Jottings

pp. 127-9

- In the Preface to the 2nd Edition of the Critique, Kant thought it a scandal to philosophy that until now no-one had proved the existence of an external world, but this had to be accepted on faith.
- Moore distinguishes, in Kant’s German, between “the existence of things outside of us” and “the existence of the things outside of us”, preferring the latter.
- Moore agrees that Kant’s question is important in itself and part of philosophy – and answering it is the aim of his paper, even though he won’t say as much as might be said.
- Kant thought he had a rigorous and the only possible proof. It is of “the objective reality of outer intuition” (in Critique), which Moore takes to be the same as “the existence of (the) things outside of us”.
- If Kant’s proof were satisfactory, all that would be left for Moore would be to say what sort of proof it was and whether there were any others. Moore, however, doesn’t think Kant’s proof is satisfactory, so the question of whether there is a proof deserves discussion.
- Moore thinks “things outside of us” is an odd expression, and means “things external to our minds”, which is taken as equivalent to two other expressions – “things external to us” and “external things”. It occurs before Descartes, who uses it as though it requires no explanation and so must have taken it as familiar. It’s to be distinguished from “external to our bodies”, which is why Moore prefers the first of the three expressions.
- Moore needs to explain what he means by “(things) external to out minds” before he can get on with his proof.
- Kant distinguishes, with respect to “things outside of us”, between “something that exists as a thing in itself distinct from us” and “something that belongs to external appearance”. For Kant, the former are transcendentally and the latter empirically external objects. The latter are “outright things that are to be met with in space”.

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- Moore agrees with Kant’s definition of “things which are met with in space” are the sort of things he wants to prove exist. He gives a list of standard examples of physical things – bodies, planets, houses and suchlike. However, he thinks non-physical things such as shadows should also be included. While this may not be a “thing”, he thinks that we may be looking for “whatever can be met with in space”. Moore thinks that proof of the existence of two shadows is as good a proof of “things which are met with in space” – and so of an external world – as would proof of the existence of material objects.
- Kant uses another phrase – “presented in space” – as though it were synonymous with “met with in space”. However, Moore provides examples of the former which aren’t examples of the latter.
• (1) Negative after-images (received after staring at a black blob on white paper and then transferring the gaze to blank white paper where a grey shape will be seen). While these are presented in space, Moore thinks they aren’t met with in space. The original figures, being the surfaces of physical objects, were met with in space, but the after-images weren’t – one reason being that they weren’t public. For something to be capable of being met with in space means that anyone, under appropriate conditions, would have had the appropriate sensory experience of the thing in question. However, no-one other than the person who saw the original image can see after-images. Others might have carried out a similar experiment, but they wouldn’t see the very same after-image. So, Moore concludes that negative after-images, while presented in space, are not met with in space, and are so not external to our minds.

• (2) Double images: each is presented in space, but not both can be met with in space – for then we’d be saying that another person could see the very same double-image I do. While it isn’t absurd to say that someone else might also see a double-image, Moore thinks it is absurd to suppose someone would see the same identical pair.

• (3) Bodily pains: are also presented in space – in that toothache is felt in a particular location, and even phantom-limb pain feels to be located where the amputated limb would have been. However, pains aren’t met with in space for the same reason as the other two examples – they are private to one person. While another person may have a pain qualitatively the same, it cannot be numerically the same pain. Pains are typical of things that are not external to our minds, but within them.

• (4) After-images with the eyes shut: Moore’s final example of things presented in space, but not met with in space are, for instance, images of an electric light seen afterwards with the eyes shut. This distinguishes them from negative after-images. Moore thinks the mode of presentation in space also differs, because we are not seeing any physical space at all, so the images may simply be presented in a space.

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• So, not everything presented in space is met with in space, and aren’t physical realities at all. The category of things “presented in space” is, in this sense, wider than that of things “met with in space”. However, Moore thinks the reverse is also true – that there are things to be met with in space that are not presented. These are those things that might be perceived, and hence met with, but might not actually be perceived (ever) by anybody and so will never be presented in space. So, things to be met with in space include not only the objects of actual experience, but those of possible experience.

• Moore summarises. He’s made clear what sort of “things” he has in mind when he refers to “things external to our minds” by use of the Kantian “things that are met with in space”. However, we must note that (a) “things” such as after-images or pains, while “presented” in space are not “met with” in space and (b) things that are not, were not or may never be perceived are still “to be met with in space” even though not “presented in space”.

1 Note the introduction of these two words, which are important to the argument. They take us back to Kant’s original formulation, and so are not an invalid interpolation.
Moore also excludes from those things “external to the mind” images seen while dreaming, or hallucinations of the various sensory modalities.

Moore admits that the expressions “external to the mind” aren’t so clear as to decide whether such things as reflections or the sky fall under them. Most people will think it wrong to say that either of these are “things to be met with in space”, at least without qualification, but we don’t fall into the same absurdities as with pains or after images when we say that two people can see the same sky or same reflection—both are public.

So, Moore’s definitions aren’t so clear that we’ll be able to say of every particular things whether or not it is “to be met with in space” or is “external to our minds”. However, this is irrelevant to Moore’s purposes, which is simply whether there are at least two things that fall into this category, and proof that one dog and one plant exist outside the mind is sufficient—without worrying about the sky or reflections.

Moore draws a distinction between two inferences. He thinks the first—that from the existence of plants (say) we can infer the existence of “things to be met with in space”—is certain and requires no proof. However, he’s much less certain of the second—that from the existence of the same plants that we can infer that things exist external to our minds. In the first case, Moore is certain that that there couldn’t be a dog that couldn’t be met with in space. However, in the second he’s not so sure that a dog has to be external to our minds, and that a proof is required. The only situation this wouldn’t be necessary would be if we were using “external” as a synonym for “to be met with in space”. Moore thinks it unlikely that anyone does allow this synonymity.

We saw earlier that Kant allowed two very different senses of externality. The first was transcendental, the second merely empirical. It is notorious that Kant did not consider things that are to be met with in space as the transcendently external—things existing in themselves as distinct from us. So, there is a sense of “external” in use amongst philosophers—in particular, Kant—where the proposition “two dogs exist” will not allow us to infer that there are any external things. Moore, however, thinks that Kant didn’t make himself clear what this sense of “external” meant, and that few philosophers have used “external” in this sense, so that things met with in space are not external.

So, Moore asks how the other sense of “external”—the empirical—fares. Moore deduces that Kant understood this sense of “external” as identical with “to be met with in space”, which he finds very odd, and thinks Kant wrong, at odds with other philosophers, and probably not willing to use this definition himself.

To explain how philosophers have used “external”, and how the conceptions “external to our minds” and “to be met with in space” are related to one another, Moore asks what we mean by things being “in” our minds. This is a metaphorical usage, some well understood—e.g. “I had you in mind when …”—where it means the same as “I was thinking of you”. This isn’t the usage contrasted with external, because you will be external to my mind at the very moment I’m thinking of you and have you in mind. This ought to be an exclusive relationship, so Moore considers the cases where it is—pains, after-images and dreams—as distinct from

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2 Presumably because, like pains and after-images, these are private to one individual.
3 I.e. existing transcendentally.
those where it isn’t – eg. my body itself, which is not “in” my mind even when I’m feeling, seeing or thinking of it. Moore thinks it’s quite wrong to say “to be met with in space” is the difference.

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- Even though the answer to the above question is hard, Moore will try to give one.
- The usage of “in my mind” is not quite in accord with ordinary speech. Saying bodily pains are “in my mind” would imply that I feel them with my mind, which isn’t quite standard non-philosophical usage. It’s natural to say that that I remember or feel mental pains (such as disappointment) with my mind, but less so to say that I feel bodily pains – eg. a severe headache – with my mind, and even less so that I hear or see with it. However, there is philosophical precedence for treating seeing and having a bodily pain as much as mental occurrences or processes as remembering or thinking. This is because of the real resemblance between such as “I saw a cat” on the one hand and “I pictured the scene to myself” on the other. All such statements contrast with others in which “I” is used – eg. “I was lying on my back”. The first class of statements furnish data for psychology, and (if we add a timestamp) it follows that I was having an experience at the time in question, whereas in the second class it doesn’t.
- Even “having an experience” requires an explanation, as it’s philosophic use isn’t quite in accord with common usage. Moore thinks it’s the case at the time in question iff I was conscious, dreaming or some third possibility which resembles the other two (eg. having a vision). While still somewhat vague, this is sufficient for Moore’s purposes, provided we add that things of this sort are what count as “having an experience” and that other things don’t. Hence, what explains what it is for something to be “in my mind” is that it would be contradictory to say that I was, say, feeling this very pain and yet not having an experience. So the difference between pains that are “in” my mind, and my body, which never is, is that there is no reason to suppose there’s a contradiction if, at a particular time, my body exists and I’m having no experience.
- So, saying that something is external to our minds is just to say that there would be no contradiction in supposing that it existed at some time and yet none of us were having an experience. By “our” we mean “humans”, so any pains which animals may feel are external to our minds, though not to theirs. This points out the difference between “external to our minds” and “to be met with in space”, since animals’ pains are not to be met with in space, and the existence of the latter cannot be inferred from that of the former.
- The two concepts are not synonyms, and Moore thinks their true relation is as follows. There are lots of things – eg. stars – such that, if there exists at least one of them, then there exists at least one thing to be met with in space. For each of such things for which this is true, it also follows that there is at least one thing external to our minds. Moore’s reason is as follows. Consider any kind of thing to be met with in space, say soap bubbles; then, if I say of anything that I’m perceiving “that’s a soap bubble” I’m saying there’s no contradiction for it to have existed before I perceived it and to continue to exist after I stop doing so. This is

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4 Moore gives lots of examples. The one I’ve chosen for the second class (rather than “I was less than four feet tall”) might indicate having an experience of lying on my back, but it doesn’t entail one, as I might have been unconscious.

5 Moore, as usual, expresses this in a very convoluted sentence which I may have misconstrued.
part of what’s meant by saying it’s a real rather than hallucinatory soap bubble. This continued existence isn’t necessary, as there are notorious examples of things that exist only when they are being perceived by a particular person. But the thing perceived wouldn’t be a soap bubble unless its existence at a particular time were logically independent of my perceiving it at that time – unless it could have existed at that time without me having at that time any experience whatever. Moore takes it that from the proposition that I’m perceiving a soap bubble, there follows the proposition that it is external to my mind, and indeed external to all other minds. It is not the sort of thing that can only exist at the time somebody is having an experience. So, on seeing a soap bubble we can say that there’s an external objects that is external to all minds. This is true of any other kind of thing (including unicorns) such that if there are any things of that kind, there are things to be met with in space.

- So, if I can find any two things such that they are things met with in space, then I will have proved that there are at least two things that are “outside of us”. Moore asks whether he can prove this.

pp. 146 – 150

- Moore now comes to his famous argument. He thinks, contra Kant, that there are many perfectly rigorous proofs of the existence of things outside of us. This is by lifting up his two hands in turn and gesturing with them and saying “this is one hand” and “this is another”. If this is a proof of external things, then he can obviously repeat the proof in innumerable other ways.
- Moore insists that this is a proof – a perfectly rigorous one, and one which it is impossible to better. It’s a proof provided the following hold:
  1. The premise was different from the conclusion.
  2. Moore knew the premise to be true, rather than just believing it to be so.
  3. The conclusion really did follow from the premise.
- Moore is satisfied on all three counts:
  1. The conclusion was merely “two hands exist at this moment”, but the premise was far more specific, expressed by showing the hands, making certain gestures and saying various words. Moore thinks it’s obvious that the two are different because the conclusion might have been true had the premise been false. Much more is asserted in the premise than in the conclusion.
  2. Moore thinks it’s absurd that he might not know the premise to be true, as though he only believed it or it might not have been the case. We might as well suggest that he’s not standing there talking.
  3. The conclusion is as certain as that if there’s one hand here now and another hand here now, then it follows that there are two hands in existence now.
- Moore thinks we take such proofs as finally settling questions. He gives and example of proving that there are three misprints on a certain page of a book, which would be proved in similar manner.
- So, Moore thinks that then he gave a proof that there were then external objects, and could have given proofs of others; similarly, he could give many proofs that there are external objects now.
• If asked to prove the existence of external objects in the past, he can do this also, but the proofs are of a different sort. Moore points out the relevance of proof of the past existence of external objects to the general case that scandalised Kant. Moore thinks the proof goes as follows: “I held up two hands not long ago; therefore two hands existed not long ago; therefore at least two objects have existed at some time in the past”. This is a perfectly good proof, provided Moore knows the premise to be true. But, he does, as do all who saw him waving his hands about. He stresses that this is a different kind of proof of the existence of external objects. If these are the sorts of proofs that are wanted, then nothing is easier than proving the existence of external objects.

• Moore is quite aware that, despite this, many philosophers will be dissatisfied with the proofs, and he wants to close by discussing why. They want Moore to prove something he hasn’t attempted to prove, and hasn’t proved, namely the truth of the premises of his two proofs. They want a general statement of how any propositions of the sort of these premises can be proved. Moore doesn’t think any such proof can be given, and if this is what’s meant by a proof of the existence of external things, then he doesn’t think one’s possible. We might be able to check that one hand wasn’t artificial, but Moore doesn’t think he can prove that “Here’s one hand and here’s another”. He would need to prove he isn’t dreaming and while he has conclusive evidence that he’s awake, this is different from being able to prove it. He doesn’t know what all his evidence is, which is necessary for a proof.

• People think that if Moore can’t prove his premises, then the proofs of the existence of external objects that he’s given aren’t proofs at all. Knowledge requires proof, they say, so he doesn’t know his premises are true. This is the view Kant took – that until we have a proof of such premises, the existence of external things must be taken on faith. If I cannot prove there is a hand here, I must accept it as a matter of faith and cannot know it.

• Moore thinks this view can be shown to be wrong, but only by the use of premises we don’t know to be true unless we do know of the existence of external things. Moore insists that he can know things he can’t prove, and Moore certainly did know the premises of his two proofs. People objecting to the proofs merely on the grounds that he didn’t know their premises have no good reason for their dissatisfaction.

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8 Presumably to point out how wrong Kant was in saying there was only one proof – his own!
9 This is a rather odd comment.
10 Something wrong here? Moore says elsewhere that we can know, but can’t prove.