paraphrase above, and I note that the Preface is peppered with similar examples of this sentiment.
- 8 Moore mentions Descartes first in reference to the latter's conflation of "external things," "things external to *us*," and "things external to *our minds*" (1939, 128). He merely notes that Descartes uses the phrases "as if they needed no explanation," suggesting that they must have been used similarly prior to Descartes. This has nothing to do with skeptical questions about the existence of an external world. The second mention of Descartes comes in the penultimate paragraph of the lecture, where Moore resists the need to prove that he is not, right now, dreaming (1939, 148). In this instance, Moore's mention of Descartes is a way to reject the skeptic's criticism that *something* remains to be proved.
- 9 In the longest paragraph of the Proof (1939, 139-141), Moore works to demonstrate that to dream is to *have an experience*, which I take to be a defense against a skeptical dispensation of dreaming as *not* providing grounds for belief in the existence of an external world. "Having an experience" is important to Moore's Proof, partly explaining why something has to *happen* in his proof. So, Moore characterises the significance of dreams in such a way that they underwrite, rather than undermine, the proof. I note that Moore takes up this line of argument again two years later when he argues directly against Skeptics in "Certainty" (1941, 243).
- 10 Especially (1939, 130-131), and the other examples that follow.

- 11 To be clear: three decades earlier, Moore argued that Kant's Transcendental Idealism does not provide a sufficient response to two questions that it claims to answer. First, it fails to answer how “synthetic propositions a priori are possible” (1903a, 131), and, in response to Hume, on what grounds we could claim the validity of universal propositions (1903a, 132-134). He goes so far to say that Kant's Transcendental Idealism, with respect to Hume's concern that we cannot prove that  $2 + 2 = 4$  in all cases (this example is Moore's), “gives no answer to that skepticism” (1903a, 134). That is, in Moore's view, Kant fails. His Proof of an External World has an almost-identical form. Almost amusingly, in a discussion about the distinction between “thinking” and “knowing” (and “believing”), Moore asserts that he does, in fact, know “The fingers on this hand are five” (1903a, 135). And in his discussion of what he takes to be Kant's failures, he levels an accusation of question begging almost identical to the accusations leveled against his 1939 Proof.
- 12 Again, he does a similar thing in “Kant's Idealism” (1903a) especially pp. 132ff. Also, “Defence of Common Sense” (1925).
- 13 A longer treatment of this point would include a detailed analysis of Moore's “Defence of Common Sense.” For the purposes of our argument to here, let us grant Moore's claim that we ^ certain propositions without having to further prove them, such as the proposition that “I used to be much smaller than I am now” (1925, 33).
- 14 For the purposes of my argument here, I will assume that he is correct in this, though I note that a more complete treatment of the Proof's success must include a detailed analysis of whether he is, in fact, correct.
- 15 In the first of many instances in which Moore alludes to different *kinds* or *sorts* of proofs, he says: “...there seems to me to be no doubt whatever that it is a matter of some importance and also a matter which falls properly within the province of philosophy to discuss the question what sort of proof, if any, can be given of 'the existence of things outside of us.'” (1939, 126). Moore's complaints with Kant are not only with the structure and the content of his proof, but with the sort of proof he offers. Moore suggests that other sorts of proofs are possible to produce, and can achieve the same end. Stronger: Moore thinks that the sort of proof Kant offers cannot achieve its purpose. Moore's sort of proof can and, he thinks, does achieve the same purpose.
- 16 In a parallel case, Moore states in his “Refutation of Idealism”: “I shall undertake to show that what makes a thing real

cannot possibly be its presence as an inseparable aspect of a sentient [my emphasis] experience” (1903b, 438). Whether he succeeds in that argument or not is beside the point; the important point for my current purposes is that he would not simply “show off” his hand in order to demonstrate that it is real, or that it exists outside of his mind. It is not just our perception of an object, he thinks, that makes it real; showing his audience one hand is not sufficient demonstration to the audience that the hand is anything more than an illusion, a dream, etc. --- and I note that in this case, Moore himself is also “audience” to the Proof. This is the main reason for Moore's “certain gesture” that accompanies his hand display, and this is the main reason why we must resist characterizing his premise as “here is a hand.”

- 17 In his “Certainty” (1941), Moore does point to inanimate things such as windows and chairs. However, he uses those examples as claims that we do not *doubt*. Moreover, “Certainty” is directly anti-Skeptical, as opposed to his anti-Idealist Proof under consideration here. The issue of whether we doubt that “here is one hand” never arises in the Proof, which serves to reinforce my argument that it is not anti-Skeptical, as it is often wrongly characterised. (One might argue that even Wittgenstein wrongly conflates “Certainty” with “Proof of an External World” in his “On Certainty.” But that is a longer story.)
- 18 Moore notes that by “external to *us*” he is referring to “the minds of human beings living on the earth” (1939, 142).
- 19 I will grant that Moore significantly truncates all of this when he talks *about* the Proof at the end of his lecture, calling “here is one hand, here is another” a “proposition” in a few cases. However, in that case, his effort is to address the Skeptic who might think that Moore needs to prove a proposition, so he tries to show that even if he were to express his premise as a proposition, there is nothing further to prove.