

Introduction to Philosophy

Philosophy 110W
Spring 2011
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February 4
Moore and Wittgenstein

Review

- We started the term by calling into question some of our most basic beliefs.
- Descartes argued that sense experience cannot lead to knowledge.
- Locke defended the principle that all knowledge derives from sense experience.
- Berkeley showed that such a commonsense principle led to serious questions about the existence of the material world.

Skepticism

EW: There is an external world, made of physical things, with more or less the properties we ordinarily ascribe to those things.

- Descartes argues for EW via the existence of God.
- Locke presented an empiricist system in which we are able to gain knowledge of a material world.
 - He thus argues for EW via the veracity of some of our sensory apparatus.
- Berkeley showed that Locke's system led to the denial of the material world.
- Berkeley thus denies EW.

Moore and Wittgenstein

- Both agree that there is a problem with the question of how to prove the existence of the external world.
- Moore thinks that the proof is far easier than one might think, than the idealist makes it out to be.
- Wittgenstein thinks that the question is ill-formed, that assertions of the existence of an external world are fundamental and not open to doubt.

Kant

- Moore starts his article by referring to Kant's argument, in the *Critique of Pure Reason*, of the existence of an external world.
- Kant's justification is called The Refutation of Idealism.
- Kant provides two arguments.

Kant's First Argument

- Space and time are essential to our ideas of externality.
- Thus, they are actually part of our experience of the world, rather than in the world itself.
- Since the external world is a world in space and time, there is obviously an external world.
- This argument begs the question of the existence of a world independent of our experience.

Kant's Second Argument

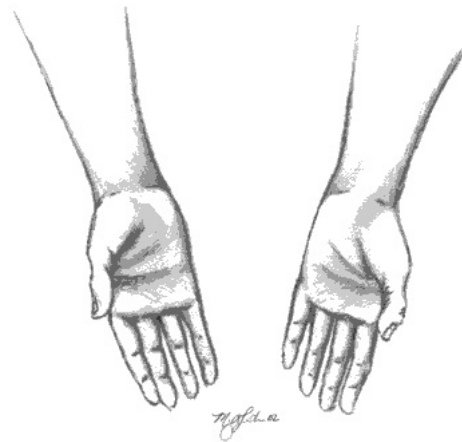
- The existence of an external world is presupposed by our understanding of ourselves as part of a world.
- We distinguish between changes in the world and changes in ourselves.
- When we move toward or away from an object, we do not think that the object changes, despite the changes in our visual field.
- When we stand still and watch the sun set, or as you watch me flail around the room, we attribute the changing visual field to changes in the world.
- The idealist claims that all such changes are internal.
- Kant argues that the idealist must presume the possibility of an internal/external distinction, a distinction between self and world, in order to claim that there is no such distinction, but that the idealist can not presume such a distinction if all we have is the flux of sensation.

Moore's Three Conditions on a Proof of EW

- C1. The premise has to be different from the conclusion.
 - A valid argument can not merely restate the conclusion.
- C2. We can not argue from belief to knowledge.
 - 'Some of you will be pleased with your second paper grades' follows from 'Some of the papers will receive As'.
 - But, I can not claim to know the former claim, because I only believe the latter.
 - If I knew the latter, then I could know the former.
- C3. The argument must be of a valid form.
 - A valid argument is one in which the conclusion follows from the premises.
- In a valid, deductive argument, if the premises are true, the conclusion must be true.

Moore's Argument

1. Here is a hand.
 2. Here is another hand.
- So, there are at least two human hands.
So, there is an external world (i.e. EW).



Analysis of Moore's Argument

C1. The premise has to be different from the conclusion.

C2. We can not argue from belief to knowledge.

C3. The argument must be of a valid form.

- Moore's argument is valid, so it does not violate C3.
- Moore makes it clear that he intends his premises to be known, so that he does not violate C2.
- There is a problem with C1.

C1 is too weak

- We want premises to differ from conclusions so that we may avoid circular reasoning.
- We can not assume that there is a hand in order to prove there is a hand.
- Once we accept that here is a hand, it does follow that there is at least one hand.
- The problem, as Descartes pointed out, is that we can start to wonder whether here is a hand.

Moore's Response to Descartes

- How am I to prove now that 'Here's one hand, and here's another'? I do not believe I can do it. In order to do it, I should need to prove for one thing, as Descartes pointed out, that I am not now dreaming. But how can I prove that I am not? I have, no doubt, conclusive reasons for asserting that I am not now dreaming; I have conclusive evidence that I am awake: but that is a very different thing from being able to prove it. I could not tell you what all my evidence is; and I should require to do this at least, in order to give you a proof (198-9).

Defeating the Skeptic

- One way to defeat a skeptic is to provide a proof.
 - If you were skeptical that the tooth fairy existed, I could produce the tooth fairy.
- Another way to respond to the skeptic is to show that the skeptic's alternative makes no difference to any important questions.
 - Even if the world were Berkeleyan, we would still act as we do.
- We might grant that the skeptic has a legitimate point, but that it does not matter.
- Wittgenstein rightly points out that while Moore's commonsense approach feels good, if we accept that the claim (that there is an external world) make sense, then we have to look for some justification.
- According to Wittgenstein, the trick is to deny that the claim is sensible.

Wittgensteinian Themes

- Early Wittgenstein and later Wittgenstein agree that philosophical problems arise from misuse and misinterpretation of language.
 - Early Wittgenstein thought that we could clean up language according to its logical form and get rid of philosophical problems.
 - Later Wittgenstein thought we could only clarify our meanings by examining the actual uses of words.
- One relevant theme in *On Certainty* is Wittgenstein's belief that sentences have their meanings only in use.
 - Uninterpreted, a sentence has no meaning.
 - the ant crawling out a pattern that looks like Martin Luther King, Jr.
 - Mondrian's landscapes
 - ah kee ess oon ah may sah

Wittgenstein's Game Metaphor

- We use language in ways similar to playing a game.
- There are rules which govern the language game, rules which are at root conventional.
- We can dissolve philosophical puzzles by understanding the rules of the game.
- “The propositions which one comes back to again and again as if bewitched - these I should like to expunge from philosophical language” (§31).

Against Moore's Argument

- Moore's view really comes down to this: the concept 'know' is analogous to the concepts 'believe', 'surmise', 'doubt', 'be convinced' in that the statement "I know..." can't be a mistake. And if that *is* so, then there can be an inference from such an utterance to the truth of an assertion. And here the form "I thought I knew" is being overlooked. - But if this latter is inadmissible, then a mistake in the *assertion* must be logically impossible too. And anyone who is acquainted with the language-game must realize this - an assurance from a reliable man that he *knows* cannot contribute anything (§21).

'I Know That...'

- Prepending that phrase seems to make a move in the language game.
- It should have some effect on the meaning of the phrase.
- But, adding “I know that...” often just results in a very odd sentence.
- The oddity is acute when the original sentence is obvious.
 - ‘I know that $5+7=12$ ’.
- To make a mistake with a simple sentence, to be asserting our surety of this calculation, would be to make mistakes with the whole system.
- If $5+7$ were not 12, then we would have made some profound, and fundamental mistakes.
- Here, ‘I know that...’ seems to lack meaning.

Verification and Knowledge

- Wittgenstein says that believing someone who claims that there is a material world entails allowing that there is a way to verify that there is a material world.
- But, if we are questioning the existence of the material world, there is no way to verify it.
- My believing the trustworthy man stems from my admitting that it is possible for him to make sure. But someone who says that perhaps there are no physical objects makes no such admission... Someone who asks such a question is overlooking the fact that a doubt about existence only works in a language-game. Hence, that we should first have to ask: what would such a doubt be like?, and don't understand this straight off (§23-§24).

Two Moves

Using EW

- We can play a game in which doubt about such claims is a reasonable move.
 - Using 'There is a hand in front of me' to accept evidence of hand-waving.
 - Distinguishing between real and artificial hands
- We can play the game in such a way that it is not.
 - Berkeley
 - Dr. Johnson
- Moore seems to be making the first move, since he accepts that there is a hand.
- But, the first move is question-begging regarding the existence of an external world.
- Perhaps Moore is better off with the second move.

The Second Move

- There are no ways to verify the claim.
 - ▶ “There are e.g. historical investigations and investigations into the shape and also the age of the earth, but not into whether the earth has existed during the last hundred years” (§138).
 - ▶ “Doesn’t testing comes to an end” (§164)?
 - ▶ “Justification comes to an end” (§192).
- If I am dreaming, I can not assert a doubt about whether I am awake (since one does no asserting when one is asleep!)

Wittgenstein's Logical Sentences

- Wittgenstein uses 'logical' in a specific way.
 - ▶ "What counts as an adequate test of a statement belongs to logic. It belongs to the description of the language-game" (§82).
- Logic is a kind of limit on our language game.
 - ▶ "I did not get my picture of the world by satisfying myself of its correctness; nor do I have it because I am satisfied of its correctness. No: it is the inherited background against which I distinguish between true and false. The propositions describing this world-picture might be part of a kind of mythology. And their role is like that of rules of a game; and the game can be learned purely practically, without learning any explicit rules" (§94-§95).

Using Logical Propositions

- The logical propositions, like 'I know that here is a hand' serve as a river bed on which ordinary empirical propositions flow.
- We can use them to teach the use of certain terms.
 - 'There are physical objects' teaches the term 'physical objects'.
 - '5+7=12' teaches the rules of arithmetic.



The River Bed

- Mathematics and what we ordinarily call logic are in the river bed.
- We can not defend our knowledge of particular river bed claims.
- How could you convince some one that you knew that $5+7=12$?
- You would have to convince them that you knew something much wider than that one proposition.
- Other riverbed statements:
 - EW
 - No human being has ever stood on the surface of the sun.

Wittgenstein's Twist

Further wrinkles

- Rules, like those in the riverbed, and those which distinguish the bed from the river, are conventional, and indeterminate.
- Sometimes, what looks like an empirical proposition turns out not to be so.
 - Moore takes 'here is a hand' as an empirical proposition.
- Wittgenstein is attempting to avoid both Moore's error and skepticism.
- We can change which sentences are like the river bed, and which ones are like the river.
- Appeals to inner states are irrelevant, if we look to use for meaning.

Do We Get the Rules by Induction?

- The basic process of induction is that we see a few examples and then come to a general rule.
- Wittgenstein thinks that there is a fallacy in this ordinary understanding.
- We do not so much derive the general rule from the few instances, but use the rule as a way of organizing the instances.
- “When we first begin to *believe* anything, what we believe is not a single proposition, it is a whole system of propositions. (Light dawns gradually over the whole.) It is not single axioms that strike me as obvious, it is a system in which consequences and premises give one another *mutual* support” (§141 - §142).

A Problem for Wittgenstein

- Wittgenstein is trying to explain the fact that some propositions seem meaningful in some contexts, while being meaningless in others.
- One solution is to ascribe meaning to river propositions, and meaninglessness to riverbed propositions.
 - ▶ If a meaningful proposition is taken as meaningless, it is clear that it has become part of the bed.
 - ▶ If a meaningless proposition becomes meaningful, it is because it has broken out of the riverbed and started into the river.
- Then there are no river bed propositions!
 - ▶ a fish resting in a pool on the side of the river

Doubt and Certainty

- Wittgenstein has come very close, in asserting the continuity of river and riverbed, to abandoning all hope for establishing claims about the world.
- If any proposition can be taken as bedrock, and any can be part of the river, it seems completely conventional whether we hold logic or mathematics steady, or whether we hold religious, or moral, or just crazy views as bedrock.
- We might even hold idealist claims as bedrock, or skeptical ones.
- Wittgenstein seems to have fallen quite near a position a lot like the skepticism he is trying to avoid.
- But: The game of doubting itself presupposes certainty (§115).

Does Doubt Presuppose Certainty?

- As a matter of fact, we do hold certain principles, logical and mathematical ones, fixed.
- Maybe one could assimilate some basic, obvious empirical principles, like that things do not go shooting off into space, to this set of fixed principles.
- But, does it follow from the doubts that we must have such fixed principles?
- Doubt surely entails belief.
 - In order to make a mistake, a man must already judge in conformity with mankind (§156).
 - Doubt comes *after* belief (§160)
- But, why does Wittgenstein think that doubt is the denial of certainty?

Practical Doubt and Philosophical Doubt

- As a practical matter, Wittgenstein is certainly right that we do not have doubts about the existence of the world.
 - Why do I not satisfy myself that I have two feet when I want to get up from a chair? There is no why. I simply don't. This is how I act" (§148).
- Still, we can avoid doubt about the existence of the external world without having proof.
- To say that we lack practical doubt is not to say that we lack philosophical doubt.

Evidence

- I am walking down the street and am shot to death. My soul hovers above my body and then I am somehow transported to the gates of heaven. St. Peter tells me that God is down the hall and to the left, and I go in for my welcome chat. I ask her if there is really a material world, and she tells me that indeed there is.
- Wittgenstein says that we should feel very distant from some one who experiences this.
- The feeling of distance does not entail that the account is false.

Summary

- Wittgenstein says repeatedly that justification must come to an end somewhere.
 - Moore thinks it comes to an end early.
 - Descartes thought it came to an end at God.
- Wittgenstein wants to ignore the whole project of justification for such claims.
 - They are not empirical claims, subject to justification at all.
 - They have a different status.
- If we accept Wittgenstein's views about meaning and evidence, we do seem pushed away from skepticism.
- But, we need not see claims about the existence of a material world as nonsense.
- We may just have an open question,

Next Week

- Space and Time
- First Paper is due on Wednesday, in class.