Jottings

pp. 227-229

- Moore starts off by making seven assertions that are important to itemise because he differentiates between them in the forthcoming discussion:-
  1. He’s at present in a room rather than outside
  2. He’s standing up rather than sitting or lying down
  3. He’s clothed rather than naked
  4. He’s speaking in a loud voice rather than singing, whispering or keeping silent
  5. He’s holding some sheets of paper with writing on them
  6. There are many other people in the room he is in
  7. There’s a window in one wall and a door in another (pointing).

- By his manner of assertion, Moore has implied that these statements are not just true but certain, and that he knew they were. It would be absurd to accuse him of dogmatism. It would also have been absurd for him to have been tentative – at least for him in his circumstances (the full possession of his senses) to have been so. We can all see that he’s in a position to make these assertions and knows them to be true, both now and when he first made them earlier in the lecture.

- These 7 assertions aren’t quite the same. 1-6 are about him whereas 7 isn’t. 1 & 6, and to a lesser extent 3-5, are about his environment. 4 is additionally a causal proposition – the sounds were made by Moore. 2 gives no information about his environment, but only about his bodily posture. 7 differs from 1 in that Moore’s existence is irrelevant to it.

- Nevertheless, these seven assertions are alike in four important respects (the first of which gets a lot more attention that the other three).

1). pp. 230-242a

- Assertions 1-7 were all alike in that they each might have been false (though were is fact true). This implies that their negations are not self-contradictory (for if this were the case, they couldn’t have been false). They are contingent. Moore has four things to say about the consequences of this contingency for certainty, and then has something to say about our use of phrases involving possibility or certainty, before finally summarising this first point of similarity of the seven assertions.

- Firstly, the mere fact that the seven propositions were contingent doesn’t mean that they weren’t all known to be true. Moore thinks false the doctrine of some philosophers that no contingent proposition is ever, as a matter of fact, known to be true, and will argue against it later. However, his present point is that, even were this doctrine correct, it wouldn’t follow from the mere fact that a statement is

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1 The editor to the book from which this paper is taken (Moore’s Philosophical Papers) states that Moore had said in the Preface that this paper contained many bad mistakes, and deduces that he was particularly dissatisfied with the closing 4 paragraphs. However, see the closing note for a more positive evaluation.

2 This discussion – like much of Moore – is rather prolix and of doubtful relevance.

3 Though it’s not clear to me at this point where the 4th point ends!

4 Is this saying that this uncertainty is itself contingent?
contingent that it couldn’t be known to be true – some argument apart from the mere fact that his current upstanding position is contingent would be required to show that he can’t know he’s standing up. It’s obvious that Moore isn’t contradicting himself by saying that he knows that he’s standing up even though it is contingent that he is (even though, for the sake of argument, Moore might countenance that this statement might be false).

- Secondly, contingency doesn’t even imply that it’s possible for any of these seven propositions to be false. By saying that it is possible that \( p \), we often mean “for all I know, \( p \) may be true” – ie. “I don’t know that \( p \) is false”. It’s a confession of ignorance, so if I do know that \( p \) is false, it’s not possible that \( p \). Moore now shows that

- Thirdly,

- Fourthly, and finally,

- Moore now feels he needs to clear up some issues that may lead people to doubt what he’s said about what follow from the contingency of propositions – those concerning our use of phrases such as “it is possible that” or “it is certain that”.

- Moore finally sums up this first section dealing with the similarities between his 7 assertions.

2). pp. 242b-243a

- 3). p. 243b

- 4). pp. 243c-?

- pp. 249b-250

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5 This is the section with which our editor thinks Moore was most dissatisfied. In none of the three papers that I’ve looked at has Moore produced the argument from the lectures that he’s more certain that he’s got a hand than he is of any philosophical theory. Where is this? Maybe look up a book on Moore’s philosophy? Note: there’s something similar in Four Forms of Scepticism – and this is referred to by DeRose & Warfield: get hold of the full article.