WITTGENSTEIN ON

KNOWLEDGE AND CERTAINTY

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Abstract

In this thesis, I bring to the fore Wittgenstein's take on two philosophical problems that he engages with in *On Certainty*: the problem of philosophical scepticism and the problem of characterizing 'Moore-like propositions.'

In chapter 1, I begin by providing the philosophical background of *On Certainty*. This involves taking note of: the global sceptic's challenge, G. E. Moore's project of defending common sense and Norman Malcolm's argument against Moore's project. In chapter 2, I present two lines of attack based on Wittgenstein's remarks: the first aims at undermining the kinds of philosophical doubts that constitute the global sceptic's challenge; the second has as its target Moore's strategy of defending common sense in the face of the challenge posed by idealist philosophers. In chapter 3, I discuss the proposals that Wittgenstein explores in response to the problem of characterization of Moore-like propositions. I argue against interpretations of Wittgenstein's remarks, put forth by Malcolm, Stroll and Moyal-Sharrock, which suggest that Moore-like propositions are *objectively certain* for us. Next, I argue against the use of the concept of *objective certainty*, as Moyal-Sharrock understands it, to characterize Moore-like propositions; instead, I suggest that the *logical exclusion of mistake* and the *inconceivability of doubt* most appropriately characterize them.

Although this short thesis is far from exhaustive not only in discussing all the main issues that occupy Wittgenstein in *On Certainty*, but also in exploring the issues that it does discuss in part, I hope that a general picture of Wittgenstein's approach to some of the perennial questions of epistemology begins to emerge from it.

Acknowledgments

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Five years ago I decided to study academic philosophy. Ever since I took that decision I have received unwavering support and encouragement from my family. I'd like to thank my parents for letting me pursue my dreams and my brother Omkar for helping me keep them alive. For their invaluable presence in my life, I thank all of my family.

For Arya, my beautiful niece

Contents

Chapter 1: The Background to Wittgenstein's *On Certainty*

1.1   The Global Sceptic's Challenge

Suppose a man walks up to you and challenges you to prove that you have any knowledge of the external world. He quickly adds that it is never certain that any perceptual judgment is true. One can *always* doubt or be mistaken about the perceptual judgments one makes. Worse still, he says, we could doubt or be mistaken about all our knowledge claims taken together. At this point, we may ask him, "What makes you think that?" – to which he replies, "We can never know for sure that we are not dreaming right now or that we are not brains-in-a-vat. What if we are fooled by an evil demon into thinking that there is an external world or that 2+2=4?"[1] Given that we can never rule out these things, he says, we can never be sure that we *really* know anything. In philosophy, we call this man a global sceptic.

The global sceptic's challenge rests on the plausibility of three claims:

1. We can always doubt or be mistaken about individual knowledge claims.

2. We can doubt or be mistaken about all our knowledge claims, taken together.

3. We have grounds to motivate (1) and (2):

   i)   we may be dreaming right now or we may be brains-in-a-vat;

   ii)   we may be tricked by an evil demon not just about perceptual judgments but even about mathematical truths

Notice the moves the global sceptic has made: first, he has asked you to prove that you have any knowledge of the external world without telling you what kind of proof would satisfy him;

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[1] See Harman (1973) and Descartes (1641) for versions of such arguments. The former is meant to be an updated version of the latter. This is to show that global scepticism has been around for quite some time and was quite fashionable even in the 20th century.

second, in the case that you do assert that you know this or that with any proof, he has a ready reply: you could always be wrong about that or could doubt it. It is as if he wants you to hit the bullseye without showing you where the dartboard is; and if you claim you found the bullseye and hit it, he insists that you have not hit it. The impression you get from the global sceptic's challenge is that all our knowledge claims are falling short of some desired standard, namely, our knowledge claims should be immune from doubt; thus, the knowledge we say we have is not *knowledge in the highest degree*.

Sceptical arguments like the one made by the global sceptic have been popular in western philosophy since the Sophists (5th century BC). Descartes famously put forward some as thought experiments in his *Meditations*. Kant thought that it was a scandal to philosophy that no philosopher before him had been able to meet the challenge of proving that the external world exists.

The challenge posed by an idealist philosopher partially overlaps with the challenge posed by the global sceptic: both deny that we know that the external world exists. Their views diverge later, as the idealist only denies the knowledge of the external world (populated by material objects), while the global sceptic denies that we know anything. Thus, if one successfully responds to the idealist's challenge, one is also successful in one's response to the sceptic. Wittgenstein thought that the English philosopher G.E. Moore failed in his response to the idealist. To put it in a nutshell, Wittgenstein thought that Moore failed because he accepted the idealist's challenge as a legitimate one. According to Wittgenstein, the idealist's challenge, along with the one posed by the global sceptic, is sham. Wittgenstein's critique of Moore and his engagement with the global sceptic's challenge is the subject of the first half of my thesis.

In order to appreciate Wittgenstein's critique of Moore, we must first take account of Moore's project of defending common sense in the face of the challenge posed by idealist philosophers.

1.2   G. E. Moore's Defence of Common Sense

Throughout his career, the English philosopher G. E. Moore sought to defend common sense against the dominant idealist philosophy in his time.[2] In a span of fourteen years Moore published two influential papers defending common sense: 'A Defence of Common Sense' (1925/1959) and 'Proof of An External World' (1939/1959), *Defence* and *Proof* hereafter. As scholars like Annalisa Coliva (2010, pp. 13-14) have noted, there are substantial differences between the two papers. There is also an interpretative debate with respect to Moore's targets in these papers and about the arguments that Moore advances in them. Given the style of writing in his times, Moore does not name his opponents in either of his papers. Michael Williams (2018, p. 484) notes that while Moore's two papers are generally seen as directed against scepticism, his immediate concern is to combat idealism.

In *Defence*, he listed a class of propositions that he claimed he knew, with certainty, to be true. I list some of them here:

> There exists at present a living human body, which is *my* body; This body was born at a certain time in the past, and has existed continuously ever since, though not without undergoing changes; the earth had existed also for many years before my body was born; I am a human being; (*Defence*, pp. 32-33)

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[2] In the early part of his career, Moore's published his first paper against idealism titled 'The Refutation of Idealism' (1903) in *Mind.*
Idealism was a very influential philosophical position during Moore's time. British Idealists like F. H. Bradley (1846-1924), J. M. E. McTaggart (1866-1925) and J. H. Muirhead (1855-1940), to name a few prominent ones, dominated British philosophy.

When Moore (*Defence*, p. 36) writes that such propositions and those that correspond to them are *wholly* true, Williams (2018, p. 484) takes Moore to be contesting neo-Hegelians like Bradley who said that "our beliefs at present are partially true." Keeping in mind another group of (idealist) philosophers, Moore (ibid., pp. 44-45) writes that although they take the kind of common sense propositions he lists as true, they hold other beliefs that are inconsistent with these propositions. In *Defence,* Moore tries to show the absurdity of his opponents' positions, namely, those who deny, in one way or another, what he calls the "Common Sense view of the world." In a nutshell, his argument is that in referring to other philosophers, their works, and things around us in general, these idealist philosophers accept that other human beings exist and that they have done so on planet earth and so on. So while the idealist philosophers he targets *know* the kind of propositions that Moore lists, they hold other views inconsistent with them; for instance, they deny that material things exist, that space and time are real and that the self is real.

But how does Moore know all the propositions he listed to be true? He cannot say how. Moore (*Defence*, p. 44) writes, "We are all, I think, in this strange position that we do *know* many things, with regard to which we know further that we must have had evidence for them, and yet we do not know *how* we know them i.e. we do not know what the evidence was." Now, *if* Moore were facing the global sceptic in a philosophical bout, his efforts in the *Defence* would have earned him a draw. The philosophical stalemate consists in this: the global sceptic's assertion that Moore could always be wrong, and that Moore cannot really know anything; and Moore's counter-assertion that he knows, with certainty, the kind of propositions he listed to be true. While Moore does manage to show that there is something absurd about his opponents' position, he nevertheless seems to tacitly accept that he fell short of giving a proof for what he claimed to know with certainty.

During his British Academy lecture, when he was presenting *Proof*, Moore (*Proof*, pp. 145-146) gave what he thought to be a "perfectly rigorous proof" of the existence of "things outside us." In front of an audience who could see both his hands clearly, he said he could prove that two human hands exist. "How? By holding up two hands, and saying, as I make a certain gesture with the right hand, 'Here is one hand,' and adding, as I make a certain gesture with the left, 'and here is another.'" Therefore, at least two external objects exist. Why does Moore consider his proof to be rigorous? Among other things, Moore says that what makes his proof rigorous is that he, in the moment he said it, *knew* that which he expressed by the combination of certain gestures with saying the words 'There is one hand and here is another.' He *knew* each of the premises i.e. he knew that there was one hand in the place indicated by combining a certain gesture with his first utterance 'here,' and the same for his second hand. He stresses that it would have been absurd for him to say that he did not *know* but merely *believed* in each case that there was a hand. Moore also adds that it is not only the case that he knows that he has two hands, but *all* of the audience knew that he did. Moore thinks that his performance amounts to a proof since his conclusion is different from his premises and it logically follows from them; and since he knows both premises to be true, the conclusion must be true as well. Perhaps, as the global sceptic might respond, he was dreaming when he said that he has two hands – and Moore concedes that he does not know how to prove that he is not in fact dreaming.[3]

Moore does not just say that his two premises do not admit of a proof but that this is *because* he cannot *prove* one other thing: that he is not currently dreaming. He says that he has "conclusive evidence" that he is awake, except he could not tell you what his evidence is. Moore (*Proof*, pp. 149-150) nevertheless maintains that the proof he did offer was solid and was in need of no auxiliary proofs – those who were dissatisfied with his proof "have no good

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[3] See Williams (2018, pp. 485) for a brief evaluation of Moore's proof.

reason for their dissatisfaction." However, the philosophical stalemate with the global sceptic still remains: Moore asserts that he *knows* that he has a hand, while the global sceptic insists that he could be wrong about that since he cannot prove that he is not dreaming. I mention the global sceptic because, as will be seen later, Wittgenstein does not delineate the many nuanced positions that Moore was targeting in his two papers; for Wittgenstein, the challenge posed both by the idealist and the global sceptic is to be met in the same way: by showing that their challenge is sham.

In 1939, Moore read a paper entitled 'Certainty' to the Cambridge University Moral Science Club.[4] In his paper Moore wanted to further buttress his defence of common sense by arguing that: i) 'it is certain' could be used with sense-experience-statements like 'I have pain' to make statements such as 'It is certain that I have pain'; ii) sense-experience-statements can be said to be certain in the same sense as some statements about material objects can be, in the sense that they can be safely counted on. Wittgenstein later heard of Moore's paper and, according to Malcolm, reacted like a "war-horse." He attended Moore's at-home and argued vehemently against the view that the concepts of knowledge and certainty can be applied to one's own sensations (in the present tense) – a view he attacked in the *Philosophical Investigations*.[5] Rhees reports that Wittgenstein used to speak again and again of Moore's *Defence* -- sometime before 1946, he reports that Wittgenstein said to him that it was Moore's best paper.[6] As will be seen later, this is because he was sympathetic to Moore's aim of defending common sense, not necessarily with the way in which he went about it. At any rate, he thought of the propositions that Moore listed as having a queer character.

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[4] Moore (1959, p. 227) opens his paper by stating similar kinds of propositions as he stated in the *Defence*.
[5] See *A Discussion Between Wittgenstein and Moore on Certainty (1939): From the Notes of Norman Malcolm*, in Citron (2015).
[6] See *Wittgenstein's Philosophical Conversations with Rush Rhees (1939-1950): From the Notes of Rush Rhees*, in Citron (2015).

In 1949, Wittgenstein visited Norman Malcolm in Ithaca. The two discussed Moore's strategy of defending common sense and what usage Moore gave to the propositions he claimed he knew with certainty in his two early papers.[7] Before Wittgenstein's visit, Malcolm had already published a paper entitled 'Defending Common Sense' wherein he concluded that Moore's assertions against global scepticism involved a use of "know" which is a radical departure from ordinary usage and that Moore's assertions more generally were a misuse of language (1949, pp. 219-220). It seems from Malcolm's 1949 paper that he reads Moore's two papers as an attack on global scepticism. Wittgenstein too views Moore's attempts as directed against scepticism.[8] From this point onward, I shall take Moore to be responding to the global sceptic's challenge as well; as I pointed out earlier, both the global sceptic and the idealist claim we do not know material objects exist, and Moore said we do know that. So, in this respect, there's no relevant distinction between the global sceptic and idealist. Wittgenstein's reading of Moore's two early papers and his conversations with Moore and Malcolm culminated in his writing the 676 remarks that were published in *On Certainty* (OC). Moore's attempt to defend common sense and Malcolm's argument against Moore's specific strategy is the philosophical background to the remarks we find in the text of OC.

Before I proceed to comment on the nature of the text of OC I will briefly present Malcolm's (1949) argument against Moore's strategy to defend common sense in the face of global scepticism (as interpreted by Malcolm). I do this for two reasons: first, it will enable us to appreciate and understand Wittgenstein's attack against Moore and the global sceptic, which I shall present in chapter 2; and second, it will allow us to clearly distinguish the contributions Wittgenstein made to epistemology from the ones that Malcolm did. My task here is not to

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[7] See Flowers (1999, pp. 100-104).
[8] See Williams (2018, p. 484).

evaluate the merits and demerits of Malcolm's argument, but to concisely present what I take to be its important points.

1.3   Malcolm on Moore

Malcolm (1949, p. 202) claims that Moore misused the expressions "I know," "I know with certainty," and "It is certain"; Malcolm wanted to show that Moore's use of those expressions, as illustrated in *Defence and Proof* is "contrary to their ordinary or correct use." Now, who is to say what their ordinary or correct use is? Malcolm notes that Moore asserted "I know that here is a hand," in front of the audience who could clearly see his hands – in *that* situation, that he had two hands was not in question. Contrast this situation with the following one: two friends are walking towards some object clouded in fog and one of them says, "It is perfectly certain that that is a tree" to which the other replies, "How do you know that?" to which the first one answers, "Because if you look carefully you will see the faint outline of the branches on either side." In such a situation, there is a question at issue and a doubt to be removed. Furthermore, the person who asserts "I know" or "I am certain" is able to give a reason for his assertion and an investigation can in principle be conducted to settle the issue. Now, in the circumstances in which Moore was lecturing at the British Academy, there was no doubt whatsoever that he had two hands. So what are we to make of his assertion that "I know that here is a hand"? What could count as a reason in support for his assertion is not clear, for anything that might be suggested is not clearer or more certain than what it is supposed to be a reason for; and we have no idea what an investigation would look like in this case. Thus, the circumstances are missing for such an assertion to make sense.

It may be objected that Moore was not responding to a *practical doubt*. Imagine that Moore, while delivering his lecture got giddy and had problems with his eyesight. For some

reason he could not see his hands properly for a while and panicked. But he recovers after a while and says to reassure himself, "I can see my hands, my hands!" But none of this was the case during his lecture at the British Academy. So what was he responding to? A *philosophical doubt*?

Malcolm (1949, pp. 204-208) argues that someone who says he is in philosophical doubt is not really in doubt – just as someone who is asking a rhetorical question is not really asking a question. Why? And how does Malcolm justify the distinction between a philosophical doubt and a practical doubt? Malcolm offers three reasons.

First, philosophical doubts of the kind that the global sceptic has regarding the possibility of our being mistaken about any perceptual judgment arise in situations when there is no practical doubt whatsoever about a particular perceptual judgment. The global sceptic will not use examples where a practical doubt could take a foothold to establish his point: for instance, the global sceptic will not tell Moore that he might be mistaken about there being a tree behind a thick fog, to which Moore could concede, "Yes, I may be mistaken about my claim that there is a tree." The global sceptic will choose examples where doubt is inconceivable – for instance, he says that one could always be mistaken about whether one knows that one has two hands.

Second, Malcolm holds that a practical doubt is expressed in actions of doubting. His point is that if we are to say that someone has a practical doubt about something, then they must exhibit certain actions. Consider the following case: a man wakes up from sleep in the middle of the night and finds that part of his house is on fire; he is astonished because he has no recollection of having started a fire; he says to himself, "Perhaps I am dreaming and there is no fire" and dashes cold water onto his face and looks at the fire again; upon extending his hand toward the fire and feeling its warmth he continues to express his astonishment by rushing

to his neighbour and asking, "Am I dreaming or is my house really on fire?" This man's practical doubt as to whether or not he is dreaming is expressed in action unlike the global sceptic's philosophical doubt. This is not to say that the global sceptic could not perform such actions, but these actions are not characteristic of his doubt. The global sceptic could well be sitting in a philosophy classroom and asking his peers nonchalantly, "What if we are all dreaming right now?"

Third, and this point is less clearly made by Malcolm: in the case of a practical doubt, there is a way to remove the doubt in question, at least in principle if not always in practice. The man who doubted whether he was awake because he unexpectedly saw his house on fire can remove his doubt if he took some steps: say, if he went across to his neighbours and asked them to confirm whether his house was on fire or if he simply waited for a while let the constancy of his sensory input convince him that he is awake and that there is a problem, his doubt could be removed. He may then take action to extinguish the fire without hesitation. On the other hand, it is a characteristic of philosophical doubt that if one were to try to provide an *answer* (to oneself or to, say, the global sceptic) as to why one is not dreaming right now, in order to remove the doubt, that answer could be subject to further questioning. This is because there is no criterion for what the right answer is – the global sceptic does not tell us what kind of proof will satisfy him. Thus, in a sense, there is no way out of a philosophical doubt: it keeps recurring.

To summarize, Malcolm, in his paper, tries to show two things: i) that Moore's assertions are made in circumstances in which it is unnatural to assert them and ii) that the global sceptic's philosophical doubt is not really a case of doubt. Malcolm also points out that Moore is *not in a position* to offer a proof to the effect that he has two hands or that he is not presently dreaming – what reasons can he offer when what is to be proven is not in question to begin with? Moreover, even if he forced himself to give a proof, it would be useless in front of

the global sceptic. If Moore says, "I know that I have two hands because I see them" the global sceptic would reply that perhaps he was hallucinating. And if Moore were to insist that he was not really hallucinating when he saw a dog in the living room, because his flatmate too confirmed that he did, the global sceptic would go a step further and say that there is nothing to rule out that Moore was hallucinating when he saw his flatmate; since nothing would count as reasons-in-support or a proof for Moore's utterance, Malcolm thinks that it is unnatural for him to say "I know that" so and so. Furthermore, Malcolm points out another absurdity with Moore's attempt at providing a proof that he knew he had two hands. Given the circumstances, if anyone from the audience approached Moore and said, "Let me see whether this is a hand, let me *feel* it" in an attempt to conduct an investigation of sorts, he would have shown that he did not *understand* that the question (and the global sceptic's challenge) was really a *philosophical one*. For the question really is not about *this* or *that* perceptual judgment, but the general possibility of knowledge in such matters. Moore betrays a similar misunderstanding. Moore's attempt at giving a proof assumes that there *can be* a proof or a method of demonstration.[9] The propositions that Moore asserts do nothing to ward off the philosophical questions and doubts that the global sceptic wishes to raise.

Moore was greatly vexed by the global sceptic's insistence that he, or any other human being for that matter, did not *really know* he had two hands or that there is a tree in front of him. Malcolm credits him with one important realization: that it would be a misuse of language if one were to say, in ordinary circumstances, "I don't know that this is a hand" by looking at one's hand. However, Malcolm thinks that what Moore could not see was that "I know that this is a hand," in response to the global sceptic's challenge, was also a misuse of language.

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[9] Recall that Moore (*Defence*, p. 149) thinks it is not possible for him to give a proof for the individual premises, namely, that "here is a hand" but he thinks that his proof qua his performance for the existence of at least two material objects is perfectly rigorous.

The philosophical question as to whether one can really know such things demands a philosophical investigation.

1.4   Wittgenstein's *On Certainty* (OC)[10]

The remarks found in the text of OC were written between 1949 and 1951, the last two years of Wittgenstein's life. The remarks were written down in three periods: the first 65 remarks (MS 173) were perhaps written during his stay in Vienna in the autumn of 1949; it is interesting to note that he left them behind at G. E. M. Anscombe's house in Oxford when he left to live with Dr. Bevan at his house in Cambridge; remarks 66 to 299 (found in MS 174 and MS 175) were written during his stay at Oxford between April and September in 1950; and finally, remarks 300 to 676 (found in MS 176 and MS 177) were written during his stay at Dr. Bevan's house, the first ones dating from 10/3/1951. The last sections, containing remarks 670 to 676, were written on 27/4/1951, just two days before his death.[11] Part of what is going on in the text of OC can be seen as Wittgenstein carrying out a philosophical investigation of the kind that Malcolm thought was required to combat the global sceptic's challenge and put it to rest.

A collection of these remarks was first published in 1969 under the title *On Certainty*, edited by G. E. M. Anscombe and Georg Henrik von Wright. The remarks are first draft material: they are often unpolished, tentative, incomplete (in line of argument), vague, at times inconsistent with each other, and at times wrong. In some remarks, Wittgenstein himself expresses his discontent with what he has written.[12] While it is clear that Wittgenstein did not

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[10] Hereafter, I will give references to remarks in OC by writing the number of the remark in square brackets, e.g. [323]; if I refer to several remarks they will be separated by a comma, e.g. [323, 456, 676]; if there is a series there will be a hyphen between the first and the last remarks in the series, e.g. [86-103].
References to remarks published in Wittgenstein's *Philosophical Investigations* will be made in the standard way, e.g. (PI, 309).
[11] See the preface to *On Certainty* (1969); see Baldwin (2011) for a detailed discussion of the content of the remarks written during each of the three periods, and Hamilton (2014, ch. 4) for a synopsis of the text.
[12] See for instance [358, 402, 405, 532].

intend to publish these remarks himself, he did think that people would read them.[13] Yet, these remarks reward hard study: some are as insightful as any we find in his more polished writings.

The aim of this thesis is to bring to the fore two philosophical problems that Wittgenstein is thinking through in the text of OC: the problem of philosophical scepticism and the problem of characterizing the "queer" propositions that Moore listed.

In chapter 2, I will discuss how Wittgenstein engages with the global sceptic's challenge. By bringing together several insights scattered throughout OC, I will present Wittgenstein's two-pronged attack against Moore and his opponents. Against the global sceptic, Wittgenstein argues that the kind of philosophical doubts the sceptic wishes to raise cannot be meaningfully raised; this involves the clarification of the concepts 'doubt' and 'mistake.' Wittgenstein's criticism of Moore's response to his opponents consists in his showing that Moore's response fails to ward off the sceptical challenge posed by his opponents; this is done in part by providing a clarification of the concept of 'knowledge.' I conclude this chapter by presenting how Wittgenstein thought Moore should have dealt with the challenge posed by his opponents and by highlighting the contributions Wittgenstein made to epistemology through his engagement with the debate between Moore and his opponents.

In chapter 3, I will present another issue that Wittgenstein is thinking through in OC: the problem of characterization. How should we characterize Moore-like propositions?[14] Do we *know* them? Do we *believe* in them? Are we *certain* about them? These are some of the positive, psychological characterizations that Wittgenstein explores. Wittgenstein also offers a negative characterization of Moore-like propositions: with respect to Moore-like propositions, in ordinary circumstances, making a mistake is logically excluded, doubt is inconceivable and

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[13] See [387].

[14] By "Moore-like propositions" I mean propositions like the ones listed by Moore in his two papers. More specifically, I mean the ones discussed by Wittgenstein in OC. I shall list them in chapter 3.

we cannot offer reasons in their support. However, commentators on OC like Norman Malcolm, Avrum Stroll and Danièle Moyal-Sharrock have suggested that it was Wittgenstein's considered view that Moore-like propositions are *objectively certain* for us. I will argue that the term *objective certainty* is *not* central to Wittgenstein's discussion of Moore-like propositions. Moreover, I will point out why the concept of objective certainty, as Moyal-Sharrock understands it, does not appropriately characterize Moore-like propositions. By arguing against the use of psychological terms and the concept of objective certainty to characterize Moore-like propositions, I will suggest that the negative characterization that Wittgenstein offers to characterize Moore-like propositions is most appropriate.

I will conclude this thesis by stating the main takeaways from my discussion of the two issues that Wittgenstein engages with in OC.

Chapter 2: Wittgenstein's Two-Pronged Attack

In this chapter, I will present Wittgenstein's two-pronged attack against the global sceptic and Moore – given the text of OC, I will present what I take to be the best lines of attack that can be extracted from Wittgenstein's unstructured but highly insightful remarks. As we have seen, this two-pronged strategy originates with Malcolm (1949). Wittgenstein bolsters this strategy and in doing so goes further than Malcolm in putting to rest the debate between Moore and his opponents.[15] We have seen in the introduction that Malcolm's two-pronged strategy involved: showing Moore that he misused language as his assertions did not make sense and showing the global sceptic that his philosophical doubt is not really a case of doubt. In OC, Wittgenstein follows Malcolm by reflecting on whether Moore's assertions made sense and if they could be given a sense;[16] however, I will not present this line of attack because I think that there is another line of attack in Wittgenstein's remarks that provides a stronger critique of Moore's response. This involves the clarification of the grammar of the concept of knowledge and the examination of the root of the disagreement between Moore and his opponents.[17]

Neither Wittgenstein nor Moore refer to the global sceptic's challenge (as I have presented it in the introduction) explicitly in their writings – but I frame my discussion in this chapter in response to it because I think that it is helpful to unite three projects: Moore's project of defending common sense, Malcolm's critique of Moore and Wittgenstein's attempt to overcome the challenge posed by sceptical philosophers. The global sceptic will serve as a common target for all three philosophers.

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[15] Since Wittgenstein does not care to distinguish the targets that Moore is attacking in his two papers, I do not delineate the positions of Moore's opponents. Wittgenstein has good reason not to focus on the nuances of the positions of Moore's opponents – it can be inferred from his lack of attention to Moore's opponents that he thinks both the idealists and the global sceptic pose the *same* challenge and it has to be met in the s*ame* way.

[16] See for instance [36, 37, 413, 622].

[17] For a detailed discussion on what Wittgenstein means by 'grammar' see McGinn (2011).

In the secondary literature, whilst there is much written about Wittgenstein and his attack against both Moore and scepticism, the historical reading I provide coupled with the introduction of a reconstructed target (the global sceptic) for all the three philosophers is novel.[18] I begin this chapter by presenting Wittgenstein's attack against the global sceptic's first two claims: i) that we can always doubt or be mistaken about individual knowledge claims; ii) that we can doubt or be mistaken about all knowledge claims, taken together. Next, I move on to his discussion concerning what is wrong with Moore's response to his opponents. Last, I bring out what I take to be the original contributions that Wittgenstein makes to epistemology as a part of his two pronged-attack in the text of OC.

2.1   The Global Sceptic's Conceptual Confusions

In the introduction I described what a philosophical confrontation with a global sceptic would look like. Recall that the global sceptic's challenge rests on the plausibility of the following three claims:

1. We can always doubt or be mistaken about individual knowledge claims.

2. We could doubt or be mistaken about all our knowledge claims, taken together.

3. We have grounds to motivate 1 and 2:

    i)   we may be dreaming right now

    ii)   we may be brains-in-a-vat;

    iii)   we may be tricked by an evil demon not just about perceptual judgments but even mathematical truths

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[18] For some detailed commentaries on OC: see Stroll (1994), Moyal-Sharrock (2004), Coliva (2010) and Hamilton (2014).

The global sceptic thinks that what follows is that we can never *really know* anything, since our knowledge is not immune to doubt. In my discussion of Malcolm's (1949) paper, I presented the reasons he offered that buttress the distinction between a practical doubt (ordinary cases of doubt) and a philosophical doubt. Malcolm claimed that a philosophical doubt is not really a case of doubt. But it may be objected, what is the problem with having a philosophical doubt: whether a doubt entertaining the possibility of always being mistaken (as in (1)) or a general doubt that puts into question all our perceptual judgments taken together (as in (2))? The global sceptic may agree with Malcolm that his philosophical doubt is not really a case of doubt but he may retort that drawing *that* distinction does not show that a philosophical doubt of the kind he wishes to raise in (1) and (2) is implausible. Malcolm's paper does not address this question adequately. Thus, the global sceptic's challenge has still not been dealt with.

Wittgenstein's discussion of the concept of doubt as seen in the remarks in OC attempts at comprehensively putting this issue to rest. Wittgenstein shows that it is not only the case that a philosophical doubt is different from ordinary cases of doubt, but also that a philosophical doubt is a logical absurdity, and hence cannot be meaningfully raised. His reflections on the concept of making a mistake are closely related to his discussions of the concept of doubt. The global sceptic says that a mistake is *always* possible, just like when he says a doubt is *always* possible. Both these views are mistaken for similar reasons. This needs some unpacking.

What about the grounds (as in (3)) that the global sceptic may use to motivate his philosophical doubts? Although the dream argument (as in (i)) and the brain-in-a-vat argument (as in (ii)) are still influential sceptical arguments, and the evil demon hypothesis (as in (iii)) has played an important role in the history of scepticism, I will not discuss these arguments because Wittgenstein does not discuss them. While Wittgenstein does have a few remarks [383, 676] where he discusses the possibility of being in a dream, and others which can be developed

to counter grounds like the brain-in-a-vat argument and the evil demon hypothesis [55, 114, 138], I do not have the space to develop these Wittgensteinian ideas into full blown arguments.

Thus, in what follows, I will show how insights scattered throughout the text of OC can be marshalled to present an argument against the first two claims that constitute the global sceptic's challenge.

2.1.1   We Cannot Always Doubt or be Mistaken

In line with one of the reasons grounding Malcolm's (1949) distinction between a doubt and a philosophical doubt, Wittgenstein discusses why what a philosopher or a global sceptic may call a doubt is not really *our doubt.* Doubting, Wittgenstein says, has certain characteristic behavioural manifestations, but they are characteristic only in certain circumstances – in other words, similar behaviour in different circumstances is *not* a manifestation of doubt. When someone looks at his hands from all sides and says he does that to make sure that he is not 'all done by mirrors': we *may* still call this doubting, but his *game* would not be ours [255, 317].

Closely connected to this is Wittgenstein's observation that doubting requires grounds [4, 122] and that one cannot doubt at will [221]. What constitutes grounds for doubt are woven into particular situations. If a stranger walks up to me and tries to sell me something, I have grounds for doubting whether he is genuine or a fraudster; perhaps when I ask him some questions, take a good look at him and at what he is selling, my doubt would disappear. There are however, cases – it is a different question as to how we describe them – where doubt is *unintelligible*. We would not understand what doubting would amount to in such situations [154]. What would doubting that I have a hand amount to? That I keep looking at my hand from all sides? But then why should I not check my eyesight by checking whether I see my hands [125]? And what would it take for someone to relieve me from such a doubt? If someone doubted that he had a body, Wittgenstein says that he would take that person for a half-wit; we

would not know what it would mean to convince him that he had one, and if something we say convinced him that he did, we would not understand how or why the person's doubt was removed [257]. That I have two hands, that my name is Pranav Ambardekar, that two times two is four, that the earth is very old, that I am a human being: with respect to all these propositions, grounds for doubt are missing. This is only another way of saying that in ordinary circumstances, it is not really clear what a doubt would amount to with respect to the kind of propositions that I listed above. Why this is so in each of the cases is a different question. The point is that the grounds for doubt are woven into particular situations. In other words, doubts arise and are settled in particular situations. But there are certain situations where, in ordinary circumstances, grounds for doubt are missing.

Unlike Malcolm, who only made a distinction between a practical doubt and a philosophical doubt, Wittgenstein adds a new element to the discussion: the global sceptic's philosophical doubt regarding the possibility of always doubting knowledge claims is *unintelligible*: because when one considers certain specific cases, doubt becomes unintelligible.

Is it always possible that I may be making a *mistake*? No, says Wittgenstein. Training in a particular practice shows what counts as a mistake [29]. Whether a mistake is possible and what it would look like in a given case is determined by the logic of the language-game [51]. Moreover, it is not just the case that a mistake becomes more and more improbable as one passes from the hypothesis that a planet exists at such and such distance from the sun to "here is a hand," but at some point a mistake seems inconceivable [52, 53]. Though the boundary between cases where a mistake seems intelligible and ones where it does not need not be a sharp one [52]. We would not understand Moore if he were to say to us, "Of course, I could be mistaken about my two hands" [32]. Suppose Moore were to walk up to us and say, "My name is George," and then he added, "but of course, I only believe so, I may be wrong," we would not understand him. There are circumstances where a mistake is ruled out logically [155], and

yet if someone has false beliefs, say, about where they have been living or what their nationality is and so on and so forth, we would not regard this as a mistake but as a mental disturbance – there is something seriously wrong with the person [73]. This is not to say that in the circumstances where a mistake is ruled out, we are infallible about certain things. We might earnestly claim something wrong, but that would not be making a *mistake* [425]. When one makes a mistake, this can be fitted with what one knows aright [74]. If a person is wrong about his name, where he lives, who his friends are and so on, this cannot be fitted into anything he knows – this is the personal background necessary for him to correct mistakes like getting his aunt's name wrong. Wittgenstein claims that in order to make a mistake, a human must already judge in conformity with humanity [156]. In other words, what counts as a mistake is determined by judgments we make collectively and this mutual agreement is reflected in the logic of specific language-games; but this is not to say that *many* people have to play the game, just that what game is being played is shown by the way in which people play it. For the reasons listed, the global sceptic's claim that we could *always* be mistaken is not just wrong but absurd.

2.1.2 We Cannot Doubt Everything

But what about the general possibility of doubting all our knowledge claims? To see why Wittgenstein thinks this is impossible, let us first take a look at his observations on human upbringing and the logic of doubting. The child learns by believing the adult, and doubt comes *after* belief [160]. Children first learn things without questioning them, this is what enables them to learn certain language-games [283]. Doubt comes later. The way we are brought up and come to doubt things tells us something about the logic of doubting: doubting and non-doubting behaviour, there is the first only if there is the second [354]. The logic of our investigations, whether they are scientific or everyday ones, shows that for us to doubt certain things, we *have to* bracket certain other things [342]. As regards the global sceptic's aim to put

into question *all* our knowledge claims, Wittgenstein reminds the global sceptic that we do not as a matter of fact doubt all our knowledge claims; and to turn the previous contingent observation into a conceptual one: that we do not doubt all of them is our manner of judging [232]; and given the logic of the concept of doubt, it does not make sense to doubt all of them together. A doubt without an end is not even a doubt [625].

The general possibility of doubting all our knowledge claims is a logical absurdity – since doubt presupposes things which are exempt from doubt. Similarly, it is a logical absurdity to say that we can *always* be mistaken or that we can be mistaken about *everything* – what we call a 'mistake' forms quite a special part of our language-games [196], as emphasized in the last section, and the global sceptic fails to realize this.

In this section, I have presented a line of attack against the global sceptic based on Wittgenstein's remarks in OC. It was seen that Wittgenstein not only buttresses Malcolm's (1949) claim (knowingly or unknowingly) that the global sceptic's philosophical doubt is not really a case of doubt, but goes a step further and shows that the philosophical doubts ((1) and (2)) he wishes to raise are logically absurd. Recall that Moore (*Defence*, p. 45) felt that there was something absurd about certain philosophers' denial of the kind of propositions he listed. The absurdity of the global sceptic's position lay in the fact that he tried to motivate questions that cannot be meaningfully put forward. It is to Moore's credit that he sensed the absurdity of his opponents' position, and to Wittgenstein's credit that he managed to *show*, through the remarks in OC, the conceptual confusions that motivate the kind of questions the global sceptic raises.

2.2   Moore's Mistake

Given that Wittgenstein thinks that the kind of philosophical doubts that the global sceptic wants to raise cannot be meaningfully asserted, Wittgenstein's prima facie position against Moore is that Moore is trying to answer questions that cannot be meaningfully raised in the first place. But is that the only reason why Wittgenstein thinks that Moore is at fault? No. Generally speaking, Wittgenstein thinks that Moore is confused by the difference between using the propositions he listed in *Defence* and *Proof* in an ordinary sense (making a knowledge claim) and using them to make a philosophical point.

Wittgenstein's comprehensive attack, as far as it can be reconstructed from some of the remarks in OC, against Moore's argumentative strategy has three elements: first he points out that Moore is wrong to think that knowledge is some kind of *mental state*; second, Wittgenstein shows that Moore failed to give his propositions an ordinary usage whilst trying to make a philosophical point; and last, Wittgenstein throws light on the root of the disagreement that Moore had with his opponents and suggests an alternative way to respond to the idealists and the global sceptic's challenge.

In the next sub-section, I will discuss Wittgenstein's take on how Moore was using the propositions he listed – this will help us understand why Wittgenstein thinks that Moore is under the grip of a conceptual confusion regarding the concept of knowledge. In the sub-section after, I shall reconstruct a line of attack that can be found in OC against Moore's usage of "I know…" followed by the kind of propositions he listed as a response to his opponents who insisted that he did not know [521]. Two influential Wittgenstein scholars, namely, Hans-Johann Glock (2004) and Oswald Hanfling (1982), think that, despite Wittgenstein's line of attack against Moore, Moore was justified in saying that he knows the kind of propositions he asserted. I shall argue that Glock and Hanfling's defence of Moore fails.

I will end this chapter by highlighting the contributions Wittgenstein makes to epistemology by examining Moore's response to his opponents and in arguing against the plausibility of the global sceptic's philosophical doubts.

2.2.1 Moore's Usage of "I know"

In his conversations with Malcolm in Ithaca, before he started to write the remarks we find in OC, Wittgenstein discusses why he thinks Moore asserted what he did (in his two papers) in the manner in which he did it. I now present relevant points that Wittgenstein made in his conversations with Malcolm on the basis of Malcolm's report.[19]

Wittgenstein acknowledges that there is a tendency to think of knowledge as a kind of mental state, such that i) one is supposed to *know* what mental state one is in and ii) if one is in that mental state then one's claim to knowledge is guaranteed to be true. Moore, when he is staring at a house twenty feet away, wants to produce in himself the *feeling* of knowing: he says with a peculiar intonation, "I *know* that *there's* a house." He wants to exhibit knowing for certain for himself. It is as if someone had said to Moore, "you don't really feel pain when you are pinched" – and Moore pinches himself in order to feel pain and to prove to himself that the other is wrong. Similarly, of all the things he could have claimed to know, he prefers to gaze at a tree in front of him and say, "I *know* there's a tree there.' He wants to give himself the *experience* of knowing.[20]

These observations on Wittgenstein's part throw important light on how Moore is using the proposition 'Here is one hand' in *Proof.* In *Proof* (p. 146), why does Moore say that "I certainly did at the moment *know* that which I expressed by the combination of certain gestures

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[19] The part of the discussion that I draw on can be found in Flowers (1999, pp. 100-104).
[20] See Flowers (1999, p. 101).

with saying the words 'There is one hand and here is another'"? He said it because, as Wittgenstein points out, he wants to give himself, at a *particular moment*, the feeling/experience of knowing with certainty; so he asserts 'Here is one hand' with a peculiar tone of voice and accompanying gestures; as if our "knowledge" that we have two hands is something that dawns on us at a *particular moment*. If this is indeed the usage he makes of "I know with certainty that here is a hand," he is merely expressing his *subjective certainty* or *conviction*: the absence of doubt that shows itself in characteristic expressions and actions e.g. "I know," "I'm completely sure about it," "I'm absolutely certain," "Just believe me, I know what I am doing" etc. along with accompanying gestures. The global sceptic and Moore's opponents, however, are not interested in Moore's subjective certainty regarding matters. So Moore's saying, "I know with certainty…" is beside the point.

Wittgenstein also points out that Moore's opponents want to make a *logical/conceptual* point.[21] For them, everyday examples of knowing (that there is a dog in the backyard or that the neighbour's house is on fire) are not strictly speaking *knowledge*; they are not *knowledge in the highest degree*.[22] Instead of challenging them on their usage of the concept of knowledge, Moore plays by their rules by accepting their conception of knowledge. In *Defence,* why did not Moore include, along with the propositions he listed, everyday examples of knowing? When his idealist opponents said "You cannot know this or that to be *wholly* true," Moore, as it were, chose his best examples of knowledge and replied, "I *know these* propositions to be *wholly* true."

Now, what are we to make of the propositions that Moore listed in *Defence* prefixed by "I know with certainty that..."? It is clear that even in *Defence*, Moore is subjectively certain about all the propositions he lists. At this juncture, I would like to make two important points:

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[21] See Flowers (1999, p. 103).
[22] See Flowers (1999, p. 101).

the first is that for someone who does not know who Moore is arguing against, what the debate is and more generally, the background to Moore's two papers, Moore's expression of his subjective certainty would seem strange; one would likely think to oneself, "Why is this man saying that he knows that he is a human being? Why is saying that he knows that here is a hand? What's the matter with him?"; this is because as a matter of fact, people do not express their subjective certainty regarding such matters; the second is that for people who do know what the background to Moore's two papers is (Malcolm, Wittgenstein), the question of whether Moore properly used the expression "I know…" does not concern whether he was expressing his subjective certainty – that he *is* expressing it is clear to everyone; the question is what usage, *apart from* expressing his subjective certainty, did Moore give to the propositions he asserted.

Now, with respect to the question raised in the latter point, rather than saying that Moore misused the expression "I know…" Wittgenstein thinks that Moore's assertions have no clear meaning. Wittgenstein says that Moore himself does not know how he is using his propositions: he is confused by the difference between using them in some ordinary sense (making a knowledge claim) and using them to make some philosophical point e.g. that some empirical propositions function like propositions of mathematics or that it is a misuse of language to say, "Perhaps it is not a tree," or "I believe my name is George, but of course I can be mistaken about this."[23] The nature of Moore's response is unclear, even to himself: does he think he is making knowledge claims or is he making some philosophical point with the propositions he asserted using "I know…"?

Now, I believe that Moore wanted to make the philosophical point that he, and everyone else, knows the kinds of things that his opponents denied could be known to be *fully* true – but

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[23] See Flowers (1999, p. 101-102).

he wanted to make this philosophical point *by making knowledge claims*; it's as if an idealist came up to him and said, "Are there any propositions that we can know to be *fully* true? If so, tell me what they are!" and Moore searched hard and found a list of them which he asserted as knowledge claims thinking that that would put the philosophical debate to rest. Moore thinks of them as *knowledge in the highest degree*. And I think that Wittgenstein is right to say that in doing so, it does not strike Moore that he is not even giving his propositions an ordinary usage (making knowledge claims).

2.2.2 The Problem with Moore's Response

In the beginning of OC, Wittgenstein writes that "I know" seems to describe a state of affairs that guarantees what is known [12]. I think Wittgenstein has in mind here Moore's tendency to think of knowledge as a kind of mental state, such that if one is in it, what one claims to know is guaranteed to be true. Wittgenstein clarifies what we *actually* mean by a "mental state": we may call a "mental state" what is expressed by tone of voice, by gestures etc.; conviction or being sure may be called a mental state [42]; but knowledge does not express itself in *this* way; there is no *tone* of knowledge. What is knowledge if not a mental state? We must ask ourselves what we *do* with the statement "I know…" – for it is not a question of mental states or processes [230].

That one knows something takes some showing [14]. One must be in a position to offer evidence/reasons for what one claims to know, and others must be (in principle) in a position to evaluate what one puts forward to support the claim [243]. The utterance "I know…" can only have its meaning in connection with other evidence of my "knowing" [432]. Does saying "I know…" along with giving reasons guarantee what is known? No, claims to knowledge may *assure* others of the truth of p but never *insure* the truth of p – and this is based on a tacit

awareness of the many ways in which a knowledge claim may fail.[24] However, with respect to the propositions that Moore listed in *Defence*, a mistake is logically ruled out – there is no such thing as doubt in such cases. With respect to ordinary claims to knowledge, one can imagine how one could be wrong about them, what making a mistake is like, how one could doubt them and so on. And so it makes sense to say, "I know that…" and offer reasons in support. But with respect to some of the propositions that Moore listed, doubt is excluded, as a matter of logic [454]. By logic, Wittgenstein means the logic or the description of language-games and our general conceptual situation.[25]

Wittgenstein asks himself: can one say, "Where there is no doubt there is no knowledge either?" [121]. Early on in OC he says that we do not recognize how very specialized the use of "I know" is [11]. Hans-Johann Glock (2004, p. 70) neatly stipulates three features that Wittgenstein thinks characterize the ordinary use of the word "know" – we should reserve "I know" for cases in which:

a) It also makes sense to speak of believing, of being mistaken or ignorant, of doubting and making certain [58];[26]

b) There is an answer to the question 'How do you know?' [550];

c) One is prepared to give 'compelling reasons' for one's claim [243].

'I know' may mean 'I do not doubt' but does not mean that the words 'I doubt' are *senseless*, that doubt is logically excluded. One says 'I know' where one can also say 'I believe' or 'I suspect'; where one can find out (PI II, Fragment xi, Remarks 310-311).

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[24] See Thomas Morawetz (2007, p. 175).

[25] See D.Z. Phillips's afterword in Rhees & Phillips (2003) for a discussion of what Wittgenstein means by logic in OC.

[26] I do not know why Glock cites [58] as [58] says something different from what Glock wants to say.

Now, what is the import of all this? We may take Wittgenstein to be saying that Moore is misusing the expression "I know…" since he does not use in it the ordinary way characterized by the three points above. Wittgenstein writes that he wants to reserve the expression "I know" for the cases in which it is used in normal linguistic exchange [260]. This line of attack in OC has garnered some attention. I should like to point out that Wittgenstein expresses certain reservations against the conclusion that Moore *misused* the expression "I know…" [397, 552]. This is a problem for anyone who wants to interpret Wittgenstein as holding the view that Moore misused the expression "I know…".

At any rate, anyone who wants to say that Moore used his propositions to make knowledge claims in an ordinary way must specify what that way is. If it is seen that we do indeed make knowledge claims that way, and that Moore himself was making knowledge claims in the same way, then we may me say that Wittgenstein was wrong to suggest that Moore does not even give his propositions an ordinary usage.

Glock (2004) and Hanfling (1982) argue that Moore did give his propositions an ordinary usage i.e. the putative way in which Moore used his propositions is an ordinary way to make knowledge claims. I say putative because, as we shall see, the plausibility of their claims rests on the contention that Moore used the propositions he listed in certain specific ways. If Glock and Hanfling are right, then it would be the case that Moore made a philosophical point *by making knowledge claims* in the ordinary way. However, I shall show that Moore in fact did not use them in those ways and that he failed to give his assertions an ordinary usage. The discussion of these two arguments will help me bring out what I take to the strongest argument – based on Wittgenstein's remarks on the concept of knowledge - against Moore's response to his opponents. I do not claim that this argument was Wittgenstein's considered view.

Glock (2004, p. 71) points out that the question that 'How do you know?' can be equally answered by specifying a cognitive faculty like perception or memory. How do I know that my cat has white fur? Simple: because I can see it. Furthermore, he presents an observation that Wittgenstein himself once made: that we have kinaesthetic knowledge of the position of our limbs, while insisting that this knowledge is not derived from the alleged evidence provided by kinaesthetic sensations postulated by psychologists like James and Köhler. Thus, we may say that we have knowledge of some things since they are evident to the senses, or because of our memory, and that we have knowledge of the position of our body parts without observational evidence.

I take it that Glock's point here is that the cases he discusses all contribute to the ordinary usage of "I know…" and if Moore is using the propositions he listed in these ways then he cannot be *misusing* the expression. Now, as a matter of fact, Moore is *not* using any of his propositions in any of the ways specified by Glock. As I pointed out in the last section, in *Proof*, Moore does not utter "I know with certainty that here is a hand" because it is evident to his senses or because he remembers it – his utterance taken together with his gestures tells us that he wanted to give himself an experience of knowing. His performance ended up being an expression of subjective certainty. Nowhere in his paper does Moore say that he knows that he has two hands because it is evident to his senses, because he remembers that, or that he has kinaesthetic knowledge of them. He says that any proof about the existence of external things is not possible. He adds, as if to concede to his opponents that he has under-delivered, that for him to prove that he knows he has a hand he must first show that he is not currently dreaming, and he thinks he cannot show *that*. If Moore was using 'I know that here is one hand' in the way in which Glock specifies, nothing more needs to be said – neither is any proof expected nor are any reasons needed to back up that claim.

What about the propositions that Moore lists in *Defence*? Did Moore want to say that he *knows* propositions like 'I am a human being,' 'The earth is very old,' and suchlike because they are evident to his senses, because he remembers them, or because he has kinaesthetic knowledge of them? In *Defence* (p. 44), Moore admits that with respect to these propositions we do not know how we know. Moore says that this is a strange situation – again, it seems that Moore thinks he *should have* had some evidence to back his claims but he is somehow falling short. Whereas if Glock is right and if Moore is using the propositions in the ways specified by him, then Moore should not have said that there is something strange about the situation. Even if we leave aside how Moore actually used the propositions he listed, it is absurd to say that one *knows* propositions like 'I am a human being' and 'The earth is very old' *because* they are evident to one's senses or that one remembers such things well or that one has kinaesthetic knowledge of them. Any reason one offers in support of these propositions is not more certain than these propositions. Moreover, such responses invite questions like: why should you not check your eyes [125] or the reliability of your memory first? And how can one have kinaesthetic knowledge of the proposition that 'the earth is very old'? This goes to show that kinaesthetic knowledge does not get us far with Moore-like propositions. Thus, Glock is wrong on two points: i) he is factually wrong about Moore's usage of his propositions and ii) he is wrong to suggest that the additional ways of "knowing" – which for him are ordinary ways of knowing - he lists show that Moore-like propositions can be *known* in the ways he suggests.

Hanfling (1982) tries to defend Moore in a similar way. He tries to show that Moore's usage of "I know…" with the propositions he listed is a normal usage. First, he says that Moore may be simply using "I know…" to assure the other person that has no doubt about the matter. Moreover, Hanfling says that the expression "I know…" is used to assure the other person that one has no doubt about the matter in the background of some "doubt or anxiety," even if the doubt may be a result of fallacious reasoning or confusions about language – and this counts

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as a normal use of "I know." Now, as I said before, it is no mystery that Moore made an ordinary usage of his propositions to express his subjective certainty. But that is beside the point. What is in contention is whether Moore, *in addition to* expressing his subjective certainty, used his propositions to make knowledge claims (in the ordinary way). Thus, Hanfling has misunderstood what the point of contention is.

Second, Hanfling suggests that Moore could have been making a *grammatical* use of the propositions he asserted. As Wittgenstein says in OC, "I know…" could have been used to give a logical insight [59]. The logical insight being the following one: in all the cases I (Moore) list, doubt is inconceivable and making a mistake is ruled out logically; thus, it is wrong to say, like his (Moore's) opponents would have, "Perhaps I may be mistaken about my name," or "I cannot know that I am a human being to be fully true." In *Proof*, it is clear that Moore did not use the proposition 'Here is one hand' to make any grammatical point. In *Defence,* as I pointed out in the last sub-section, it is clear that Moore only lists the kind of propositions prefixed by, "I know…" because he thinks that the propositions he lists are examples of *knowledge in the highest degree*. Moore thinks that he is making a philosophical point by asserting knowledge claims that he takes to be *knowledge in the highest degree*, but he fails to see that they do not even fulfil the criteria for being ordinary claims to knowledge. Therefore, Hanfling's first suggestion simply misses the point and his second suggestion that Moore provided a grammatical use to his propositions is, as a matter of fact, false.

I am now in a position to clearly present the main argument against Moore's response to his opponents that can be extracted from Wittgenstein's remarks on the concepts of knowledge, doubt and mistake in OC. The point of the discussion of the ordinary usage of the concept of knowledge is to remind us how we *actually* use the concept of knowledge. Once we take note of this, and once we recognize that the philosophical doubts that the global sceptic wishes to raise are logically absurd, we see that the view of the concept of knowledge which

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holds that everyday examples of knowledge are not *knowledge in the highest degree* amounts to conceptual confusion. Moore's mistake lies in the fact that in *Defence,* he is on board with his opponents' conception of knowledge as mentioned before, and in *Proof*, he is confused about knowledge as being some kind of *mental state*. Moreover, given the aforementioned, Moore fails to realize that the propositions that he listed are not *paradigmatic cases* of knowledge; they are at most *limiting* ones.

When his opponents insisted "You cannot know," Moore responded by saying that he *knew with certainty* the kind of propositions he listed, as if his response gave him any leverage over his opponents. Moore's assertions give him no leverage over the idealists and the global sceptic because he failed to spot the root of his disagreement with his opponents. Moore responds as if his disagreement with the idealists and the global sceptics is just over facts. Wittgenstein, in his remarks in OC, is sensitive to the kind of challenge that is posed by the global sceptic and what must be done to put it to rest.

2.2.3   How to Respond to the Idealists and the Global Sceptic

To the idealist's question: "what right have I not to doubt the existence of my hands?" the reply cannot be, "I *know* that they exist" [24]. The idealist does not have a practical doubt about the existence of his hands, for he may be told to look closer [3]; he has a doubt *behind* the practical doubt, and that this doubt is an *illusion* has to be shown in a different way [19]. The global sceptic's philosophical doubts betray conceptual confusion. It is this conceptual confusion that leads the idealist to disagree with philosophers like Moore over trivial facts.

Imagine an encounter between Moore and Bishop Berkeley in the 21st century. Berkeley tells Moore that the chair in his office does not exist when Moore goes outside to get coffee, because "to be is to be perceived." Moore replies that he can verify whether it exists or not by taking a look at the CCTV camera's footage in the janitor's room. When he shows Berkeley

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the live footage, Berkeley responds by saying, "The chair exists because you are seeing it now." The point is that there is no way for Moore to show to Berkeley that the chair exists independently of someone's seeing it. This shows that the disagreement about whether the chair exists or not is not *just* factual, but there is something *more* to it. To make the distinction clearer: a factual disagreement can be settled by alluding to other facts; thus if P and Q disagree about how many planets exist, they can consult a book on astronomy, ask an eighth grade geography teacher, or learn the relevant skills required to make astronomical observations themselves. Nothing of this sort can be done in the case of Berkeley and Moore.

Similarly, Moore's disagreement with the idealists and the global sceptic is not *just* factual, there is something more to it. With respect to Moore and his opponents the *something more* is a conceptual confusion. Moore's opponents think that their usage of the concepts of knowledge, doubt and mistake is justified. Conceptual confusion of this sort has to be tackled by a conceptual/grammatical investigation of the kind that Wittgenstein undertakes in OC to clarify the criteria for the use of concepts like knowledge, doubt and mistake. What must be shown is that there is a problem at the conceptual level, which is why there is a disagreement at the factual level. In Moore's two papers, the most that Moore manages to show is that there is something absurd in the position of his opponents. Moore fails to make a philosophical point with the propositions he asserts as he is under the grip of conceptual confusion with regards to the concept of knowledge. As we have seen in the introduction, Moore's argumentative strategy leads him to a philosophical stalemate with his opponents.

2.3   Wittgenstein's Contributions to Epistemology

By engaging with the global sceptic's philosophical doubts and Moore's responses, Wittgenstein makes three important contributions to epistemology, historically speaking.

The first concerns the plausibility of philosophical doubts of the kind that the global sceptic wishes to raise. While Malcolm (1949) made a distinction between practical doubts and philosophical doubts, Wittgenstein in OC shows that certain philosophical doubts are logically absurd and thus cannot be meaningfully asserted. As we have seen in section 2.1, this is a result of a comprehensive study, or a grammatical investigation, of the concepts of 'doubt' and 'mistake.' The second has to do with how one ought to deal with the challenge posed by idealists and the global sceptic alike. Attacks on common sense cannot be warded off by restating propositions of common sense prefixed by "I know…". The global sceptic must be shown that his questions betray conceptual confusion and that nothing is wrong with our ordinary ways of speaking about knowledge. This is the Wittgensteinian strategy of dealing with scepticism. The third contribution is closely related to the second: in reminding us how we actually use the concept of knowledge, Wittgenstein's discussion shows that the propositions that Moore listed are not paradigmatic cases of knowledge, they are at best limiting ones. This result further clarifies and enriches our understanding of the grammar of the concept of knowledge – something that Wittgenstein did in the *Investigations* with respect to the possibility of knowing one's own sensations in the present tense.

Chapter 3: Wittgenstein's Search for a Description

3.1 The Problem of Characterization

In the introduction, I mentioned that Wittgenstein, in conversation with Rhees, said that there was something "queer" about the propositions that Moore listed and discussed in *Defence* and *Proof*. In OC, Wittgenstein discusses such propositions and tries to pinpoint what makes these propositions queer. In doing so, he phrases some of Moore's propositions differently and also adds new ones to the list. I list them here:

- 'My name is L.W.'
- The world existed for a long time before my birth'
- 'Everyone has parents'
- 'Everyone has a brain inside his skull'
- 'I have two hands'
- 'That's a tree'
- 'I am in England'
- 'I have/ No man has never/ever been on the moon'
- 'I have never been to China'
- 'Water boils at 100 degrees Celsius'
- 'The water in the kettle on the gas-flame will not freeze but boil'
- 'I am a human being'
- 'I flew from America to England a few days ago'
- 'I am sitting and writing at the table'
- '12*12=144'

On the list of propositions presented above, Marie McGinn (1989, p. 104) rightly comments: 'the class is very much a motley.'[27] Nevertheless, I shall for the sake of convenience, refer to the propositions listed above as Moore-like propositions. Much of the secondary literature on OC focuses on two problems that Wittgenstein seems to be grappling with throughout the text of OC:

1) The problem of characterization (of Moore-like propositions);
2) The problem of *why* Moore-like propositions have the status they do;

In this section, I will discuss some proposals offered by Wittgenstein that can be seen as responses to the problem of characterization. In the next section, I will argue against three influential interpreters (Malcolm, Stroll, and Moyal-Sharrock) of Wittgenstein and OC who seem to suggest that the concept of *objective certainty* is central to Wittgenstein's discussion of Moore-like propositions. In the last section, I will point out what is problematic with the proposal of objective certainty as Moyal-Sharrock understands it. I will end this chapter by touching upon the problem of why Moore-like propositions have the status they do – constraints of space do not allow me to discuss the proposals that Wittgenstein offers in response to this problem.

Now, what is the problem of characterization? Since Moore-like propositions are hardly ever uttered in ordinary circumstances, we face the question of what concept most appropriately describes our relation to them. Do we *know* Moore-like propositions? Do we

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[27] There is a debate as to whether Wittgenstein thought that Moore-like propositions could be given a one-size-fits all characterization: see Rhees (2003, pp. 154-157). I do not discuss the views of disputants in that debate here because I think that they misconstrue the proposals that Wittgenstein offers. Not all the proposals he offers are meant to characterize Moore-like propositions; some are meant as answers to a related, but different question: why do Moore-like propositions have the status they do? I think this question is more general in nature and the proposals he puts forward are reflections on our general conceptual situation.

believe in them? Are we *certain* about them? Are we *objectively certain* about them? Let us see what Wittgenstein has to say.

Recall that in arguing against the global sceptic's view that one can always be mistaken about perceptual judgments, Wittgenstein replies that with respect to certain propositions, grounds for doubt are missing. In ordinary circumstances, we do not, and cannot doubt Moore-like propositions; grounds for doubt are lacking [4, 88, 394]. This is what I would call a *negative characterization* of the status of Moore-like propositions.

However, it is not clear if Wittgenstein was satisfied with characterizing Moore-like propositions only negatively. For throughout OC, he explores the idea of characterizing them positively. In the previous chapter, we saw that Wittgenstein pointed out to Moore the ordinary usage of the concept of know. It was seen that the strongest argument against Moore's reply to his opponents was not that the concept of knowledge does not apply to Moore-like propositions, but that Moore-like propositions are not paradigmatic cases of knowledge and that Moore's assertions did not give him any leverage against his opponents. This has the following implication: if Moore-like propositions can be *called* cases of knowledge (though limiting ones) by an extension of our ordinary concept of knowledge, then the concept of knowledge is clearly not the *best* way to characterize Moore-like propositions. And this is exactly what we find in the text of OC; Wittgenstein tries to find alternatives to the concept of knowledge in characterizing Moore-like propositions. Instead of "I know…" Moore could have said, "It stands fast for me that…" and further "It stands fast for me and many others…" [116]. Moore does not *know* what he asserts he knows, it stands fast for him [151]. Now, is standing-fast (*feststehen*) still a negative characterization? I think it is. Since all the work that the concept standing-fast is doing here is: i) grouping together Moore-like propositions with respect to which we do not have grounds for doubt – with the qualification that some propositions may stand fast only for me, while I may share some others that stand fast for me with a community,

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or all intelligent human beings; ii) suggesting that these things stand fast or are fixed for me also in the sense that everything else rotates around them [152].

What are some of the *positive characterizations* that Wittgenstein explores? Wittgenstein says that he *believes* in a whole host of Moore-like propositions: that he and everybody has ancestors; the facts of history and geography; that the earth is a body and it does not disappear any more suddenly than any other solid body like a table or a tree [234]; that every human being has two parents [239]; he has two hands [252]. To find out if *belief* best characterizes Moore-like propositions, let's take a look at the use of the concept of belief. If someone is said to believe something, he must be capable of manifesting his belief through certain actions – or, better still, certain actions must count as manifesting his belief in so and so.[28] With respect to this criterion, we may say that we believe all the things that Wittgenstein says we believe since there are many actions with respect to each Moore-like proposition that he lists which can be seen as manifesting the respective belief. However, it is also a part of the use of the concept of belief that a belief can be meaningfully stated. To put it in another way, the utterance of beliefs has a *use* in some language-game. Why does it sound more natural when I say, "I believe that the Prime Minister has lost his mind," or when I say that, "I believe in ghosts" and unnatural when I say, "I believe that I have two hands"? Perhaps because the first two utterances have a *use* in certain language games, while the third is, prima-facie, useless. There may be a debate about the Prime Minister's policies, and when I say that I believe he has lost his mind, my utterance is *doing something* in the language game: I have, so to speak, planted a flag on one side of the debate and made my position clear to others; they may ask me why I believe what I do; they can infer certain things about me after they know what my position is, and so on. Similarly, the utterance "I believe in ghosts," has a use, and

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[28] See (PI, 578), where Wittgenstein asks "What does it mean to *believe* Goldbach's conjecture? What does this belief consist in?" He later hints at the answer: we must look and see what the consequences of this belief are.

therefore a meaning, because of the age-old discussion about the existence or non-existence of ghosts. Or perhaps it's a move in some other language game: I may say it as a kind of a joke in a serious scientific gathering. Now, "I believe that I have two hands" could also be a part of some joke, for instance: an experiment falsifies a theory that many scientists believed to be true for years; at a gathering of scientists, one exclaims, "I'm not sure what I should believe anymore," to which another facetiously replies, "Well, I believe that I have two hands." However, we do not want to characterize Moore-like propositions as a class of jokes.

Wittgenstein, however, does not settle for *belief* as a characterization of Moore-like propositions. Another positive characterization could be made by the use of the concept of *certainty*. As Wittgenstein rightly points out, with the word "certain" we express complete conviction, the total absence of doubt, and thereby we seek to convince other people. That is *subjective certainty* [194]. *Subjective certainty* is manifest in one's actions, one's tone of voice, one's facial appearance and is expressed by saying things like, "I am totally sure," "I'm convinced that..," "I am certain that..," etc. – if one said these things whilst being hesitant in action, or in a timid tone of voice, or with a confused looking face, perhaps the person whom we are trying to convince or answer will doubt that we are certain. It is also a part of the use of the concept of certainty that talk of certainty arises only against a background of contention or possible contention. In this sense, the concept of certainty is tied with the concept of belief: it is as unnatural to say, "I am certain that I have two hands," as it is to say, "I believe that I have two hands," in ordinary circumstances; because it is constitutive of ordinary circumstances that there is no debate about the number or the existence of human beings' hands. Furthermore, subjective certainty may also be called an attitude, or a settled way of thinking or feeling about something. "I'm sure that I am going to do great in my exams," if someone says that without having any compelling grounds (I've been studying hard, I already know what questions are going to appear, etc.) to say so, with all other behavioural manifestations in place, we may say

of him that he has an attitude of conviction. However, in ordinary circumstances, I have no such attitude towards: my hands, the tree that stands in front of me, the truth that the earth is very old, 12*12=144 or any other Moore-like propositions.[29] I may *come to have*, as Moore did, an attitude of conviction regarding such propositions if my opponent flatly denies that such things can be known. I may be shocked and vexed like Moore and assert these propositions repeatedly with great conviction. However, this does not discredit the point that in ordinary circumstances, I have no particular feeling or attitude towards Moore-like propositions.

We have seen that psychological terms like *know*, *believe* and *certain* do not get us very far. Wittgenstein recognizes this: all psychological terms merely distract us from the thing that really matters [459]. This remark shows that even if there is no emphatic declaration by Wittgenstein regarding what he thought was the best characterization of Moore-like propositions, he had qualms about characterizing them positively. With respect to the negative characterization, namely, the inconceivability of doubt, he shows no such concern. Given the nature of the text of OC, I think that this is the most we can say about Wittgenstein's views on the matter of characterizing Moore-like propositions.

On this matter, I find myself in disagreement with three influential scholars in the secondary literature on OC. I have in mind: Malcolm (1986), Stroll (2007) and Moyal-Sharrock (2007). As I said earlier, all three suggest, in one way or another, that the concept of *objective certainty* is central to Wittgenstein's discussion of Moore-like propositions. Based on their interpretations of Wittgenstein's remarks in OC, they seem to attribute to Wittgenstein the view that Moore-like propositions are *objectively certain* for us. All three cite the distinction Wittgenstein makes in [194] between subjective and objective certainty in favour of the aforementioned view. In addition to the distinction made in [194] Stroll and Moyal-Sharrock

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[29] Genia Schönbaumsfeld (2016, p. 120) makes this point. Wittgenstein seems to be making a similar point in [376, 377].

cite as evidence the distinction Wittgenstein makes in [308] between knowledge and objective certainty.

My disagreement with Malcolm and Stroll is less substantial than my disagreement with Moyal-Sharrock. For when Malcolm and Stroll suggest that it is Wittgenstein's view that Moore-like propositions are objectively certain for us, they mean that with respect to Moore-like propositions a mistake is logically excluded and doubt is inconceivable. This is the negative characterization that Wittgenstein often uses to characterize Moore-like propositions. However, given the textual evidence, I do not think that i) Wittgenstein consistently used the concept of objective certainty to put forward a negative characterization of Moore-like propositions and ii) Wittgenstein introduced a term that he thought was useful to capture the negative characterization of Moore-like propositions he introduced earlier. With Moyal-Sharrock, my disagreement is not just confined to her interpretations of remarks wherein Wittgenstein uses the term objective certainty, but with her elucidation of the concept itself. For her, the concept of objective certainty amounts to more than just a negative characterization. In the last section, I will argue that objective certainty, as Moyal-Sharrock understands it, does not appropriately characterize Moore-like propositions.

That said, I do not think that my disagreement with Malcolm and Stroll is *merely terminological*. I think that the term they give center stage in their interpretation of Wittgenstein *suggests* a positive, psychological characterization, something that Wittgenstein tried to explore throughout OC. However, some remarks suggest that he does not think it appropriate to characterize Moore-like propositions positively.

In what follows, I will examine the textual evidence that each of the three philosophers cites in favour of their interpretation. I will argue that the textual evidence they present does

not justify their interpretation. I will also present textual evidence from OC that contradicts their interpretations of Wittgenstein.

3.2   Objective Certainty

3.2.1   The Interpretative Debate

Malcolm (1986, p. 207), Stroll (2007, p. 37) and Moyal-Sharrock (2007, p. 76) all cite as evidence for the view that Wittgenstein made a distinction between subjective and objective certainty the following remark:

> With the word "certain" we express complete conviction, the total absence of doubt, and thereby we seek to convince other people. That is *subjective* certainty.
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> But when is something objectively certain? When a mistake is not possible. But what kind of possibility is that? Mustn't the mistake be *logically* excluded? [194]

This is the first remark in OC where Wittgenstein can be seen as making a distinction between subjective certainty and objective certainty. In the last section, we have seen what subjective certainty amounts to. Note, however, that in the cases where someone can be said to be subjectively certain about some matter, doubt is still conceivable, it can gain a foothold. When someone is sure that her favourite tennis player is going to win a final in a tournament, she may be told that her favourite player is battling with a minor knee injury or that the player's record in tournament finals is, statistically speaking, terrible. These are grounds for her to doubt whether her favourite player will win the final, regardless of whether these grounds (in fact) induce doubt in her. However, when something is objectively certain, there *can* be no grounds

for doubt, and a mistake is logically excluded. I cannot conceive what doubting that I have two hands would look like. Moyal-Sharrock (2007, p. 78) adds that Wittgenstein wants to say that in cases of objective certainty, one cannot produce grounds for what is objectively certain; for instance, if I am objectively certain about the existence of my two hands, I am not in a position to put forward any reasons in support of my claim – I simply am objectively certain about the existence of my two hands, there is no justification.

Now, I think that [194] only shows that at some stage Wittgenstein made a distinction between subjective and objective certainty, not that he *maintained* it throughout the text of OC. For us to say that Wittgenstein maintained this distinction and that this distinction is central to his discussion of Moore-like propositions, it must be shown that Wittgenstein recurrently uses *this* concept of objective certainty to characterize Moore-like propositions.

Malcolm (1986, p. 208) in an essay called 'Certainty,' writes in the section titled 'Objective Certainty' that "Wittgenstein is calling our attention to a real distinction," and that the concept of objective certainty is Wittgenstein's "primary concern" in OC. These claims remain unsubstantiated, since Malcolm does not go on to show that Wittgenstein maintained the distinction between subjective and objective certainty as seen in [194]. Instead of providing evidence of Wittgenstein's frequent use of this concept, Malcolm (1986, pp. 208-216) discusses whether the logical exclusion of a mistake with respect to propositions of arithmetic and 'empirical' propositions can be based on a rule; whether one can *know* what one is objectively certain of; and whether it follows from something's being objectively certain that it is true. Admittedly, these are important questions, but Wittgenstein discusses them in OC without using the term objective certainty. Therefore, Malcolm's discussion does not justify his claim that the concept of objective certainty is Wittgenstein's primary concern in OC.

Stroll (2007, p. 33) claims that Wittgenstein is a proponent of "a form of foundationalism that differs from anything in the previous philosophical literature" and that

Wittgenstein identifies this foundation with objective certainty.[30] Stroll writes that, "The textual evidence that Wittgenstein is a foundationalist seems to me conclusive. But another step is required to show that he identifies certainty with what is foundational." Stroll (2007, pp. 35-37) takes this step by citing as evidence:

1. Wittgenstein's frequent use of the words 'Gewißheit,' 'Sicherheit,' 'Bestimmtheit,' 'feststehen,' 'festhalten,' 'feststellen,' 'festlegen';

2. Remarks [86-103]; [194] and [308];

As far as (1) goes, I interpret Stroll as saying that whenever Wittgenstein uses the words mentioned in (1) in the context of Moore-like propositions, he is using the non-psychological concept of objective certainty found in [194]. Stroll (2007, p 36) writes that after [86], "Wittgenstein becomes increasingly aware that knowing and certitude are completely different and that the latter is not a psychological concept at all." [194] is thus to be interpreted as an open declaration of Wittgenstein's realization that objective certainty is a non-psychological concept which can be used to characterize Moore-like propositions. There are three problems with the textual evidence provided by Stroll.

First, there are remarks in which Wittgenstein uses the terms 'Gewißheit' and 'Sicherheit' after 'subjektiv' to mean *subjective certainty* – in [194, 245, 308] Wittgenstein says that one's 'Gewißheit' is subjective; in [415, 563] he says that one's 'Sicherheit' is subjective. This contradicts Stroll's suggestion that the words mentioned in (1) only express the non-psychological/non-subjective concept of objective certainty. Second, in [341], Wittgenstein crosses out both 'Sicherheit' and 'Gewißheit' and leaves in their place a purely

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[30] Stroll does not write "Wittgenstein identifies this foundation with objective certainty" – instead of "objective certainty" he just has "certainty." But it is clear from his discussion that by "certainty" he means objective certainty.
For Stroll's interpretation of Wittgenstein as unique kind of foundationalist, see Stroll (1994).

negative characterization 'Zweiefelfreiheit' (literally: freedom from doubt) or the absence of doubt. I suspect that this is so because he does not want to use terms that may mislead: saying that we are certain or even objectively certain about Moore-like propositions may lead one to think that there is some kind of ever-present mental state of certainty that we have regarding some things, we just need to find out more about it. Third, in some remarks where Wittgenstein *explicitly* mentions the concept of objective certainty, he gives it a *different usage* than the one in [194] where he distinguishes it from subjective certainty. Let us review these remarks.

Wittgenstein next mentions the term *objective certainty* in [270], but there he contradicts his previous use of it in [194]:[31]

"I have compelling grounds for my certitude."

These grounds make the certitude objective. [270]

Here, Wittgenstein wants to say that mere subjective certainty about a particular matter can be turned objective if, in addition to one's own subjective feelings or attitude about some matter, one can bring forward grounds to support it. Recall what Wittgenstein thinks about the ordinary usage of the concept of knowledge: one is in a position to make a knowledge claim if one can back the claim up with reasons. Thus, the subjective certainty which turns into objective certainty upon the adducing of reasons is *nothing but a justified knowledge claim*. Clearly, then, this use of objective certainty differs from the one as seen in [194], in which the objectivity meant the *logical* exclusion of a mistake. Moyal-Sharrock (2007, p. 78) admits this, yet sticks

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[31] Actually, there is a remark before [270] where Wittgenstein sees whether the concept of objective certainty is useful. In one version of [203] Wittgenstein adds 'objectively' to the left of 'certainly' and 'true' to its right, the result being, 'objectively certainly true' which does not make good sense. Moreover, he crossed out the whole remark which shows that he was not pleased with what he wrote.

to her view that what Wittgenstein is really after is a groundless, logical and non-epistemic objective certainty. In the four remarks following [271], Wittgenstein uses the words 'certain' and 'certainty' to mean subjective certainty backed by reasons:

I know = I am familiar with it as a certainty. [272]

But when does one say of something that it is certain?

For there can be dispute whether something *is* certain; I mean, when something is *objectively* certain.

There are countless general empirical propositions that count as certain for us.[32] [273]

One such is that if someone's arm is cut off it will not grow again. Another, if someone's head is cut off he is dead and will never live again.

Experience can be said to teach us these propositions. However, it does not teach us them in isolation: rather, it teaches us a host of interdependent propositions. If they were isolated I might perhaps doubt them, for I have no experience relating to them. [274]

If experience is the ground of our certainty, then naturally it past experience.

And it isn't for example just my experience, but other people's, that I get knowledge from. Now one might say that it is experience again that leads us to give credence to others. But what experience makes me believe that the anatomy and physiology books don't contain what is false? Though it is true that this trust is *backed up* by my own experience. [275]

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[32] I suspect that Wittgenstein is expressing the same concept in two different ways in [270] and [273]. The point he is making in [270] is that subjective certainty can be turned objective if it is backed by reasons (Gründe Machen die Sicherheit objektiv). If something is objectively certain then there can be a dispute about it [273] – since to dispute something is to debate whether the grounds given its support are compelling, the 'objectively certain'/'*objektiv* gewiß' in [273] is the same as the certainty that is made objective by adducing grounds. The link between the two remarks is *this* concept of objective certainty. Note that *this* concept is different from the concept of objective certainty found in [194].

In [272], Wittgenstein says that there can be a debate concerning what is objectively certain. In other words, we can challenge someone on the reasons she gives for something that is certain for her. However, on Moyal-Sharrock's understanding, when something is objectively certain there can be no debate about it since whatever is being claimed as objectively certain is groundless i.e. not backed by any reason. Wittgenstein says that 'if someone's arm is cut off it will not grow again' counts as certain for us [273]. If someone asks, "How do you know that?" we can cite as evidence facts about the limits of the regenerative power in humans; we can also give as a reason past experience [274]. And someone can challenge us on such matters. What Wittgenstein means by objective certainty is not what Moyal-Sharrock takes him to mean; instead, he means it to be the kind of conviction that a schoolboy has when he's going to take an exam and has reasons to believe that he will do well.

These remarks pose a problem for Malcolm, Stroll and Moyal-Sharrock. They show that Wittgenstein did not *maintain* the same distinction he made between subjective and objective certainty in [194]. Moreover, after [273] Wittgenstein *never* explicitly mentions the concept of objective certainty. However, there is one last, crucial remark that Stroll (2007, p. 36) and Moyal-Sharrock (2007, p. 78) cite in favour of their interpretations of Wittgenstein – it is one where he is calling our attention to an important distinction. Wittgenstein writes:

> 'Knowledge' and 'certainty' belong to different *categories*. They are not two 'mental states' like 'surmising' and 'being sure'. (Here I assume that it is meaningful for me to say "I know what (e.g.) the word 'doubt' means" and that this sentence indicates that the word "doubt" has a logical role.) What interests us now is not being sure but knowledge. That is, we are interested in the fact that about certain empirical propositions no doubt can exist if I making judgments is to be possible at all. Or again: I am inclined to believe that not everything that has the form of an empirical proposition *is* one. [308]

I think Moyal-Sharrock and Stroll not only take the whole remark out of context, but they also take the first line of this remark out of context. For they interpret Wittgenstein as saying that the 'certainty' in [308] is the objective certainty from [194] which needs to be distinguished from knowledge. For Stroll (2007, pp. 33-36), [308] serves as an open declaration from Wittgenstein that knowledge and objective certainty are radically different – which he may then use (along with other remarks) to justify his claim that for Wittgenstein knowledge belongs to the language-game but certitude stands outside to support it (the foundation). Moyal-Sharrock (2007, p. 78) cites [308] as evidence for the view that Wittgenstein is distinguishing the groundless objective certainty from knowledge.

To see that both these interpretations of [308] are wrong, let us consider what Wittgenstein is saying in the remark. First, he makes a distinction between 'knowledge' and 'certainty'/'Sicherheit' – this can be straightforwardly interpreted as Wittgenstein making a distinction between knowledge as something objective, since it is backed by compelling grounds [243], and certainty, which is merely subjective since for someone to be sure of something, she *need not* (although she may) have grounds for her certainty; this is the basis for the distinction between knowledge and certainty, and *not* that they are two different 'mental states.' 'Surmising' and 'being sure' are examples of two different mental states. Skipping the sentence in parenthesis, Wittgenstein then says that the mental state of 'being sure' does not interest us. Wittgenstein is interested in knowledge, *not* objective certainty. We can only make judgments (in our pursuit of knowledge) if with respect to certain empirical propositions, there is no doubt possible. Judgments can be made only if certain propositions are exempt from doubt – that is simply how we judge [150, 232].

And what should we make of the last sentence of [308]? Wittgenstein is dissatisfied with calling the propositions that Moore listed as empirical propositions since it is a characteristic of empirical propositions that their truth or falsity is known as a result of testing,

whereas the propositions in question are not tested. Our so-called 'empirical propositions' do not form a homogenous mass [213]. The next remark sheds important light on how to interpret the last sentence of [308]. Wittgenstein suggests that some empirical propositions may have the character of (grammatical) rules – they have a dual nature. Take for instance the proposition 'I have two hands': we can imagine what its negation would be like (empirical character), but we do not come to *know* it via testing, we are simply taught what hands are and that we have two of them (grammatical character). The reflection on the pseudo-empirical or hybrid nature of the propositions that Moore listed is a strand of thought that Wittgenstein returns to time and again: in [35] Wittgenstein asks whether "there are physical objects" is an empirical proposition; in [167] and [319, 321] Wittgenstein reflects on the merging of empirical proposition and rule and the lack of boundary between propositions of logic and empirical propositions, and finally, in [494] where Wittgenstein reflects on a proposition that has the character of a rule. This is the context that both Moyal-Sharrock and Stroll have failed to take into account. Thus, Moyal-Sharrock and Stroll's interpretation of [308] is wrong.

To summarize, I think that Malcolm, Stroll and Moyal-Sharrock are wrong to suggest that the concept of objective certainty is central to Wittgenstein's discussion of Moore-like propositions. In my review of some of Wittgenstein's remarks in OC, it was seen that Wittgenstein *does not maintain* the distinction he made between subjective and objective certainty in [194]. Moreover, it was also seen that in [308] Wittgenstein distinguishes knowledge from subjective certainty, *not* the objective certainty found in [194]. However, I do concede that in several remarks where Wittgenstein attempts to characterize Moore-like propositions, he uses 'Sicherheit' instead of a purely negative characterization. I think that this is because Wittgenstein had still not given up on finding a positive, psychological characterization of our relation to Moore-like propositions. Nevertheless, as I mentioned

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before, at times he realizes that a positive characterization may mislead [341] and that all psychological terms merely distract us [459].

So what can we say about Wittgenstein's answer to what I call the problem of characterization? As I pointed out earlier, I think that Wittgenstein did not settle on a characterization for Moore-like propositions but floats several interesting proposals. He provides a negative characterization of them, saying that they are all propositions with respect to which doubt is inconceivable; in normal circumstances, we do not and cannot doubt Moore-like propositions. He also explores positive characterizations of Moore-like propositions using psychological terms like *know, believe* and *certain*, but realizes in [459] that all psychological terms distract us.

In the next section, I will argue that the concept of objective certainty, as Moyal-Sharrock (2007) understands it, does not appropriately characterize Moore-like propositions. I say "as Moyal Sharrock understands it," because I do not think she interprets Wittgenstein rightly on this. She misconstrues Wittgenstein's remarks as elaborating on a certain aspect of objective certainty. I do not have the space to contest her interpretation of certain remarks. Consequently, in the next section, my criticism of the use of the objective certainty to characterize Moore-like propositions is a criticism of Moyal-Sharrock, not Wittgenstein.

3.2.2 Objective Certainty or Simply the Inconceivability of Doubt?

In this section, I will examine the concept of objective certainty, as put forward by Moyal-Sharrock. I will only discuss in detail aspects of objective certainty that I think bring something more to the table than a mere negative characterization of Moore-like propositions does. The concepts that are used to further elucidate objective certainty will be scrutinized in two

respects: whether we are in need of such concepts and whether they are misleading. Moreover, it will be seen that the concept of objective certainty has something ad-hoc about it.

Moyal-Sharrock (2007, pp. 79-89) holds that there are two different descriptions of the same objective certainty in OC: one elucidating the categorical status of objective certainty; the other its phenomenological nature. It is her elucidation of the latter description or aspect of objective certainty that I find worth engaging with: this is because in her discussion she uses concepts that *might* help us to distinguish it from a mere negative characterization of Moore-like propositions – whether this move actually works is something that shall be examined. For, as things stand, saying that Moore-like propositions are objectively certain is tantamount to saying that with respect to Moore-like propositions doubt is inconceivable and that no grounds can be offered in support of them. So let us see what more Moyal-Sharrock has to offer.

Moyal-Sharrock (2007, p. 81) says that the phenomenological nature of objective certainty lies in it being a doxastic attitude, construed as a disposition, and can be referred to as a kind of sureness; an assurance; a conviction; a being sure; a trust; a relying on; a belief; an attitude; a (direct) taking hold; a holding fast; acting; a way of acting and speaking; something that we show or that shows itself in what we say and do. It's an animal trust, or belief-in rather than a belief-that and its occurrent mode can be described as a kind of know-how or unhesitating mastery. Now, one may ask, what is this doxastic attitude towards? Moyal-Sharrock's answer is that it is an attitude of certainty towards certain rules of grammar and the objects or states of affairs that belong to grammar. As an instance of our attitude of certainty towards a rule, she cites the rule '2+2=4.' As an instance of our attitude towards an object or state of affairs belonging to grammar, she cites 'Here is a hand.' Now, as I've already said, in ordinary circumstances, we do not have any particular attitude towards '2+2=4' or our hands. In the previous section I discussed how I may *come to have* an attitude of certainty concerning such propositions. But that is not to say that, to begin with, I had an attitude of certainty towards

such rules of grammar or objects of grammar, as Moyal-Sharrock calls them. Perhaps she can respond by saying that this is certainty in its non-occurent, dormant mode; it is always there, but hovers in the background. I shall discuss what I think is problematic about this response later.

For Moyal-Sharrock, objective certainty is also a non-propositional attitude. She (2007, p.84) quotes M. J. Van Den Hoven who says that our basis for it is not something that we know, but something we do. She quotes Van Den Hoven in such a way that it seems his view is that a propositional attitude, whatever that may be, is based on grounds, since to know something is to have compelling grounds for what one claims. And so, a *non-propositional attitude* about something must be based on *action*. Now, my question to Moyal-Sharrock is: why not just say that the attitude is groundless?

Might the concepts that Moyal-Sharrock (2007, pp. 84-89) uses to elaborate on the concept of objective certainty tell us how the attitude is based on action? She discusses three concepts:

Objective certainty as a non-propositional attitude construed as:

1) A 'taking hold'

2) A blind trust

3) A know-how or flawless way of acting

Let us take a look at the examples Moyal-Sharrock cites as illustrative of our non-propositional attitude of 'taking hold.' She cites Wittgenstein's remark where he imagines himself taking hold of a towel; Wittgenstein says that no thoughts cross his mind when he does it and no doubts occur to him – he simply takes hold of the towel. Given that he has not made up his

mind on this matter, he says that this corresponds to a sureness and not a knowing [510]. Now why must this be described as one exhibiting some kind of attitude? Moyal-Sharrock offers a distinction that might persuade us to think that taking hold of a towel *is* a kind of an assurance or attitude.

The distinction is between a pondered assurance (via reasoning, observation, or research) and a kind of animal-like, unthinking assurance. Although I agree that there is such a thing as assurance that is a result of pondering, I do not agree that the kind of unthinking, instinctive assurance that is illustrated through one's taking hold of one's towel without any doubts can be its "contrast." When a close friend or a parent advises us on a matter of which we know little, and where we do not know how to go about things, one may go about following the advice given unthinkingly. Little children look up to their parents as authorities and follow their instructions unthinkingly. Sometimes, the mere presence of their parents gives them an assurance that is not the result of any serious thought. When a child is learning to ride a bicycle, there comes a point when the child must ride the bicycle without supporting wheels on the sides; the child is anxious, and a parent may assure the child by saying, "I'm right behind you if anything happens. I'm there, don't worry!" the assurance with which the child then rides the bike can be called an unthinking assurance – the child does not think "Will daddy be able to stay behind me all the time?" "What if he fails to catch me?" "Is daddy just saying this to get me to ride the bicycle?" The child does not entertain such thoughts, there is no debate going on its mind, so to speak, about whether his father's assurances are reason enough to ride the bike.

Unthinking assurance can also come about through training. The kind of assurance that a professional rock climber or a tightrope walker has is a result of many years of practice. But what about the assurance with which one walks or with which one takes hold of a towel? We do not *need* the concept of 'assurance' to characterize ordinary behaviour – it is doing no work.

Whereas with the examples I discussed, there is something additional to ordinary behaviour, an additional behavioural repertoire, so to speak, which is in need of conceptualization.

Moyal-Sharrock (2007, p. 86) next discusses objective certainty as a kind of blind trust. Interestingly, she admits that "certainty here is better described as the *utter* absence of doubt – 'I had no thought of its [the chair] possibly collapsing' – than the lived experience of trust." Yet, she goes on to say that trust is the default attitude, whilst admitting that "this trust is not experienced as trust but rather shows itself in the absence of mistrust." However, just like we saw with the case of assurance, we do not *need* the concept of trust to explain ordinary behaviour like getting up from bed, taking a glance at the clock, heading for the shower, dressing up, eating breakfast and going to work. On the other hand, we need the concept of blind trust to conceptualize what goes on in certain human relationships. For instance, we say that two people who love each other ardently, trust each other on crucial matters in their lives blindly.

Throwing objective certainty as a *know-how* into the picture does not help: again, for similar reasons. In ordinary parlance know-how refers to practical knowledge or a skill which is natural or acquired through training. Some children have a gift for music – they learn musical instruments quickly and begin to compose music on their own with no guidance. Others have to be taught really thoroughly, but once they get the hang of it, they can play the instrument they were learning without paying much attention. Again, Moyal-Sharrock needlessly extends the concept of know-how, which has its place in conceptualizing certain a pattern of behaviour, to cover behaviour which is *not* ordinarily described in this way. Thus, for Moyal-Sharrock, our certainty that tables offer resistance to touch should be construed as a *stance* or a *disposition* that I have towards tables and other solid objects: I *expect* tables to remain solid when I touch them, not to vanish or to turn into human beings. If, in this way, a know-how is manifested in expectations of the sort that Moyal-Sharrock describes, then the concept of know-how would

be characteristic of almost any action I perform – making the concept hollow and useless. As Schönbaumsfeld points out (2016, p. 119), it is not clear what the concept of objective certainty is ruling out, and hence ruling-in, so to speak. Thus, nothing significant has been said by saying that objective certainty is an attitude that is not based on grounds but on action.

Schönbaumsfeld (2016, p. 120), however, is quick to add that Moyal-Sharrock does give objective certainty a kind of opposite in the sense that lacking this assurance, blind trust in things and know-how, would be a form of madness. Schönbaumsfeld goes on to say that doubting that there is a chair in front of one's eyes or that one has hands would, outside philosophical contexts, be pathological. Although I agree with Schönbaumsfeld that such behaviour would be pathological, I do not think that it amounts to *doubting*. There are two kinds of cases to consider here. We would say that someone had a mental disturbance [71] only if they participated in the linguistic form of life to begin with – only a deviation from previous normalcy would count as madness. On the other hand, a child who whilst growing up keeps on looking at his hands repeatedly, or asks senseless questions in pre-school, or does not agree that 2+2=4, will not learn the *games* we are teaching him [283, 315].

Might Moyal-Sharrock insist that we use the concept of objective certainty, an attitude construed as a kind of taking-hold, blind trust or know-how, to distinguish normal human behaviour from the two types of cases discussed above: that of the insane and that of the child?

I think there are two considerations against such a response. First, as I have mentioned before, is to see whether the concepts Moyal-Sharrock wants to introduce are prone to mislead. In the *Blue Book* (1958, pp. 22-23) Wittgenstein reflects on the introduction of new terminology in the case of the term "unconscious toothache." This new notation is intended to distinguish between a decaying tooth that does not produce toothache and a decaying tooth that does. And now one may say, "I have a toothache but don't know it," (unconscious toothache) giving sense to the utterance "I *know* that I have a toothache" (conscious toothache) which

would otherwise have been nonsensical or could be readily substituted by "I have a toothache." Wittgenstein, however, says that the new notation misleads us by calling up "pictures and analogies" which present difficulties for us in adopting the new convention. We may be misled into thinking that a stupendous discovery has been made: there is such a thing as unconscious toothache! One may be puzzled by the convention and ask questions like, "How is unconscious toothache possible?" We would want to deny that such a thing is possible, but the scientist would remind us that there are plenty of things that we do not know of, and so there can also be a kind of toothache of which one does not know. Thus, the puzzlement would persist.

I think the situation with Moyal-Sharrock's introduction of new terminology which carries with it pictures and analogies, is similar. When Moyal-Sharrock talks of objective certainty as a kind of blind trust, we are reminded of the situations in which we *actually* employ the term blind trust; one may then be puzzled by how human beings come into the world *blindly trusting* what we see in front of our eyes, or that we have hands. Or when Moyal-Sharrock (2007, p. 89) writes that the know-how of objective certainty shares with ordinary know-how only its "confidence" and "success," the pictures and implications that come with these concepts puzzle us. For when we think of a confident person, we imagine a person with characteristic expressions, particular facial expressions, an upright posture; we associate with confidence a particular behavioural repertoire - with certain variations - in the context of a person's domestic, professional and social life. And with success comes the implication that something has been *accomplished*. We see that the concepts confidence and success are used to conceptualize behaviour that is non-ordinary – whereas, Moyal-Sharrock wants to use them to characterize ordinary behaviour like getting up from bed and taking a shower. Thus, we are puzzled when we hear something like, "He got up from bed with confidence," or that "She drank a glass of water successfully." The point is, we do not *need* these concepts to make a distinction between ordinary behaviour and the two types of cases I discussed. We already have

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the concept of "abnormal behaviour," which does not bring with it any pictures and implications that make it difficult for us it go through with the notation. On the other hand, the terms that Moyal-Sharrock wants to introduce are bound to puzzle.

And with the ever-present attitude of certainty that hovers in the background, one may ask, as Wittgenstein's imaginary interlocutor asked about unconscious toothache, "How is such a thing possible?" – it almost sounds like a discovery.

The second consideration I want to bring forward is that the concept of objective certainty seems to have something ad-hoc about it. I suspect that Moyal-Sharrock uses so many different concepts to elucidate the concept of objective certainty because she realizes that certain concepts do not sit well with certain Moore-like propositions. We discussed the examples Moyal-Sharrock offers in support of the concepts she introduced – there, we saw that the concepts are unnecessary in describing the behaviour in question and that they are misleading. But let us see how her concepts fare with respect to some other Moore-like propositions. How is my *know-how* manifest in my being objectively certain about the fact that I have a brain? Or how is it that through my *taking-hold* of something I can be said to be objectively certain about my never having been to the moon? And lastly, what sense does it make to say that I am objectively certain about there being physical objects by *blindly trusting* them? Even if the concepts taking-hold, blind trust and know-how had *some* plausibility in the examples she discusses, I believe it disappears when we discuss them in the context of many other Moore-like propositions.

Thus, I think that Wittgenstein's negative characterization of Moore-like propositions is most appropriate. In ordinary circumstances, we do not and cannot doubt Moore-like propositions; making a mistake is logically excluded, doubt is inconceivable and we are not in a position to offer grounds in their support. With such a characterization nothing unnecessary

is introduced; nothing misleads; and nothing is ad-hoc – we can say this of *all* Moore-like propositions.

At the beginning of this chapter I said that in the text of OC, Wittgenstein grapples with another problem whilst engaging with Moore-like propositions. Why is it that we cannot doubt Moore-like propositions? Why is it that they have *this* status? Is there a why? If there is a why: what kind of a why is this? When it comes to his attempts at answering this question in OC, I think Wittgenstein is following his own advice from the *Investigations* where he says that instead of looking for a causal *explanation* i.e. explaining our language-game by means of experiences, one must take account of our language-game (PI: 654, 655) [189]. The answer to the question must either be in the form of a *description* of the language-game being played or the description of our general conceptual situation. Thus, Wittgenstein attempts to describe the *logic* of our language-games – something he thinks we can see if we look at the practice of language [501].

The proposals he puts forward in response to the problem of why Moore-like propositions have the status they do in OC is a topic for another work.

4.   **Conclusion**

In this thesis I have endeavoured to present Wittgenstein's engagement with two philosophical problems in *On Certainty*: the problem of philosophical scepticism and the problem of characterizing Moore-like propositions. Although the remarks constituting *On Certainty* were not written as one *work*, some of them make important and original contributions to philosophy.

The main takeaway from Wittgenstein's engagement with Moore's response to the challenge posed by idealists and the global sceptic is the following: sceptical challenges must be overcome not by trying to respond to the questions they pose, but by showing that the questions that constitute such challenges are products of conceptual confusion.

In *On Certainty*, Wittgenstein dwells on the "queer character" of Moore-like propositions – something that Moore himself overlooked. Although Wittgenstein does not arrive at a considered view regarding what characterizes Moore-like propositions most appropriately, I have argued that the negative characterization he offers does hit the mark: with respect to Moore-like propositions, in ordinary circumstances, making a mistake is logically excluded, doubt is inconceivable, and no reasons can be offered in their support. While Wittgenstein occasionally attempts to characterize Moore-like propositions by giving them a positive, psychological characterization, he shows signs of awareness that such characterizations pull us in the wrong direction. Therefore, despite appearances to the contrary, *On Certainty*/*Über Gewißheit* is not primarily about *certainty/Gewißheit*; rather, it is about the impossibility of doubt.

5.   References

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