Philosophy 101

Moore &
Cartesian
Skepticism

Review of
Descartes

Moore's Proof

Philosophy 101

Moore & Cartesian Skepticism

April 24, 2014

Review of Descartes

Philosophy 101

Moore &
Cartesian
Skepticism

Review of
Descartes

Moore's Proof

Descartes' Project

- What, if anything, can we know with certainty?

Philosophy 101

Moore &
Cartesian
Skepticism

Review of
Descartes

Moore's Proof

Descartes' Project

Epistemic Foundationalism: The structure of human knowledge
is like a building. There is privileged set of
propositions we know—the foundation—and all of
our other knowledge—the building or
superstructure—is based on this privileged set

Philosophy 101

Moore &
Cartesian
Skepticism

Review of
Descartes

Moore's Proof

Descartes' Project

- What knowledge is part of the privileged foundation?
    - logic
    - mathematics

- Can we give an account of how we have empirical knowledge, either as part of the foundation or as derived from the foundation?

Philosophy 101

Moore &
Cartesian
Skepticism

Review of
Descartes

Moore's Proof

The Method of Doubt

- For the purposes of building a foundation of what we know, we should only count as knowledge that of which we are absolutely certain

Philosophy 101

Moore &
Cartesian
Skepticism

Review of
Descartes

Moore's Proof

The Method of Doubt

DOUBT: We must suspend judgment concerning any proposition whose truth is not known with absolute certainty

- Is there anything that survives DOUBT?

Philosophy 101

Moore &
Cartesian
Skepticism

Review of
Descartes

Moore's Proof

The Stages of Doubt

1. Sense-Perception
2. Dreams
3. An all-powerful deceiver

Philosophy 101

Moore &
Cartesian
Skepticism

Review of
Descartes

Moore's Proof

The Cogito Argument

1. For any thought that I think, it is possible that I am deceived about its truth
2. But any time I think a thought, there must be subject of that thought who is doing the thinking
3. ∴ Insofar as I am thinking, I cannot be deceived about my own existence

Philosophy 101

Moore &
Cartesian
Skepticism

Review of
Descartes

Moore's Proof

The Cartesian Problem

- We can be sure of our *own* existence but can we be sure of the existence of anything else?
- How do we build out from the certainty of our own existence to the certainty of the existence of anything else, either other minds or other physical objects?

Moore's Proof

Philosophy 101

Moore &
Cartesian
Skepticism

Review of
Descartes

Moore's Proof

Cartesian Skepticism

1. If I do not know that I am not being radically deceived, then I cannot know that h (where h is some commonsensically true proposition concerning the physical world)
2. I do not know that I am not being radically deceived
3. ∴ I do not know that h

Philosophy 101

Moore &
Cartesian
Skepticism

Review of
Descartes

Moore's Proof

Moore's Proof of the External World

1. Here is a hand
2. Here is another hand
3. ∴ At this moment, two human hands exist
4. ∴ I know an external world (a world outside my mind) exists

Philosophy 101

Moore &
Cartesian
Skepticism

Review of
Descartes

Moore's Proof

An Assumption about Knowledge

- We can extend our knowledge by recognizing, and thereby accepting, things that follow deductively from our knowledge

Philosophy 101

Moore &
Cartesian
Skepticism

Review of
Descartes

Moore's Proof

Epistemic Closure

Philosophy 101

Moore &
Cartesian
Skepticism

Review of
Descartes

Moore's Proof

Epistemic Closure

Closure Principle: Knowledge is "closed under entailment"—
If, while knowing p, S believes q because S knows
that p entails q, then S knows q

Philosophy 101

Moore &
Cartesian
Skepticism

Review of
Descartes

Moore's Proof

Epistemic Closure

An Example

1. I know that the walls of this room are blue
2. If the walls of this room are blue then the walls of this room are colored
3. ∴ I know that the walls of this room are colored

Philosophy 101

Moore &
Cartesian
Skepticism

Review of
Descartes

Moore's Proof

Closure and Skepticism

The Cartesian Argument

1. If I know that here is a hand (*h*), then I know that I am not being radically deceived (by dreams, an evil demon, etc.)

Philosophy 101

Moore &
Cartesian
Skepticism

Review of
Descartes

Moore's Proof

Closure and Skepticism

The Cartesian Argument

1. If I know that here is a hand (*h*), then I know that I am not being radically deceived (by dreams, an evil demon, etc.)
2. I don't know that I'm not radically deceived

Philosophy 101

Moore &
Cartesian
Skepticism

Review of
Descartes

Moore's Proof

Closure and Skepticism

The Cartesian Argument

1. If I know that here is a hand (*h*), then I know that I am not being radically deceived (by dreams, an evil demon, etc.)
2. I don't know that I'm not radically deceived
3. ∴ I don't know *h*

Philosophy 101

Moore &
Cartesian
Skepticism

Review of
Descartes

Moore's Proof

Closure and Skepticism

1 If I know that here is a hand (*h*), then I know that I am not being radically deceived (by dreams, an evil demon, etc.)

- Premise (1) depends on the closure principle:
  - I know that here is a hand (*h*)
  - $h \rightarrow$ I'm not radically deceived
  - ∴ I know I'm not radically deceived

Philosophy 101

Moore &
Cartesian
Skepticism

Review of
Descartes

Moore's Proof

Closure and Skepticism

1. If I know that here is a hand (*h*), then I know that I am not being radically deceived (by dreams, an evil demon, etc.)
2. I don't know that I'm not radically deceived
3. ∴ I don't know *h*

Philosophy 101

Moore &
Cartesian
Skepticism

Review of
Descartes

Moore's Proof

Closure and Skepticism

Moore's Argument

Philosophy 101

Moore &
Cartesian
Skepticism

Review of
Descartes

Moore's Proof

Closure and Skepticism

Moore's Argument

1. If I know that here is a hand (*h*), then I know that I am not being radically deceived (by dreams, an evil demon, etc.)
2. I know *h*
3. ∴ I know I'm not radically deceived

Philosophy 101

Moore &
Cartesian
Skepticism

Review of
Descartes

Moore's Proof

Closure and Skepticism

- If we endorse closure we seem forced to accept one of two conclusions:
  1. we must be skeptics about our knowledge of *h*, since we admit we cannot know that we are not radically deceived
  2. we know *h*, but then must also say that we know we are not radically deceived

The Conditions of Non-Trivial Proof

Philosophy 101

Moore &
Cartesian
Skepticism

Review of
Descartes

Moore's Proof

The Conditions of Non-Trivial Proof

1. The premises must be different from the conclusion they prove
2. The premises must be *known*
3. The conclusion must follow from the premises

- Is (2) satisfied for Moore's Argument?
  - According to Moore it *is* even though he can give no proof for either of the premises

Philosophy 101

Moore &
Cartesian
Skepticism

Review of
Descartes

Moore's Proof

Proving the Premises?

Philosophy 101

Moore &
Cartesian
Skepticism

Review of
Descartes

Moore's Proof

Proving the Premises?

- The skeptic thinks that Moore's proof works only if he can also prove the premises of his argument
    - proof of the premises would amount to a general claim regarding how any propositions of the sort that figure in the argument could be proved

Philosophy 101

Moore &
Cartesian
Skepticism

Review of
Descartes

Moore's Proof

Proving the Premises?

- Moore admits that if proof of the premises is required than his argument cannot succeed
  - But why think that proof of the premises is required to know them?

Philosophy 101

Moore &
Cartesian
Skepticism

Review of
Descartes

Moore's Proof

Knowledge without Proof?

I can know things, which I cannot prove; and among the things which I certainly did know, even if (as I think) I could not prove them, were the premises of my…proofs (3)

Philosophy 101

Moore &
Cartesian
Skepticism

Review of
Descartes

Moore's Proof

Knowledge without Proof?

- We typically think of knowledge claims as claims which are backed by the availability of proof
    - mathematical knowledge (mathematical proof)
    - empirical knowledge (an experience)
    - claims concerning responsibility & punishment (legal/moral proof)

- Denial that proof (or its availability) is necessary for knowledge seems to go against a fundamental feature of our epistemic practices

Moore's Awkward Position

Philosophy 101

Moore &
Cartesian
Skepticism

Review of
Descartes

Moore's Proof

Moore's Awkward Position

- Accepts the closure principle
- Argues that we know we are not radically deceived
  - we know mundane truths about the external world (e.g. "here is a hand")
- Denies that we can *prove* that we know mundane truths about the external world

Philosophy 101

Moore &
Cartesian
Skepticism

Review of
Descartes

Moore's Proof

Moore's Awkward Position

Two Problems

Philosophy 101

Moore &
Cartesian
Skepticism

Review of
Descartes

Moore's Proof

Moore's Awkward Position

Two Problems

1. Knowledge without proof runs counter to our epistemic practices

2. The acceptance of epistemic closure seems to require that either we don't know anything about the world, or that we know we are not radically deceived—both are counter-intuitive