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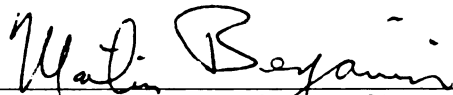
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WITTGENSTEIN'S NEW KIND OF FOUNDATIONALISM

By

Robert G. Brice III

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ABSTRACT

WITTGENSTEIN'S NEW KIND OF FOUNDATIONALISM

By

Robert G. Brice III

In *On Certainty* Wittgenstein presents an argument against both G.E. Moore and the Cartesian skeptic, exposing both positions as flawed. His main contention is that what "stands fast" for us-certainty-is not subject to doubt, truth, or falsehood. Whatever is subject to these ascriptions is propositional in form and belongs to our language-games. But certitude is not so subject; certitude is principally non-propositional and therefore stands outside the language-game.

Action is the locus of certainty, the things about which we are certain constitute the "foundation" upon which all our knowledge (and language-games) turn. What Moore had once called our "obvious truisms" are, under Wittgenstein's direction, recognized first as inherent in our human natural history, and second, as grounded or based in human societies, cultures, *forms of life*. It is this *human-*centered kind of foundationalism that distinguishes Wittgenstein from what Moyal-Sharrock characterizes as the *super*-human kind of traditional, Cartesian foundationalism.

Due to the human emphasis, Wittgenstein's new kind of

foundationalism is quite different than the traditional Cartesian variety; it makes no guarantees of absoluteness or universality. Instead, Wittgenstein identifies a common groundwork, a "footing" on which our language-games rest. This new kind of foundationalism shows the way our language-games are anchored to (or founded in) the world. Therefore, in *On Certainty*, I argue that Wittgenstein presents a new kind of foundationalism.

In memory of my father, Robert G. Brice Jr. and my
grandfather, Gus Elliott

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I owe deep thanks to many professors, friends, and family members for their valuable comments and criticisms of the dissertation. First and foremost, I am indebted to Dr. Martin Benjamin, who met with me and two other graduate students every week for more than a year to discuss our progress. These meetings proved invaluable; without Benjamin's wisdom, guidance, and support, this dissertation would not have been completed. I would also like to thank Bernard Mahoney, Paul Streveler, Rudy Bernard, and Maya Goldenberg, who all provided valuable comments on portions of the dissertation at different stages of its evolution. Finally, and most importantly I want to express how fortunate I am to have had such strong support from my family. To my mom, my dad, and my sister: I am grateful to you all and love you very much.

Things and actions are what they are, and their consequences will
be what they will be: why then should we seek to be deceived?

-Bishop Butler, *Fifteen Sermons*, VII

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Introduction

Was Wittgenstein A Foundationalist?

In "Proof of an External World," G.E. Moore opens with

a quote from Kant:

> It still remains a scandal to philosophy… that the existence
> of things outside of us… must be accepted merely on *faith*,
> and that, if anyone thinks good to doubt their existence, we
> are unable to counter his doubts by any satisfactory proof.[1]

"Kant," he says, "thought it a matter of some importance to

give a proof of 'the existence of things outside of us.'"[2]

Moore agreed and sought to meet this challenge.[3] Moore's

article is significant for three reasons: (1) in earlier

papers, and throughout most of his life, he made no effort

to "prove" his common sense view true. Common sense

propositions such as "The earth exists" and "I have two

hands" were such "obvious truisms" they were "not worth

stating."[4] So why, in "Proof of an External World," did he

find it necessary to prove what he once thought so obvious

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[1] Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, Norman Kemp Smith translation, (New York: St Martin's Press, 1965), 34.

[2] G.E. Moore, "Proof of an External World," *Philosophical Papers* (New York: Collier Books, 1962), 126.

[3] "The question whether it is possible to give *any* satisfactory proof of the point in question," says Moore, "still deserves discussion." Moore, "Proof," 127-128. Moore found Kant's own proof unsatisfactory. "I think it is by no means certain that he did succeed in removing once for all the state of affairs which he considered to be a scandal to philosophy." Ibid., 127. In the Preface to his second edition of the *Critique of Pure Reason* however, Kant declares he has *already given* a rigorous proof of the external world in his first edition, and here, he says, "in the propositions themselves and their proofs…I have found nothing to alter." Kant, B xxxviii, 33.

[4] Moore, "Defense of Common Sense," *Philosophical Papers* (New York: Collier Books, 1962), 32.

it required no comment? (2) In taking on this issue, Moore was not responding solely to Kant but to something much larger: most of the Western philosophical tradition since Descartes. (3) After reading Moore's article, Wittgenstein became interested in epistemological issues and began writing notes published posthumously under the title *On Certainty*. In this work, Wittgenstein develops an argument against both Moore and the Cartesian skeptic, exposing both positions as flawed.

Descartes regarded all statements about the external world as susceptible to doubt. Wittgenstein thought this absurd and agreed with Moore's common sense thesis against the skeptic: "[t]he reasonable man," says Wittgenstein, "does *not have* certain doubts;" "[t]hat is to say, the *questions* that we raise and our *doubts* depend on the fact that some propositions are exempt from doubt."[5] Wittgenstein, however, disagreed with Moore's belief that these types of propositions provided *proof* of the external world. "The existence of the earth," he insists, "is rather part of the whole *picture* which forms the starting-point of belief for me."[6]

According to Wittgenstein, Moore was wrong in thinking

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[5] Ludwig Wittgenstein, *On Certainty*, edited by G.E.M. Anscombe and G.H. Von Wright, translated by Denis Paul and G.E.M. Anscombe (New York: Harper & Row, 1972), §§220, 341.
[6] Ibid., §209.

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he *knew* such propositions at all, not because the propositions were false, but because Moore's claim to knowledge of them was wrongly applied. "[C]an one enumerate what one knows (like Moore)," Wittgenstein inquired. "Straight off like that, I believe not.-For otherwise the expression 'I know' gets misused."[7] "When one hears Moore say 'I *know* that that is a tree' one suddenly understands those who think that that has by no means been settled.. It is as if Moore had put it in the wrong light."[8] By putting an "obvious truism" in such light, Wittgenstein thought Moore had committed a "grammatical mistake," a "misuse" of the verb "to know." This mistake blurred an important distinction between "knowledge" and "certainty": they are not the same thing and cannot be used interchangeably, "they belong to different *categories*."[9]

Because of Moore's misunderstanding, Wittgenstein rejected his argument against the skeptic, and presented an altogether different refutation of the skeptical position[10]

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[7] Ibid., §6.

[8] Ibid., §481.

[9] Ibid., §308.

[10] I think it is important to keep in mind that although Wittgenstein rejects Moore's argument he does think his common sense conclusions are right. These common sense claims form an interesting, "necessary" class; they occupy a special place in our lives, constituting, as Wittgenstein put it: "the rock bottom of [our] convictions." Ibid., §248. They form an unquestioned stopping point for all our inquiries and justifications of claims 'to know.' In fact, it would be impossible for us to conduct our lives, to think, to act, without taking at least some things entirely for granted, ibid., §88. The propositions Moore identifies are

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that exposed the senselessness involved in maintaining it: "If you tried to doubt everything," Wittgenstein explains, "you would not get as far as doubting anything…[for] the game of doubting itself presupposes certainty."[11] This "game," as well as other language-games, presupposes certitude. For Wittgenstein, knowledge is a language-game[12] distinct from certainty. Certainty stands as the "frame" or "hinge" to the language-game of knowledge; it serves as *external support* to this and our many other language-games.

Perhaps Wittgenstein's most important contribution in *On Certainty*, is that what "stands fast" is not subject to justification, proof, the adducing of evidence, or doubt;[13] "it is not true, nor yet false."[14] Whatever is subject to the above list is propositional in form and belongs to our

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precisely what play this crucial role for us; they help define our *Weltanshauung*; they serve to ground our procedures by which other language-games can be assessed. Wittgenstein takes Moore-type propositions as among the most basic certainties one could have. I take Wittgenstein's *goal* to be very much "in the spirit" of Moore in that he thinks the external world does indeed exist, it is instead his *method* that differs from Moore. For after accepting common sense propositions as laying at the "rock bottom" of our convictions he sees *this will not suffice in responding to the skeptic*, ibid., §248. Moore needs something that will not invite the skeptic's question: "Yes, but *how do you know?*" In order to thwart the skeptic, Wittgenstein's method exposes a cleavage between two categories: "knowledge" and "certainty." I discuss this cleavage in Part Two: Analysis.

[11] Ibid., §115.

[12] "The game of doubting," that Wittgenstein talks about in *On Certainty* §115, might be thought of as a subset of an even larger "game of knowledge."

[13] See Avrum Stroll, *Moore and Wittgenstein on Certainty* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 138.

[14] Wittgenstein, *On Certainty*, §205.

language-games. Certainty however, is quite different. It is non-propositional in form and stands *outside* the language-game. Certainty manifests itself in our actions. *Action* is the locus of certainty, the "hinge" upon which all our knowledge (all our language-games) turn.

On Certainty, then, offers a new kind of foundationalism different from traditional foundationalist theories. Wittgenstein's new kind of foundationalism is not an epistemological theory. Epistemological theories are language-games and presuppose a non-propositional, non-ratiocinated certitude (action). I believe what we find in *On Certainty* is a *kind* of foundationalism, but the relationship is not between differing degrees of knowledge, the relationship is between two completely different categories: knowledge and certainty.

What follows will be divided into two parts, each containing three chapters. In Part I, "Historical Background," I pay particular attention to why Moore's "Proof of An External World" was such an important paper. In chapter one, I rehearse Moore's common sense realism and its influence. In chapter two, I turn to the Cartesian tradition and its bewitching effects on subsequent philosophers. In chapter three, I conclude Part I with questions raised by Wittgenstein concerning Cartesian skepticism and Moore's attempt to resist it.

Part II is an analysis of *On Certainty*. Because Wittgenstein died before he was able to polish it, in chapter four I offer a rational reconstruction of *On Certainty*. Here I (a) distinguish *propositional* knowledge from *non-propositional* certainty, (b) discuss the character of "hinge-propositions," and (c) examine the direction Wittgenstein's thoughts seem to lead. In chapter five, I assess the current debate about *On Certainty*. Disparate views from A.C. Grayling, Daniele Moyal-Sharrock, and Avrum Stroll are examined and critically discussed. Finally, in chapter six, I conclude Part II and the dissertation as a whole by attempting to blend the strengths of the three views examined in chapter five together, into another, more adequate, fourth position.

I believe *On Certainty* is a "foundational" text, but not in any traditional sense of the word. By first dividing knowledge and certainty as two distinct categories, and then showing certainty's foundational relationship to knowledge and other language-games, Wittgenstein, I believe, is a new kind of foundationalist.

Chapter 1: Significance of Moore's Articles

> The evidence of sense, of memory, and of the necessary relations of things, are all distinct and original kinds of evidence, equally grounded on our constitution.…To reason against any of these kinds of evidence is absurd.…They are first principles, and such fall not within the province of reason, but of common sense.
>
> -Thomas Reid, *The Works of Thomas Reid*

How Moore's Common Sense Realism Developed

Spearheading the departure from the idealistic philosophy so prevalent in England at the end of the Nineteenth Century, G.E. Moore defended what he called a "common sense realism."[1] His common sense approach appealed for philosophical clarity and accuracy.[2] As he says in "The

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[1] As Bertrand Russell described it: "G.E. Moore took the lead in the rebellion, and I followed, with a sense of emancipation. Bradley [a British idealist at Cambridge] argued that everything common sense believes is mere appearance. We reverted to the opposite extreme, and thought that *everything* is real that common sense, uninfluenced by philosophy or theology, supposes real. With a sense of escaping from prison, we allowed ourselves to think that grass is green, and that the sun and stars would exist if no one was aware of them.…The world, which had been thin and logical, suddenly became rich and varied and solid." Bertrand Russell, "My Mental Development," *The Philosophy of Bertrand Russell*, edited by Paul Schlipp, 3rd Edition, (New York: Tudor Publishing Company, 1944 and 1951), 12.

[2] Such appeals to precision can be traced back to Moore's undergraduate days. As a member of the Apostles, a secret student society at Cambridge, he implemented what came to be known as "Moore's philosophical method." This method, according to Paul Levy, consisted in Moore demanding of someone that "he be precise as to what question he is asking." Paul Levy, *Moore: G.E. Moore and the Cambridge Apostles* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1981), 69. Moore's emphasis on precision struck a sympathetic chord with many of his students, especially Ludwig Wittgenstein who makes similar appeals throughout his writings. E.g., "In reflecting on language and meaning we can easily get into a position where we think that in philosophy we are not talking of words and sentences in a quite common-or-garden sense, but in a sublimated and abstract sense." Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Grammar*, edited by Rush Rhees, translated by Anthony Kenny (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978), 121. "In logic the most difficult standpoint is that of sound common sense. For in order to justify its view it demands the whole truth; it will not help by the slightest concession or construction." Ibid., 267. In the *Blue and Brown Books* Wittgenstein says: "A philosopher is not a man out of his senses, a man

Refutation of Idealism,"[3] philosophical problems are often difficult to answer because they are obscurely presented.[4] For instance, idealists maintain the proposition "*esse* is *percipi*" to be an essential premise in their argument that "reality is spiritual," but Moore believed idealists had not done enough to clarify this key premise. "There are three very ambiguous terms in this proposition,"[5] he notes. Carefully considering the different possible meanings of each term, Moore, at one point asks, "Is *esse percipi*?"[6] If the proposition is to be understood as "to be is to be perceived" he says, then it would have to entail the idea that when one ceases to see an object, the object ceases to

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who doesn't see what everybody sees; nor on the other hand is his disagreement with common sense that of the scientist disagreeing with the coarse views of the man in the street." Wittgenstein, *Blue & Brown Books* (New York: Harper & Row, 1958), 59.

[3] See G.E. Moore, "The Refutation of Idealism," *Philosophical Studies* (Paterson: Littlefield, Adams, & Co., 1959), 1-30. "The Refutation of Idealism" is regarded by many as one of Moore's most important and influential articles. Avrum Stroll has declared it such a thorough and devastating attack on idealism that the doctrine "has more or less vanished from the Western philosophical scene as a result." Avrum Stroll, *Moore and Wittgenstein on Certainty* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 12. Even though Moore credited McTaggart, a British idealist at Cambridge, with quite a lot of influence on his work, Paul Levy says that "[m]ost of this disappeared, and with it McTaggart's influence on the rest of the world, when Moore came to disagree with his teacher's idealism." Levy, *Moore* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1981), 60. Moore's appeal for philosophical clarity and accuracy established much of the groundwork for the newly emerging analytic movement. Apart from Moore, there were a handful of other philosophers involved in the formation of this movement, e.g., Gottlob Frege, Bertrand Russell, and Ludwig Wittgenstein.

[4] In this article, Moore says "the question requiring to be asked about material things is thus not: What reason have we for supposing that anything exists…but: What reason have we for supposing that material things do *not* exist?" See Moore, "Refutation," 30.

[5] Ibid., 5-7.
[6] Ibid., 7.

exist. Moore found this reasoning misguided. *Seeing* the sense datum may cease to exist, but the object *itself* does not, he insisted.

To illustrate the peculiarity of idealism, Moore asked whether we would be willing to say that trains only have wheels while in stations, on the grounds that the passengers cannot see the wheels while in the train.

> [I]s this, in fact, what you believe, when you believe you are traveling in a train? Do you not, in fact, believe that there really are wheels on which your carriage is running at the moment, and couplings between the carriages? That these things really exist, at the moment, even though nobody is seeing either them themselves, nor any appearances of them? And now, too, when you consider a case like this, is it not, in fact, very difficult to believe that you do not under such circumstances really *know* that the carriage is supported on wheels and is coupled to the engine?[7]

Moore's example underscores the absurdity of both idealism and the proposition upon which it is based. "How utterly unfounded is the assumption '*esse* is *percipi*,'" Moore concludes, when it "appears in the clearest light."[8]

On the one hand, Moore's common sense realism was a reaction to the widespread idealism of his day, on the other, it also developed out of his contempt for Cartesian skepticism.[9] Regarding all statements about the world

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[7] Moore considered this in "Material Things," *Some Main Problems of Philosophy* (New York: Collier Books, 1953), 149-156, specifically, 152.

[8] Moore, "Refutation," 28.

[9] Moore was by no means the first to advocate common sense to combat skepticism. This doctrine comes from a long tradition, a direct descendent of Thomas Reid's Scottish School of Common Sense. I think it is safe to assume that Moore probably came into contact with Reid's

outside one's mind as susceptible to doubt seemed odd, Moore

thought.[10] To respond to the skeptical question, "How do you

know?" invited the further question: "What justifies you?"

If knowledge requires justification or reasons, one might

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views while studying at Cambridge under Henry Sidgwick, a supporter of
Reid's doctrine. It is also worth noting that some have argued this
common sense thread goes back much further than Reid. See Bernard
Mahoney's *The Empirical Tradition and Newman's Concept of the
Conscience*. Mahoney's main concern turns on whether J.H. Newmann was a
Cartesian or an empiricist from Oxford. Although some French scholars
wanted to make Newman a Cartesian, Mahoney contends he was an Oxford
empiricist. What is of interest here, for our purposes, is that
Mahoney's view that the line of British Empiricists, Locke and Hume, and
to a certain degree Berkeley, begins with the study of Aristotle at
Oxford. When Aristotle was banned at the University of Paris in the 13th
Century, a group of scholars moved north to Oxford to continue their
research. These scholars, inspired by the empiricism of Aristotle,
influenced not only the aforementioned philosophers but also (much
later) exercised an amount of influence on Thomas Reid and his Scottish
School of Common Sense. Reid's School is an important link to the
empirical tradition, for it can be seen in the work of Henry Sidgwick,
Moore's instructor at Cambridge. Reid's work can also be seen in a
contemporary of Moore's, H.H. Price. Price, in his book *Perception*, says
"[t]he position maintained in this chapter with regard to the nature and
validity of perceptual consciousness is in essence identical with that
maintained by Reid against Hume." H.H. Price, *Perception* (Westport:
Greenwood Publishing Group, 1984), 203. Mahoney's study shows that the
"British empirical tradition" began at Oxford well before Locke,
Berkeley, and Hume, and, that these Aristotelian scholars have
influenced every empirical movement well into the 20th Century including
the School of Ordinary Language, i.e., Wittgenstein, J.L. Austin. Reid's
influence on Moore, says Mahoney, is evident. The views of both men
exhibit striking similarities in their appeals to common sense and their
opposition to idealism and Cartesian skepticism. However, as Avrum
Stroll correctly points out, Moore becomes "co-opted by the traditional
philosophical game.…[W]hen he enumerated his long list of propositions,
his comments about them suggested that he had personally checked each to
see if he knew or only believed it. He thus seemed…to be espousing a
main feature of the Cartesian model-that knowledge is a mental state."
Stroll, *Moore and Wittgenstein on Certainty*, 98-99. I think Stroll's
assessment is correct. It is curious that Moore feels the need to
provide a proof for "obvious truisms" unless he was, as Stroll suggests,
"under a powerful spell." Moore's bewitchment, it could be argued, is
what ultimately stirs Wittgenstein's interest in the area of
epistemology and provokes him to write, what has posthumously been
titled, *On Certainty*. Stroll's observation, Moore's bewitchment, and
Wittgenstein's interest will be discussed in the following chapters.

[10] Norman Malcolm goes so far as to say that Moore was "outraged by the
contentions of the skeptical philosophers." See Norman Malcolm, "Moore
and Wittgenstein on the Sense of 'I know,'" edited by John V. Canfield,
Volume VIII, Knowing, Naming, Certainty, and Idealism (New York: Garland
Publishing, 1986), 142.

then ask whether these justifications themselves also require further reasons, and so on, *ad infinitum*.[11] Where then does inquiry stop? What sort of argument will satisfy the skeptic?

Descartes' method of doubt[12] led to this radical form of skepticism.[13] Reverting to the opposite extreme, Moore insisted "there *are* in fact…propositions, every one of which I *know*, with certainty, to be true."[14] But by rejecting radical skepticism, Moore faced a serious challenge: defend his claim that there are propositions he knows with certainty to be true, but defend it *without* explicit argumentation. Lacking a proof, how was Moore to do this? It seems he would need to prove his common sense doctrine true while, simultaneously, combating skepticism, but how?

Due to the odd nature of skepticism, Moore proposed an altogether new strategy. This new strategy was to defend the notion that certitude was attainable, not by explicit proof

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[11] This is the ancient epistemological problem of infinite regress. See Aristotle's *Posterior Analytics*, reprinted in *The Complete Works of Aristotle*, edited by Jonathan Barnes, Volume I (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984), I.3, I.19-22.

[12] I discuss the Cartesian model and its influence on the rest of western philosophy in chapter two.

[13] In *An Inquiry Into the Human Mind on the Principles of Common Sense* and again in both *Essays on the Intellectual Powers of Man* and *Essays on the Active Powers*, Thomas Reid attacks the Cartesian model on similar grounds. "It may be observed, the [Cartesian] system…leads to skepticism with regard to memory, as well as with regard to the objects of sense," see *The Works of Thomas Reid*, edited by William Hamilton, Sixth edition, (Edinburgh: Thoemmes Press, 1863), 357.

[14] Moore, "Defense of Common Sense," *Philosophical Papers* (New York:

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but instead by *appealing* to "common sense truisms."
Philosophers, in the tradition of Descartes, have had a
tendency to "intellectualize"[15] matters; Moore however,
would appeal to the common sensibilities of the "man in the
street."

Common Sense Propositions

In "A Defense of Common Sense," Moore provides a list
of "common sense truisms" while at the same time refusing to
offer a proof for them. Among this set of propositions he
knows "with certainty, to be true," he includes:

> [t]here exists at present a living human body, which is *my*
> body,… there are a large number of other living human
> bodies, each of which has… at some time been born,…
> continued to exist for some time after birth,… been, at
> every moment of its life after birth, either in contact with
> or not far from the surface of the earth; and many of these
> bodies have already died and ceased to exist.[16]

Appealing directly to our common sense understanding of the
world, Moore says there is an "ordinary or popular
meaning"[17] to such propositions. They are so obvious to any
"reasonable person" they're "not worth stating."[18] In fact,

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Collier Books, 1962), 32-33.

[15] Martin Benjamin uses this term in his *Philosophy & This Actual World*:
commenting on the Cartesian influence, Benjamin says, "[t]his highly
intellectualized conception…is deeply rooted in Western philosophy,"
Martin Benjamin, *Philosophy & This Actual World* (Lanham: Rowman &
Littlefield Publishers, 2003), 17.

[16] Moore, "Defense," 33.

[17] Ibid., 36.

[18] Ibid., 32.

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when we *do* state them, they seem uninteresting, even trivial. "Such an expression as 'The earth has existed for many years past,'" says Moore, "is the very type of unambiguous expression, the meaning of which we all understand."[19]

For Moore, these "common sense propositions"[20] constitute an unquestioned stopping point for our inquiries and our justifications of claims "to know." We all know them to be true, he insists, and if we know them to be true it is foolish for the skeptic to try to show they are *not* true. So, to even raise the question, "How do we analyze common sense propositions?" means we must already understand what they are.[21]

Common sense propositions are conceptually prior to the descriptions of reality, e.g., descriptions like science offers; they are, as Avrum Stroll calls them, "pre-scientific."[22] "Pre-scientific" propositions are beliefs

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[19] Ibid., 36.

[20] Sometimes these "common sense propositions" are called "Moore-type propositions." For example, Marie McGinn says she will label these propositions "*Moore-type propositions*." Marie McGinn, *Sense and Certainty: A Dissolution of Skepticism* (New York: Basil Blackwell Publishing, 1989), 102. In fact, McGinn devotes an entire chapter to these, "On The Status of Moore-Type Propositions." McGinn however, is not the first to refer to the statements Moore claims "to know with certainty as true" as "Moore-type propositions." For the first instance I can find of this, see Anthony Kenny's *Wittgenstein*: "[n]ow are the Moore-type propositions such as 'Here is my hand'…" Anthony Kenny, *Wittgenstein* (New York: Allen Lane, 1973), 211.

[21] Moore, "Defense," 36.

[22] Stroll uses this term in *Moore and Wittgenstein on Certainty*, 15. W.V.O. Quine holds a similar view. In a rarely cited article entitled

about the world, the kind of "basic presuppositions"[23] we all share: "primitive,"[24] "fundamental"[25] beliefs, such as "there are physical objects," "there are other minds," etc. They are, according to Stroll, "circumstance-independent"[26] since we take them to be true *with certainty* not just in particular contexts or under certain conditions but rarely, if ever, do we find ourselves in circumstances where we would question such propositions.[27] It's hard to imagine what circumstance would make a common sense proposition false. For instance, consider the truth of the utterance "I

"The Scope and Language of Science," Quine, echoing Moore, says that "[s]cience is not a substitute for common sense, but an extension of it. The quest for knowledge is properly an effort simply to broaden and deepen the knowledge which the man in the street already enjoys, in moderation, in relation to common-place things around him. To disavow the very core of common sense, to require evidence for that which both the physicist and the man in the street accept as platitudinous, is no laudable perfectionism; it is pompous confusion, a failure to observe the nice distinction between the baby and the bathwater." See W.V.O. Quine, "The Scope and Language of Science," *The Ways of Paradox and Other Essays*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1976), 229-230.

[23] Cf. Robin Collingwood, quoted in Avrum Stroll, *Moore and Wittgenstein on Certainty* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 138-139.

[24] Michael Kober, "Certainties of a world-picture: The epistemological investigations of On Certainty," *The Cambridge Companion to Wittgenstein*, Edited by Hans Sluga and David G. Stern, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 422-423.

[25] I should emphasize that just because it is more fundamental than language doesn't mean it can't be expressed in language. Common sense propositions are the case in point: although they are fundamental they can still be uttered. But, again, they appear exceedingly trivial when we do say them. This is why Moore says at the outset that they are such "obvious truisms as not to be worth stating," Moore, "Defense," 32.

[26] Stroll, *Moore and Wittgenstein on Certainty*, 32.

[27] To entertain whether a common sense proposition is true or false is to call into question a core background belief. I discuss this issue in more detail below under "local and global doubt" and again in chapter three when I look at how Wittgenstein responds to Moore.

have a body." In what circumstance would one actually utter this proposition?[28] Or again, consider the proposition: "The earth has existed for many years past." Do either of these depend on particular circumstances when one utters them? Moore thinks not. Propositions such as these are just the sort of "obvious truisms not worth stating." They seem trivial and as reasonable people Moore believes we accept such propositions as true. Under his common sense view, then, the skeptic's request for proof of such propositions appears fantastic.

The Absurdity of Skepticism

Skepticism about knowledge has been based on the assumption that we should not claim to know *anything* unless absolutely confident about it.[29] Immediately however, we see that it is at least *logically* possible to be wrong about most (if not all) of the things that we ordinarily claim to know. Consider a challenge to our common sense belief that the world has existed for many years past. Bertrand Russell once argued that there is nothing logically inconsistent in asserting that the earth is but five minutes old.

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[28] Martin Benjamin recounted to me an example he once heard by Daniele Moyal-Sharrock at the 20th International Wittgenstein Symposium at Kirchberg am Wechsel, Austria, in August, 1997. Perhaps uttering "I have a body" might be appropriate in the following scenario: A woman, no longer receiving the physical affection of her husband, exclaims "I have a body!" Of course it would make sense in such a context but does it really retain the same metaphysical emphasis that the Cartesian meant it to? I don't believe it does.

[29] i.e., there is no possibility of our being wrong.

> There is no logical impossibility in the hypothesis that the world sprang into being five minutes ago, exactly as it then was, with a population that 'remembered' a wholly unreal past. There is no logically necessary connection between events at different times; therefore nothing that is happening now or will happen in the future can disprove the hypothesis that the world began five minutes ago.[30]

Why is Russell's hypothesis logically possible? First, we need to consider the age of the earth. Many geologists, astronomers, and scientists who study the earth believe it is roughly 6 billion years old.[31] There are however, still other scientists who argue the earth is not 6 billion but closer to 4.5 billion years old. Although 1.5 billion years is a substantial amount of time, we can still conceive of a 4.5 billion year old earth without too much distortion to our understanding of reality. If we follow this line of reasoning however, notice, Russell's hypothesis is a *logically* permissible one. If the age of the earth is a matter of degree, then the hypothesis that the earth is 6 billion years old, 4.5 billion years old, a million years old, or even five minutes old, are all *logically legitimate* hypotheses. Russell simply pushes it to its extreme. It may not be a *sensible* hypothesis, it is however, a *logically possible* one.

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[30] Bertrand Russell, *The Analysis of Mind* (London: Routledge, reprinted 1992), 159-160. It should be noted that Russell, like Moore (and Wittgenstein), thought little of this kind of skepticism. "Like all skeptical hypotheses," Russell explains, "it is logically tenable, but uninteresting." Ibid., 160.

[31] Avrum Stroll uses this example. See Stroll, *Moore and Wittgenstein on Certainty*, 45-48.

Although Russell's hypothesis is intellectually uncomfortable it is not *logically* implausible. But logic aside, what does his hypothesis tell us? Would any reasonable person take it seriously? And if Russell, or anyone for that matter, genuinely proposed such a hypothesis, we would not say he had made a mistake in his calculations, we would instead insist that his conception of reality was wildly abnormal. As Moore put it,

> [t]here is… a real and important difference between [knowing the existence of material objects] and the dogmatic position that we *certainly do not* know of their existence. And, *in practice, if not in logic*, it is, I think, an important step towards the conviction that we *do* know of their existence.[32]

This "real and important difference" not only underscores the philosophical difference between Moore and Russell,[33] but I think it also illustrates Moore's rejection of the entire Cartesian program: a *logically possible*, but at the same time *practically untenable* model. For a model that would permit such hypotheses as a five minute old earth is a model Moore thinks we must reject.

Although he champions practical common sense over logical permissibility, this does not mean doubt has *no place* in Moore's program. As we shall see, he makes implicit use of what might be called a "division of doubt."

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[32] Moore, "Material Things," 161, the second emphasis is mine.

[33] Moore explains the "root of the difference between Russell and me" in

Moore's Division of Doubt

Contained in Moore's common sense approach is a division of skepticism that David Annis and others have called the "local/global" distinction. In an article entitled "A Contextual Theory of Epistemic Justification," Annis distinguished between these two kinds of skepticism:

> If an objection must be the expression of a real doubt caused by the jars of a real life situation, then such objections will be primarily *local* as opposed to *global*. Global objections call into question the totality of beliefs held at a certain time or a whole realm of beliefs, whereas local objections call into question a specific belief.[34]

For Moore, global doubt far exceeds the kind of reasonable or "real" doubt that *jars* the man in the street. This *extra-ordinary* doubt, despite its logical possibility, can be pushed to quite excessive and absurd heights, well beyond what reasonable people encounter, as Russell's hypothesis above illustrated. Moore believes "absolute skepticism [is]... as baseless as the grossest superstitions."[35]

Conversely, in ordinary contexts, although doubt is permissible, it is limited or bounded by "local" rules. These local rules restrain skeptical questions from reaching the level of absurdity permitted in the Cartesian model. For example, as we've seen, discrepancies (doubts) in the

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"Four Forms of Skepticism," *Philosophical Papers* (New York: Collier, 1962), 220-222.

[34] David Annis, "A Contextual Theory of Epistemic Justification," reprinted in *The Theory of Knowledge*, 3rd edition, edited by Louis Pojman (Stamford: Wadsworth, 2003), 249.

[35] Moore, "Refutation," 30.

scientific community about whether the earth is 4.5 or 6 billion years old are legitimate, even encouraged, when "bound" or "framed" by certain rules, in this case, scientific rules. But if one were to exceed these rules, say, with a proposition that the earth is but five minutes old, how would this person support it? What proof could he offer?

Moore's Proof Of An External World

For much of his academic career, Moore believed it was not the business of the philosopher to attempt to prove there were material things outside the mind. Why, he thought, should anyone suppose the philosopher could provide better reasons that material objects exist than the common man? The philosopher may analyze the propositions we use, she may try to make explicit the reasons we have for accepting common sense propositions, but the philosopher, Moore believed, should not offer proof. This view came to a dramatic halt however, with his article entitled, "Proof of An External World." No longer did Moore rely on the common sense truisms of the man in the street, he now found it necessary to *prove* what he once thought "unmistakably obvious."

In this article, Moore sought a proof to meet the Kantian challenge for the existence of things outside of us;

for Moore, it was proof of the existence of his two hands:

> I can prove now…that two human hands exist. How? By holding up my 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"… [This] proof… was a perfectly rigorous one; and…it is perhaps impossible to give a better or more rigorous proof of anything whatever.[36]

But is *this* really a "rigorous proof"? Has Moore demonstrated even a *simple* proof? After offering it, he makes another remarkable statement: "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."[37] Moore's argument raises a couple of questions. What kind of "proof" is Moore offering? What exactly is his motivation here?

Acknowledging that many philosophers will find his argument unsatisfactory,[38] Moore says what they really want

> is not merely a proof… but something like a general statement as to how any propositions can be proved. This, of course, I haven't given; and I do not believe it can be given: if this is what they mean by proof of the existence of external things, I do not believe that any proof of the existence of external things is possible…[Yet] I can know things which I cannot prove.[39]

Given the limitations Moore has described, how does he hope to prove an external world exists? He cannot, as he had previously done, simply appeal to our common sensibilities.

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[36] Moore, "Proof of an External World," *Philosophical Papers* (New York: Collier Books, 1962), 144.

[37] Ibid., 148.

[38] Ibid., 147.

[39] Ibid.

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"Proof" that the world exists is quite different than "appealing" to common sense. A "proof" means Moore must provide sound argumentation, that is, his argument must not only be valid, but his premises and conclusion must also be true. But this only raises more problems for Moore. How does he intend to stay outside the Cartesian tradition if presenting a proof for the *external* world? In offering a proof for the "external" world, it seems Moore must tacitly accept an "internal" one as well. But to draw an "internal/external" distinction is to draw a Cartesian distinction. What then are we to make of Moore's "proof"?

Moore's Aim in "Proof"

In "Proof Of An External World," Moore offers no justification, no reasons to support his claim to know that the external world exists. Instead, he affirms and reiterates that he does in fact "know" it. But affirmation and reiteration[40] are not a sufficient basis to support Moore's argument, nor, for that matter, can he return to simple "appeals." In order to offer a "proof" for the external world, Moore must go further than he had in previous articles.[41] Until "Proof Of An External World,"

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[40] Max Black, *Philosophical Analysis: A Collection of Essays* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1950), 7.

[41] Although it should be pointed out that technically, an argument or "proof" is not actually stated until "Proof Of An External World," it *is* implicitly stated in "A Defense Of Common Sense," e.g., Moore says his

Moore never addressed skeptical questions, e.g., "How do you know?" or "What justifies you?"; instead he appealed to his audience's common sensibilities. But in "Proof," Moore does something radically different: common sense truisms are advanced as premises in his argument. "Here is one hand and here is another" *are* his premises that the external world exists. Moore readily admits he is unsure *how* he knows them, but insists that he does: "[a]mong [the] things which I certainly did know, even if (as I think) I could not prove them, were [my] premises."[42]

I find Moore's "proof" unsatisfactory. As A.J. Ayer once said of it, "[t]his is as far as Moore goes, but I think that he could and should have gone a little further."[43] I think Ayer is at least partially right. "Going further" meant Moore should have offered "reasons for accepting…[his] proposition 'Here are two hands.'"[44] As it stands however, the proof is terribly flawed. By assuming in the premises of his argument the truth of what he seeks to establish in his conclusion, Moore begs the question.

Despite Moore's lapse in reasoning, I think Ayer and

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common sense propositions "*imply* the reality of material things, and the reality of space." See "Defense," 38.
[42] Moore, "Proof," 148.

[43] A.J. Ayer, *Russell and Moore*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1971), 172. This is contrary to what Wittgenstein thinks Moore should have done. Wittgenstein finds it odd that Moore should take up the argument *at all*! I look at this below.

[44] Ibid.

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other critics tend to overlook something even larger than Moore's *petitio*: the only person one must *go further for* (the only person in need of a proof that the external world exists), is the one person who professes to doubt it, i.e., the skeptic. However, even *with* a proof, will the skeptic be silenced when Ayer, Moore, or anyone else offers one? If shown two hands, won't the skeptic merely say she doubts whether what she sees *really are two hands*? It seems to me that a determined skeptic will not be convinced by this or *any* proof.

Despite Moore's inability to explain *how* he knew that which he insisted he *did* know, I find his *aim* in "Proof" to be no different than it had been in previous articles. Moore wished to diffuse the skeptical problem of infinite regression. He hoped to do this by halting such inquiry at a basic, "unanalyzable" level; for Moore, common sense propositions represented this basic point. Much earlier in his career, in "A Defense of Common Sense," he made the following observation: "[w]e are all… in this strange position that we do *know* many things…and yet we do not know *how* we know them."[45] And similarly, in "Proof," he says,

> How am I to prove now that 'Here is 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

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[45] Moore, "Defense," 44.

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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 my evidence is.[46]

By avoiding the question of evidence, *how he knew what he knew*, Moore seems to have believed he could also avoid justificatory questions that might unravel infinitely. By merely appealing to our common sensibilities, he had been able to avoid the problem before; but before, he had not tried to offer a proof. Moore, it seems to me, believed he could make the same move in a proof without expecting skeptical questions to arise.[47] This was Moore's mistake.

What Moore's Proof Actually Shows Us

Once committed to offering a proof for the external world, Moore had to prove:

(a)   material objects do in fact exist, and

(b)   doubts that the skeptic raised could be rejected or at least neutralized.

The positive part of the argument, (a), was to meet Kant's challenge, while the negative part of the argument, (b), was directed against the skeptic. If Moore could prove his conclusion, he would succeed in meeting condition (a). But,

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[46] Ibid., 148.

[47] This, I believe, is the crucial difference between Moore's early application of common sense propositions and his later application of them in "Proof."

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as we've seen, he does not succeed in proving his conclusion. What then does Moore's proof actually show us about the external world?[48] Can we arrive at the conclusion "Two human hands *exist*" from the premises "Here is one hand...and here is another?" I don't believe we can.

The premises in Moore's argument appear to be nothing more than the simple mathematical application of 1+1=2. But this does not prove that some things *exist* "outside of us"; addition will not allow us to arrive at any metaphysical conclusions. What then could Moore have been arguing here? If his conclusion that two human hands were external objects and independent of the mind, he needed more supporting premises in his argument.[49] Avrum Stroll has suggested we apply the principle of charity to Moore's proof, accepting a covert use of two "submerged premises."[50]

If we interpret the Kantian phrase "x is outside of us" as "x is outside of the human mind," Stroll says that Moore took this to mean that "x is an external object." Surfacing these submerged premises, Moore's argument looks like this:[51]

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[48] For a closer analysis of Moore's proof, see appendix.

[49] Stroll, devotes an entire chapter to this. See Stroll, *Moore and Wittgenstein on Certainty*, 55-78.

[50] Ibid., 56.

[51] I diverge a little from Stroll's exact terminology here favoring "not mind-dependent" to his "not depend[ing] upon our being in a certain psychological state." See Stroll, *Moore and Wittgenstein on Certainty*, 56-57.

1. The existence of any human hand is not mind-dependent.
2. Anything whose existence is not mind-dependent exists outside of us.

These are then coupled with Moore's original premises,

3. Here is one hand.
4. Here is another (hand).

These premises then elicit the following conclusion: "Two hands exist outside of us." Indeed, this is a valid argument, however, Moore still fails to offer a *proof*. A proof is not *merely* a valid argument but is also a *sound* one. Are Moore's premises (including the imported ones) known to be true? Is his argument sound?

Stroll's submerged premises are requisite for a valid argument, but I believe they also expose a presupposition: a split between what is internal and what is external to the mind. But this presupposition still begs our question for proof of an external world. Moore's premises simply assume the truth of what he seeks to prove, namely, a divide between an external world and an internal one. Moore's proof is a *petitio principii* argument and as Stroll has rightly concluded, is "ultimately abortive."[52]

What is perhaps most devastating here for Moore is that by assuming this split between an internal and external world, he commits himself to the "intellectualized" tradition he so disliked. Implicit in Kant's challenge was a

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[52] Ibid., 75.

distinction between what is internal and external to our minds. But in offering a proof for "things outside us," Moore tacitly accepts this division.[53]

Why would he make such a move? Given his writings to this point, what would compel Moore, perhaps the most prominent common sense philosopher of the Twentieth century, to offer a proof for the external world?

Why Did Moore Feel Compelled To Offer A Proof?

One possible reason Moore felt compelled to offer a proof for the external world might have been due to the lack of respect his common sense doctrine had received from the philosophical community. In a discipline that prides itself on well-formed argumentation, Moore offered none. For Moore, the common man was just as capable as the philosopher of knowing such things as "This is my hand" or "I have never been far from the earth's surface." Neither philosopher nor common man need always give an analysis of what such propositions mean. They possess an ordinary, pre-scientific[54] meaning. This "practical," common sense

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[53] As Stroll says, "Moore is working with two metaphysical categories, the mental and the physical, and is trying to draw an exact line between them." Stroll, *Moore and Wittgenstein on Certainty*, 74.

[54] As Wittgenstein was later to argue, such convictions are so fundamental they are rarely, if ever, articulated. They are not first and foremost propositional, not a matter of knowledge, including scientific knowledge. Rather they are embedded in our ordinary actions -- more a matter of 'know-how' than 'knowing-that.'

approach may have served to alienate Moore from his peers'

traditional, "logical" approach. Logic is fundamental in

constructing proofs. Prior to this article however, Moore

had simply made "appeals."[55] Lacking a proof, we find Moore

encountering abusive *ad hominem* attacks from his

contemporaries.[56]

He received a condescending blow from Max Black, who

described Moore's philosophy as childlike: "After the

intoxication of metaphysics," Black wrote, "it is good to

look upon the world again as a child might-to be told 'After

all, this *is* a hand. I have a body, so have you, and there

are many other people like both of us who can say the

same.'"[57]

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[55] I mentioned above that his common sense approach was an appeal for philosophical clarity and accuracy. For this reason, Moore was committed to the ordinary meanings of terms and, in turn, in exposing philosophers who violated ordinary usage.

[56] Moore was not the only common sense philosopher to encounter such verbal attacks. Thomas Reid, for example, faced a vicious attack from Joseph Priestley. First, Priestley blasted him for his insistence that a proof could not be given for his belief about the external world, ultimately dismissing Reid's doctrine of common sense as "no answer at all." Priestley then went on to accuse Reid of simplicity, trivializing his common sense argument that material objects exist in the external world. Priestley said of Reid's argument: they "are so *because they are so*." "This," says Priestley, "is Dr. Reid's common sense, and his short irrefragable argument." Joseph Priestley, *An Examination of Dr. Reid's Inquiry*, 2nd Edition (London: 1775), 30, [my emphasis].

[57] Black, *Philosophical Analysis: A Collection of Essays*, 7. Black, as well as other contemporaries of Moore (Russell, Wittgenstein, Malcolm, and Ayer) criticized either Moore, his doctrine, or in many instances both. Russell thought highly of Moore's philosophy *qua* philosophy, insisting that "[i]n the world of intellect, [Moore] was fearless and adventurous." He quickly adds however, "but in the everyday world he was a child." See Russell's *Autobiography* I (New York: Bantam, 1968), 85. Similarly, Wittgenstein wrote in a letter that "Moore [was] in some sense extraordinarily childlike." See Norman Malcolm, *Ludwig Wittgenstein: A Memoir* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984), 80. Norman Malcolm also once said that "Moore was a childlike person" and

When Moore *did* offer what he thought to be "a rigorous proof,"[58] it was something of a surprise to the philosophical community. He was again maligned but this time for his "obstinacy and redundancy." Moore, his critics argued, did not seem to understand the necessary conditions of a "proof." Black, once again, criticized him for not only failing to provide a proof for things outside us, but for not even attempting to argue.

> [T]here is a kind of dogmatism in [Moore's] work which will continue to bother some of his readers. Careful examination…shows again and again that he fails, or rather, does not try, to argue; on crucial issues, he seems to attack his opponents by vehement affirmation and reiteration.[59]

Believing such ready dismissals of his common sense doctrine to be mistaken, Moore thought Black and others were asking for proof where none could be given and then went on to criticize both him and his doctrine for not providing one.

So what was Moore attempting to respond to in "Proof"?

"as a philosopher, not very imaginative." See "George Edward Moore," *G.E. Moore: Essays in Retrospect*, edited by Klemke, E. D. (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1969), 34, 36. Ayer once wrote: Moore's "chief service to philosophy was [like] that of the child in Hans Andersen's story: he saw and was not afraid to say that the Emperor had no clothes." See A.J. Ayer, *Part of My Life* (London: Collins, 1979), 149-150. Recent philosophers, reflecting on Moore make similar criticisms, in *The Significance of Philosophical Skepticism*, for example, Barry Stroud finds what Moore says as "perfectly acceptable" from a *non*-philosophical point of view, but "irrelevant to the philosophical questions." See Stroud, *The Significance of Philosophical Skepticism* (New York: Clarendon Press, 1984), 120. These remarks make Moore and his doctrine sound immature and adolescent. But, as S. Jack Odell says in his book, *On Moore*, "[m]ost philosophers are not only dismissive regarding [common sense's] validity; they are largely contemptuous of it." See S. Jack Odell, *On Moore* (Belmont: Wadsworth Publishing, 2001), 48.

[58] Moore, "Proof," 144.

I believe he was trying to respond not only to his critics but to something much larger. By accepting Kant's challenge to prove an external world exists, Moore was challenging the entire Western tradition since Descartes.

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[59] Black, *Philosophical Analysis: A Collection of Essays*, 7.

Chapter 2: Moore & The Cartesian Tradition

> Modern philosophy has very largely accepted the formulation of its
> problems from Descartes, while not accepting his solutions.
>
> -Bertrand Russell

To Whom Was Moore Responding?

In "Proof of An External World," I believe Moore was attempting to respond not only to his critics and not only to Kant but to much of the Western tradition since Descartes.[1] Kant's challenge of providing a proof for "the existence of things outside of us," merely served as a backdrop for Moore's larger aim: dismantling the Cartesian model.

For many,[2] Descartes' *Meditations on First Philosophy* represents the very essence of philosophical inquiry: securing foundations for human knowledge, finding a reliable basis for the sciences and all else[3] is what makes philosophy worthwhile. So why should Moore criticize this model? Despite the fame of Descartes' system, there is much about it that seems radically misguided. Although Descartes

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[1] As I suggested in chapter one, implicit in Kant's challenge was a distinction between that which is internal and external to our minds.

[2] Though not for all. Many other philosophers have followed Quine and subscribe to a naturalized epistemology. While the details of the various naturalized epistemologies differ, on all of these views Cartesian skepticism is regarded as obsolete.

[3] Descartes' method caused reverberations beyond philosophy, e.g., neuro-physiology. For an interesting critique that criticizes Descartes for essentially cutting reason off from emotion and biology, see Antonio Damasio, *Descartes' Error* (New York: Avon, 1995).

was quite successful in capturing our imagination with his lonely pursuit for knowledge, it slowly became apparent that his project was beset with problems. Central among these problems was his decision to doubt *everything*, i.e., global skepticism.

Descartes' Project

Wanting to establish "a new foundation for the sciences," Descartes sought the "one thing, however slight, that [was] certain and unshakeable."[4] In order to do this however, his investigation had to begin with what could be "called into doubt."[5] Descartes soon began waging a skeptical campaign that became increasingly more radical as he proceeded. After demonstrating how our "senses are deceptive," he says that our perception of the external world may be nothing more than a dream. Pushing this skepticism further still, he ultimately introduces the possibility of "a demon with supreme power and cunning, deliberately and constantly trying to deceive."[6]

If such a malevolent demon existed, Descartes believed

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[4] Rene Descartes, *Meditations on First Philosophy, Selected Philosophical Writings*, translated by John Cottingham, Robert Stoothoff, and Dugald Murdoch (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 80.

[5] "From time to time," he tells us, "I have found that the senses deceive, and it is prudent never to trust completely those who have deceived us even once." Ibid., 76.

[6] Ibid., 80.

he could elude (or at least partially elude) his trappings with the following "unshakeable certainty": if the demon is deceiving me "he will never bring it about that I am nothing so long as I think I am something."[7] Hence, the proposition *"I am, I exist"* (hereafter, *"cogito"*) must be true "whenever it is put forward by me or conceived in my mind."[8] Such a proposition, Descartes insists, is certain.[9]

Believing that the *cogito* had secured a firm foundation for knowledge, two important questions remained for Descartes:

1. Is there a reality external to our minds?

2. If so, can we have knowledge of this reality?

Due to his methodological skepticism, we might wonder how Descartes is to go beyond the content of his own mind to answer these questions. For the *cogito* does not provide knowledge of the external world, rather, it effectively cuts one off from such knowledge.

Despite this limitation, Descartes believed knowledge of the outside world was still possible, few philosophers however, have been satisfied with his argument. The reason: his reply to both (1) and (2) were viciously circular. His argument turns on two important, yet controversial issues:

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[7] Ibid., 80.

[8] Ibid.

[9] Ibid., 82.

"clear and distinct ideas" and the existence of a non-deceiving God.

Two Controversial Issues

After establishing what he believes to be the certainty of his own existence, Descartes then asks himself why the *cogito* is so evident. He offers a general criterion of knowledge, sometimes referred to as the "truth rule."[10]

> I am certain that I am a thinking thing. Do I not therefore also know what is required for my being certain about anything? In this first item of knowledge there is simply a clear and distinct perception of what I am asserting; this would not be enough to make me certain of the truth of the matter if it could ever turn out that something which I perceived with such clarity and distinctness was false. So I now seem to be able to lay it down as a general rule that *whatever I perceive very clearly and distinctly is true*.[11]

But Descartes' truth rule does not dispose of radical skepticism.[12] Even with this rule, radical reasons for doubt remain. As he readily admits, "perhaps some God could have given me a nature such that I was deceived even in matters which seemed most evident."[13] Descartes wanted to remove this "reason for doubt" and set out to "examine whether there is a God, and, if there is, whether he can be a

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[10] See Louis Loeb, "The Cartesian Circle," *Cambridge Companion to Descartes*, edited by John Cottingham (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 200.

[11] Descartes, *Meditations on First Philosophy*, 87, my emphasis.

[12] He only knows he is a "thinking thing," but questions concerning the external world and knowledge of it, (1) and (2), are still radically skeptical questions.

[13] Descartes, *Meditations on First Philosophy*, 87.

deceiver."[14]

Descartes offers two arguments for the existence of God in the *Meditations*, the first is presented in the *Third Meditation* and is commonly referred to as the "trademark argument,"[15] while the second argument for the existence of God comes in the *Fifth Meditation* and is typically known as the "ontological argument." The latter is an older argument, dating back to Anselm of Canterbury (c. 1033-1109). It maintains that the *idea* of God implies His existence. Whenever one thinks of God one thinks of His existence, and whenever one thinks of His existence one thinks of God; the two, it is argued, go together necessarily. We cannot think of a triangle[16] that lacks three sides without contradiction, and whenever we think of God without existence, we contradict ourselves here too. Therefore, according to the argument, God must exist.[17]

In the "trademark argument," two important issues about

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[14] Ibid., 88.

[15] The "trademark argument" is essentially that God's existence "must be inferred to explain the presence, within the mind of the mediator, of the idea of God." See John Cottingham, *A Descartes Dictionary* (New York: Blackwell Publishing, 1993), 164. I will say more about this below.

[16] See Descartes' argument with triangle example, Descartes, *Meditations on First Philosophy*, 109.

[17] Ibid., 106-108. This argument has been refuted by Thomas Aquinas, Immanuel Kant, and Bertrand Russell. Kant and Russell's refutation stem from Anselm's (and Descartes') assumption that existence is a real predicate. For each philosopher's refutation of the ontological argument see Aquinas' *Summa Theologica*, Part One, Question 2: Article One, Objection 2 and the Reply to Objection 2; Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason*, Transcendental Dialectic, Book II, Chapter III, Section 4; and

God surface. First, the idea of a supreme being is found within Descartes' mind and it is an idea so beyond a finite being like himself, it could not have been invented or placed in him by anyone other than God.

> [T]he mere fact that I exist and have within me an idea of a most perfect being, that is, God, provides a very clear proof that God indeed exists. It only remains for me to examine how I received this idea from God... [and] the only... alternative is that it is innate in me.[18]

Second, and coming at the end of the *Fourth Meditation*, Descartes says that God has given him a very strong inclination to believe in external bodies. Such an inclination would be deceitful, indeed God would be deceitful if, in fact, there were none. But because God is not a deceiver, argues Descartes, He would not allow him to be misled by his "clear and distinct" ideas. A deceptive God, on this view, is both imperfect and inconsistent.

> [I]f, whenever I have to make a judgment, I restrain my will so that it extends to what the intellect clearly and distinctly reveals, and no further, then it is quite impossible for me to go wrong. This is because every clear and distinct perception is undoubtedly something [real and positive], and hence cannot come from nothing, but must necessarily have God for its author....God, who is supremely perfect,... [and] cannot be a deceiver on pain of contradiction.[19]

Assuming God's existence has been proved, the rest is quite easy. Since God is good and not a deceiver, He cannot act

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Russell's lecture series *The Philosophy of Logical Atomism*.

[18] Descartes, *Meditations on First Philosophy*, 97.

[19] Descartes, *Meditations on First Philosophy*, 104-105. The words "real and positive," which I have inserted here, are in the French translation, as Cottingham indicates in his footnote 1.

like the untrustworthy demon whom Descartes earlier imagined to be the mastermind behind his most extreme doubt. A deceptive God is an imperfect God, hence an external world must exist.

Descartes' procedure however, suffers from an apparent difficulty: his reasoning is viciously circular. How can he be in a position to establish the reliability of the knowledge needed to establish God's existence, if he takes God's existence as an already reliable justification for that knowledge? The problem stems from the fact that what he perceives clearly and distinctly is "proven" after even the most evident of his beliefs have been placed in doubt. But his premises for clear and distinct ideas must also be open to doubt in light of his speculation of a deceiving demon.

This problem has come to be known as the "Cartesian Circle" and was first observed by two of Descartes' contemporaries, Marin Mersenne and Antoine Arnauld. Arnauld characterized the problem in the following way:

> I have one further worry, namely how the author avoids reasoning in a circle when he says that we are sure that what we clearly and distinctly perceive is true only because God exists. But we can be sure that God exists only because we clearly and distinctly perceive this. Hence, before we can be sure that God exists, we ought to be able to be sure that whatever we perceive clearly and evidently is true.[20]

Descartes believed the *cogito* had secured him a firm foundation for knowledge and the sciences; he also believed

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[20] Descartes, *Meditations on First Philosophy*, 142.

his clear and distinct ideas offered sufficient evidence that God and an external world existed. However, due to the odd structure of his method, I believe he was unable to get beyond the foundation of the *cogito* to offer any satisfactory answers to the skeptical questions his method raised, questions (1) and (2) above.[21]

Voluminous literature has emerged about whether Descartes' proof was viciously circular.[22] This debate is broad and presents difficult interpretive and philosophic problems that I'll not here consider. In the present treatment however, I'd like to focus attention on the following question: if one's subjective certainty was the total and complete extent of one's knowledge, what might this be like? Martin Benjamin has characterized Descartes' precarious position as that of a "lone, disembodied

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[21] In fact, following Wittgenstein, even the *cogito* is suspect, for if you are really to doubt *everything*, the meaning of your words must be subject to doubt as well. Hence, the meaning of "*Cogito, Ergo Sum*" must also be thrown into doubt. I discuss this in chapter three, below.

[22] A list of authors writing on this topic include: Gewirth, "The Cartesian Circle" and "The Cartesian Circle Reconsidered"; Curley, *Descartes Against the Skeptics*' Van Cleve, "Foundationalism, epistemic principles, and the Cartesian Circle"; Markie, *Descartes' Gambit*; Doney, "Descartes' conception of perfect knowledge"; Frankfurt, "*Demons, Dreamers and Madmen*; Kenny, *Descartes: A Study of His Philosophy*, Feldman and Levison; "Anthony Kenny and the Cartesian Circle"; Kenny, "A reply to Feldman and Levison"; Etchemendy, "The Cartesian Circle"; Cottingham, *Descartes*; Rubin, "Descartes' validation"; Larmore, "Descartes' psychological theory of assent"; Loeb, "The priority of assent" and "The Cartesian Circle"; Garns, "Descartes and indubitability"; Tlumak, "Certainty and Cartesian method"; Bennett, "Truth and stability."

spectator."[23]

> [A]lone because, in doubting whatever can possibly be doubted, you're doubting that other people exist… disembodied [because] you can be mistaken about the reality of your own body for the same reason you can be mistaken about the existence of other people (and their bodies).… [And] a spectator because without a body-and without other physical objects in the 'external' world-there is nothing, except reflecting on one's own thoughts and beliefs, one can do.[24]

Despite the absurdity of the Cartesian position, it is, as Benjamin points out, one of the more "deeply rooted" in philosophy.[25] But why? And how deep do these roots go?

The significance of questions (1) and (2) above, can be measured in relation to the two major movements they spawned: idealism and skepticism, respectively.[26] But this deeply rooted Cartesian influence can be seen in philosophers outside these movements as well. In fact, I think it is fair to say that this influence has been felt in nearly every major philosopher through and beyond Kant.

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[23] Martin Benjamin, *Philosophy & This Actual World* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2003), 16-17. Others, like R.B. Perry, have called this Descartes' "egocentric predicament."

[24] Ibid., 17.

[25] Again, it should be pointed out that not everyone subscribes to this view, e.g., Quine, Kornblith.

[26] Moore even went so far as to say that the Cartesian method had created a skepticism that went hand in hand with idealism, thus linking the two together. The *cogito*, he believed, had failed to provide an adequate explanation beyond the present content of our minds. If all one is aware of is one's own ideas or sensations, then, Moore insisted, he has "no *reason* for holding that anything does exist except himself." Moore, "The Refutation of Idealism," *Philosophical Studies* (Paterson: Littlefield, Adams, & Co., 1959), 28-29.

Cartesian Revolution

While controversial, Descartes' influence on Western philosophy cannot be overstated.[27] Adrien Baillet, Descartes' biographer, within just a few years of his death, wrote: "it was no more possible to count the number of Cartesian disciples than the stars of the sky or the grains of sand on the seashore."[28] Even his detractors, like Thomas Reid, writing more than 100 years after Descartes' death, believed Descartes' influence had worked as much of an affect on empiricist philosophers as it had on those of his own rationalist temperament.[29] Philosophers such as Locke, Berkeley, and Hume, said Reid, all shared a system of human understanding that "may still be called *the Cartesian*

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[27] His *originality* however, has recently been called into question. Descartes made much about having discovered a new foundation for the sciences, but as John Cottingham points out, "the approach which Descartes takes in his supposedly 'fresh start' for philosophy is by no means as original as is often supposed. For example, the radical tone which characterizes the opening of the *Meditations* is anticipated in remarkable detail in the work of Francisco Sanches, the Portugese philosopher and medical writer, whose *Quod nihil scitur* was published in Lyons in 1581. Sanches," Cottingham explains, "begins his inquiry into the possibility of knowledge by 'withdrawing into himself' (*ad memetipsum retuli*) and 'calling into doubt' (*omnia in dubium revocans*); this is the 'true way of knowing' (*verum sciendi modus*; ed. Thomson, 1988, p. 92)." John Cottingham, *A Descartes Dictionary*, 122.

[28] Cf. Adrien Balliet, *La Vie de M. Des-Cartes*, Vol. II, p. 146, as quoted in Nicholas Jolley's article "The Reception Of Descartes' Philosophy," *Cambridge Companion to Descartes*, edited by John Cottingham (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 403.

[29] In his entry in the *Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, Bernard Williams thinks "it is perhaps, a mild irony of the history of philosophy that Descartes' attempt to start with subjective questions of epistemology and to 'work out' from there had more influence on the development of empiricism than on later rationalism," *Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, Vol. VII, reprinted edition, s.v. "rationalism."

system."[30]

Among the rationalists, Leibniz in particular, (although trying to distance himself from Descartes and his influence, nevertheless) began his inquiry from an unmistakably Cartesian starting point: "from the simple perception or experience of which I am conscious within myself; that is, in the first place, *myself* thinking the various things, then the various *phenomena* themselves or the appearances which exist in my mind.…[T]hey can be accepted without question."[31]

In Frederick Copleston's important series, *A History of Philosophy,* he discusses the influence Descartes had on philosophers such as Hegel, Husserl, and Sartre.

> [B]oth [Hegel and Husserl] laid stress on "subjectivity" as the Cartesian point of departure. M. Jean-Paul Sartre does the same, though… different from that of either Hegel or Husserl.… Sartre remarks that the starting point for philosophy must be the subjectivity of the individual, and that the primal truth is *I think, therefore I am*, which is the absolute truth of consciousness as it pertains to itself.[32]

Even more recently, Anthony Kenny, Stephen Toulmin, and Norman Malcolm have all noticed "a surprising revival of

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[30] Thomas Reid, *An Inquiry Into The Human Mind,* Chapter VII, reprinted in *The Philosophy of Thomas Reid,* edited by E. Hershey Sneath (London: 1892), 345.

[31] G.W. Leibniz, *New Essays Concerning Human Understanding,* translated by Alfred Gideon Langley, 2nd edition (Chicago: Open Court Publishing, 1916), 717-718.

[32] See Frederick Copleston's *A History of Philosophy,* Vol. IV, *Modern Philosophy: Descartes to Leibniz* (Westminster: Newman Press, 1958), 158.

Cartesianism... by the linguist Noam Chomsky."[33]

Leaving aside the more recent effects of Cartesianism, let's consider Reid's observation. Why was Descartes' philosophy capable of crossing rationalist/empiricist boundaries? One answer to this question, an answer gaining popularity among historians, is that the traditional distinction between "British empiricists" and "Continental rationalists" is nothing but "a rough label of convenience."[34] This division, they argue, is a superficial one, the two camps are not as disparate as once believed.[35]

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[33] See Anthony Kenny, *The Metaphysics of Mind*, (Oxford & New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), 12. According to Chomsky, there exists an underlying structure that constitutes an innate organization, "filling the gap" in every human being. The small amount of data a child is presented with when learning a language, and the extent of the competence in language which the child eventually develops require that we postulate the existence of something that will fill this gap. This innate structure, Chomsky postulates, is called "the general theory of language," or as it is more commonly referred to, "the universal grammar." Stephen Toulmin, at one point in his book *Return to Reason*, parenthetically remarks that "[t]hose who find a belief in innate ideas bizarre or outdated may note that it resurfaced in the debate about Noam Chomsky's *Cartesian Linguistics*," Toulmin, *Return to Reason* (Cambridge & London: Harvard University Press, 2001), 84. Norman Malcolm criticizes Chomsky's observation about language acquisition: "[a]ccording to Chomsky's theory," says Malcolm, "every normal human child would have to be a *prodigy* right from the start!" Norman Malcolm, "Underlying Mechanisms," *Wittgenstein: A Religious Point of View?* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1994), 51.

[34] Alan Lacey thinks "[t]he distinction between empiricism and rationalism is wearing thin for reasons connected with the challenges recently mounted against the analytic-synthetic distinction,...one motive for refusing to call oneself an empiricist (or a rationalist for that matter) is that it suggests that one accepts that distinction." *The Oxford Companion to Philosophy*, s.v. "empiricism."

[35] Hide Ishiguro, opened her George Dawes Hicks lecture at the University of London, with the following statement: "[t]he grouping of European philosophers of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries into rationalists and empiricists seems to me to be very unfortunate and unhelpful. It suggests that there are two self-contained mutually incompatible sets of views, which are clearly demarcated and based on opposing principles: one claiming that the source of all substantial

Peter Markie, for instance, lists no less than "five basic reservations" about the accuracy of this traditional divide.[36] Among them, he says,

> a close study of the three Continental Rationalists… reveals they had a great respect for the role played by experience in scientific knowledge, [and] the British Empiricists, especially Locke and Berkeley, stress… the importance of reason as a source of knowledge.[37]

Robert Fogelin says,

> [i]t has been a recurrent theme, at least since Descartes, that the foundation of knowledge is given in subjective self-certainty. There is ample room for disagreement within this tradition concerning the elements of this subjective certainty; they might be evident truths (e.g.,'I think') or

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truths about reality is reason; the other claiming that all knowledge derives from experience. To divide these thinkers into Continental rationalists and British empiricists is even more misleading. It suggests that the grouping of people with opposing sets of beliefs and theories coincided with their nationalities." See her lecture, Ishiguro, "Pre-established Harmony Versus Constant Conjunction: A Reconsideration of the Distinction Between Rationalism and Empiricism" *Rationalism, Empiricism, and Idealism: British Academy Lectures on the History of Philosophy*, edited by Anthony Kenny (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986), 61-85.

[36] See Peter Markie's entry in the *Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy* Vol. VIII, s.v. "rationalism."

[37] Markie says that although philosophy departments, textbooks, and anthologies all classify the major philosophers of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries into either empiricist or rationalist camp, scholars now have "at least five basic reservations about its accuracy." Besides the two listed above, Markie's third reservation is that the division "encourages us to overlook important areas of agreement between different philosophers on different sides of the divide, such as the views of Descartes and Locke on nature, though not the source, of our ideas. Fourth, the division encourages us to associate irrelevant differences in language and geography-those who do not write in English against those who do; the Continent against England and Scotland-with a supposed difference in philosophical views. Fifth, the grouping of the six philosophers in epistemological terms encourages an incorrect grouping of them in metaphysical ones. The Continental Rationalists are mistakenly seen as attempting to apply their reason-centered epistemology to pursue a common metaphysical program, each trying to improve on the efforts of those before him; the British Empiricists are incorrectly seen as gradually rejecting those metaphysical claims, with each again consciously trying to improve on the efforts of predecessors. Defenders of Continental Rationalists-British Empiricists distinction generally admit many, if not all, of these shortcomings but treat them as minor anomalies." Ibid.

particular non-propositional items in consciousness (e.g., sense data). But whatever these immediate contents of consciousness are, the task is to construct the edifice of knowledge on their foundation.[38]

According to Fogelin then, the two theses proposed by empiricists and rationalists to account for consciousness (i.e., the demonstrative knowledge thesis or the innate idea thesis, respectively), are not as important as the fact that, whatever consciousness is, it supports the remainder of knowledge. This consciousness, this subjective self-certainty, is taken for granted. So Fogelin's view that both rationalists and empiricists take subjective self-certainty for granted, coupled with the historians' view that this divide has been exaggerated, suggest, I think, that Descartes' influence was quite extensive, going beyond what was traditionally thought.

In passing, Avrum Stroll also mentions the overwhelming influence of Descartes. Moore, he says, had accepted the challenge to prove the existence of the external from Kant; but Kant was "standing at the terminus of a lengthy epistemological tradition from Descartes through Hume."[39]

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[38] Robert Fogelin, *Wittgenstein* (New York: Routeledge & Kegan Paul, 1976), 153. It is important to note that Fogelin discusses the historical influence of Descartes in his introduction of Wittgenstein's private-language argument. Fogelin, like Wittgenstein, finds the "whole [Cartesian] approach (in *all* of its forms)…fundamentally misguided," ibid. With respect to the "subjective self-certainty," Bertrand Russell makes a similar remark: "there is, in all philosophy derived from Descartes, a tendency to subjectivism," Russell, *A History of Western Philosophy* (New York & London: Simon & Schuster, 1972), 564.

[39] Avrum Stroll, *Moore and Wittgenstein on Certainty* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 98.

Why Continue With The Cartesian Model?

I think, despite its difficulties, philosophers continue to adopt the Cartesian system because it seems the most obvious place to begin an investigation. There is, what we might call an "intellectualist bias": beginning an investigation from the subjective awareness of the conscious self (the *cogito*) seems certain. Descartes merely appealed to our natural inclination to start from the "inside." If what is "inside" is our natural starting point, the next logical step would be an investigation, or proof, of what is "outside." Protocol for a philosopher then, is to construct such proofs. The desire of philosophers, at least since Descartes, has been to offer a satisfactory intellectual (or "pencil and paper") proof for the external world. This desire is so strong among philosophers that, as Stroll puts it, it is "virtually irresistible."[40]

Moore's decision to target the Cartesian model stems, I think, from the two points I've been emphasizing throughout this chapter. First, Descartes' method of doubt was far-reaching, setting up the agenda for much of Western philosophy. Second, and more important, Moore believed this method was wrong. If one accepts the Cartesian problematic,

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[40] Ibid., 98.

there is no way out from the problem of solipsism.

After Descartes' reconstruction project had been completed, the result was vastly different from a "common sense," pre-scientific world-view, the sort of view Moore wanted to advocate. Although Descartes did maintain that physical objects exist, he insisted that "[t]hey may not all exist in a way that exactly corresponds with my sensory grasp of them, for in many cases the grasp of the senses is very obscure and confused."[41] In order to achieve a reliable grasp of the nature of physical reality, Descartes urged that we systematically disregard the confusion of our senses and instead rely on the clear and distinct ideas that God implanted in our minds. This, Moore rightly found absurd.

Descartes' belief in the primacy of the thinking self, his heavy emphasis on the fallibility of the senses, and

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[41] Descartes, *Meditations on First Philosophy*, 116. Despite possessing a will that can reveal these clear and distinct ideas Descartes can still make the wrong judgment, he can still make mistakes. "[I]f I always saw clearly,...I should never have to deliberate about the right judgment or choice," ibid., 102. So what is the source of his mistakes? How does Descartes account for slips in judgment? It is not God. God does not cause his mistakes because, as he tells us again, He is perfect. Nor is it Descartes' own power of understanding, or "intellect," since this *comes from* God. Rather, error arises when we apply our faculty of judgment, or "will," to our faculty of understanding, or "intellect." The intellect is always presented with what is "good," "right," etc., directly from God, "but [t]he scope of the will is wider than that of the intellect; [and] instead of restricting it within the same limits, I extend its use to matters which I do not understand. Since the will is indifferent in such cases, it easily turns aside from what is good and true, and this is the source of my error and sin," ibid. If, when making a judgment, Descartes is capable of perceiving the truth clearly and distinctly, then, he says, he is "behaving correctly and avoiding error." Rene Descartes, *Meditations on First Philosophy*, 103. But if clear and distinct perception is not present to him, he is leaving it to "pure chance" that he will arrive at the truth. This, he insists, is where error exists.

above all, his radical, global skepticism, were, I think, the reasons behind the "Cartesian revolution." Moore simply wished to defeat this insurrection against our common sensibilities.

Conclusions

Global skepticism is quite dubious and there's something quite right about Moore's common sense criticism or refutation of it. But still, I believe he didn't get it quite right. Yet, in piquing Wittgenstein's interest, he stimulated Wittgenstein to develop a radically new approach that incorporates some of Moore's insights, but none of the flaws or vulnerabilities.

What is not so obvious is why, in "Proof Of An External World," we find none other than Moore himself making the classic Cartesian distinction between objects in the physical world and objects presented privately in the mind. Why would the "defender of common sense" wish to offer a *proof* for something so "obviously true" as the existence of the external world?[42] Recall, Moore had always, until this point in his career, argued *against* traditional philosophy.

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[42] Stroll also notes this proclivity in Moore's thought: "here after all was the philosopher par excellence of common sense asserting in one paper ["Defense of Common Sense"] that it was obvious there was an external world, and yet feeling the need in another paper ["Proof of An External World"] to prove the obvious." Stroll, *Moore and Wittgenstein on Certainty*, 100.

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He believed the discipline had become "intellectualized";[43] it was of course Descartes who had created this atmosphere. Yet, in "Proof," Moore paradoxically accepts the Cartesian model, and proceeds to offer a proof to the skeptic that there is indeed a world "outside."

Given the focus of his epistemological writings to this point, his rejection of traditional philosophy and, the lack of respect his doctrine had received, I believe, what we find Moore doing in "Proof" are two things at once. Wanting to legitimize his common sense realism for the philosophical community, Moore simultaneously tries to stay outside the tradition.[44] If this was Moore's aim, he was doomed to failure. As Stroll says, "[a]ll of Moore's intuitions and his best philosophical judgment should have militated against such a move-a move that by Moore's own criteria is at best unnecessary and at worst absurd."[45]

Rather than standing outside the Cartesian tradition, I believe Moore's proof created the opposite effect, firmly

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[43] Comparing the work of William James and Ludwig Wittgenstein, Martin Benjamin says that "the most important similarity is the extent to which each rejected "intellectualist" conceptions of philosophy-conceptions like that of Rene Descartes (1596-1650), who thought it possible that the asker of philosophical questions could be a *pure* intellect," Benjamin, *Philosophy & This Actual World*, x.

[44] As I suggested in chapter one, Moore may have felt compelled to offer a proof due to the lack of respect his common sense doctrine received from the philosophical community. The abusive reviews of common sense realism, cited in chapter one, offer some legitimacy to this conjecture. Moore's common sense approach might have served to alienate him from his peers' "overly intellectualized" approach and forced Moore to present his doctrine in a more traditional (Cartesian) manner.

[45] Stroll, *Moore and Wittgenstein on Certainty*, 100.

securing himself a place within it. Despite this negative result, Moore's "Proof Of An External World" did have one positive effect: it piqued the interest of his former student, Ludwig Wittgenstein.

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Chapter 3: Piquing Wittgenstein's Interest

> If Moore says he knows the earth existed etc., most of us will grant him that it has existed all that time, and also believe him when he says he is convinced of it. But has he also got the right *ground* for his conviction?
>
> -Ludwig Wittgenstein, *On Certainty* §91

Wittgenstein's Interest

During a visit to the United States, Wittgenstein and a former student, Norman Malcolm, had occasion to discuss Moore's "Defense of Common Sense" and his "Proof Of An External World."[1] Both agreed that Moore was trying to say something important but had misused expressions such as "know" and "know with certainty." Statements such as "I know I am a living human being" or "I know with certainty that I have two hands" seemed to them, mistaken. "When one hears Moore say "I *know* that that's a tree," says Wittgenstein, "one suddenly understands those who think that that has by no means been settled."[2] If there were no disagreement, no doubt about it being a tree, then it seemed to Wittgenstein a misuse of language to declare "I *know* it is a tree."

Wittgenstein soon began writing notes on the subject of

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[1] Malcolm was in the process of writing an article entitled "Defending Common Sense" in which, as he puts it, "I turned against Moore's 'defense of common sense.'" Norman Malcolm, "Moore and Wittgenstein on the Sense of 'I know,'" edited by John V. Canfield, Volume VIII, Knowing, Naming, Certainty, and Idealism (New York: Garland Publishing, 1986), 130-154.

[2] Ludwig Wittgenstein, *On Certainty*, edited by G.E.M. Anscombe and G.H. Von Wright, translated by Denis Paul and G.E.M. Anscombe (New York: Harper & Row, 1972), §481.

knowledge published posthumously under the title *Uber*

Gewissheit (*On Certainty*). The work represents his thoughts

from approximately[3] December 1949 until his death in April

1951. It constitutes, say editors G.E.M. Anscombe and G.H.

von Wright, "a single sustained treatment of the topic."[4]

The questions I should like to pursue in this chapter

are two-fold: (1) Are Moore's targets and Wittgenstein's

targets the same? (2) If they are the same, how do their

approaches differ?

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[3] I say "approximately" for as Anscombe says about the first part of *On Certainty*, §§1-65, Wittgenstein left these in her house in Oxford, "where he lived from April 1950 to February 1951.…I [Anscombe] am under the impression that he had written them in Vienna, where he had stayed from the previous Christmas until March; but I cannot now recall the basis of this impression." Ibid., vi.

[4] Ibid. In the Preface to *On Certainty*, the editors also say Wittgenstein had been inspired by Moore's work in "Defense of Common Sense." "Wittgenstein," they insist, "had long been interested in [Moore's claims "to know"] and had said to Moore that this was his best article," ibid. Malcolm however, questions the accuracy of this report: "[T]he only work of Moore's that greatly impressed him," says Malcolm, "was Moore's discovery of what Wittgenstein labeled 'Moore's Paradox.'…I asked in protest, whether he didn't agree that Moore's 'defense of common sense' was an important idea. Wittgenstein gave an affirmative nod of the head; but I had the definite impression that this part of Moore's thought had not much occupied him." Malcolm, "Moore and Wittgenstein," ft. 9. Wittgenstein's *Blue and Brown Books*, written 1933-34 however, offer evidence supporting Anscombe and von Wright. Although Moore is not mentioned by name, both his "important idea," i.e., common sense, as well as his disdain for traditional philosophy *are*. See Wittgenstein, *Blue & Brown Books* (New York: Harper & Row, 1958), 45. I quote the passage below in my section entitled "Targets & Methodology." Rush Rhees, in his posthumously published set of notes entitled *Wittgenstein's* On Certainty, says, "his 1949 conversations with Malcolm stimulated Wittgenstein to take up thoughts which were not new to him, and to develop them further." Rush Rhees, *Wittgenstein's On Certainty: There-Like Our Life*, edited by D.Z. Phillips (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2003), 5. The common sense standpoint seems to have been of interest to Wittgenstein for at least sixteen years. Whether any of Moore's work "impressed" Wittgenstein or whether he thought "Defense" to be Moore's "best" article, seems to me another matter entirely. I think there are other areas in Wittgenstein's writings however, that support his sympathy for common sense. I discuss this sympathy below.

Targets & Methodology

For much of Moore's academic career, his aim had been to dismantle the Cartesian model, a model that proved to be more problematic than advantageous. Wittgenstein agreed with Moore's targeting of the Cartesian model and, in part, with some of the more fundamental aspects of Moore's procedure,[5] e.g., employing the standpoint of common sense[6] to attack Cartesian skepticism.

> We seem to have made a discovery--which I could describe by saying that the ground on which we stood and which appeared to be firm and reliable was found to be boggy and unsafe.-- That is, this happens when we philosophize; for as soon as we revert to the standpoint of common sense this *general* uncertainty disappears.[7]

Using "philosophize" here in the same negative way that Moore thought the Cartesian tradition had become overly intellectualized, Wittgenstein believed, like Moore, that if we abandon Descartes' method and "revert to the standpoint of common sense," global skepticism would vanish. He had long agreed with Moore on this point. Even as early as the

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[5] I will say more about Wittgenstein's method in chapter four, a rational reconstruction of *On Certainty*.

[6] There are numerous other passages throughout his writings that seem to support this claim. The following are references where Wittgenstein mentions common sense by name. *Philosophical Remarks*, edited from his posthumous writings by Rush Rhees, translated by Raymond Hargreaves and Roger White (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1975) II, §18; *Philosophical Grammar*, edited by Rush Rhees, translated by Anthony Kenny (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1974), Part I, "The Proposition and its Sense," Appendix, IV, §77; Part II "On Logic and Mathematics," II Generality 7: The inadequacy of the Frege-Russell notation for generality, 267, VII "Infinity in Mathematics," 40: On Set theory, 465; *Blue & Brown Books* (New York: Harper & Row, 1958), 45, 46, 48, 58-59.

[7] Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Blue & Brown Books*, 45.

Tractatus, Wittgenstein believed skepticism was "obviously nonsensical."[8] If one accepts the Cartesian starting point, increasingly radical forms of skepticism lead to what Wittgenstein referred to as "general uncertainty."

As we saw in chapter one, Moore's earliest articles sought to abandon Descartes' method of doubt in favor of a *division* of doubt ("local/global").[9] This division contrasted the ordinary sorts of doubt we experience in our common, everyday contexts (local), with *extra*-ordinary, uncommon doubt (global). *Extra*-ordinary doubt was tolerated, even encouraged under the Cartesian model. Recall, it was global doubt that permitted Russell to inquire whether the earth was but five minutes old.[10] Following Moore's lead, Wittgenstein also rejected Russell's hypothesis. As he says in Part II of the *Investigations*, "I should ask anyone who asserted ['the earth has existed in the last five minutes']: 'What observations does this proposition refer to; and what observations would count against it?'"[11]

We don't know what observations would go with Russell's

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[8] Wittgenstein, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, translated by D.F. Pears & B.F. McGuinness (London & New York: Routledge, 1921, reprinted 1995), 6.51.

[9] See chapter one, 12-14.

[10] Bertrand Russell, *The Analysis of Mind* (London: Routledge, reprinted 1992), 159-160. See my chapter one, 10.

[11] Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, translated by G. E. M. Anscombe (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1953), Part II, xi, 221.

proposition because it is, as Wittgenstein says in *On Certainty*, so "*unheard of*,"[12] that if we did accept it among our system of beliefs, *everything* would be subject to question. No evidence can be supplied for Russell's hypothesis because it is the sort of doubt that exceeds human sensibility. The question is not whether the proposition, "The earth has existed only in the last five minutes" is *possible* (the skeptic will always insist that *anything is possible*), rather, for Wittgenstein, the question is whether this proposition makes *sense*. If the proposition makes sense, what are the ideas and observations that make it this way?

Among the most basic of our beliefs is that the earth is very old. But Descartes' method of doubt has led philosophers, like Russell, to question such fundamental beliefs resulting in such extreme absurdities as a five minute old earth.

Such a basic proposition as "The earth is very old" is so fundamental to us that, if it were false, we might just throw up our arms in exasperation and exclaim, as Wittgenstein does at one point in *On Certainty*, "what [is] 'true' or 'false' anymore?!"[13] Our common sensibilities are not threatened by affirming a proposition like "The earth is

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[12] Wittgenstein, *On Certainty*, §513.

[13] Ibid., §514.

very old,"[14] but our sensibilities *would* be threatened if we tried affirming Russell's proposition.

If someone believed Russell's proposition to be true, what would it be like to try to show him where he went wrong? Is this even possible? If this person could not (or would not) accept something as fundamental as "The earth is very old," we might wonder not about their getting this correct or incorrect, but about their mental stability. "I should not call this a mistake," Wittgenstein says of such a person, "but rather a mental disturbance."[15] We might feel, as he says later, "intellectually very distant"[16] from this person.[17]

Wittgenstein, it seems, had agreed with both Moore's "local/global" division and his insistence on common sense.[18] Moore's division of doubt exposed not only the absurdity of the global skeptic's position but also revealed

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[14] Although, why would anyone need to affirm this?

[15] Wittgenstein, *On Certainty*, §71.

[16] Ibid., §108. His example in this passage is different but the concept, *extra*-ordinary doubt, is the same.

[17] Wittgenstein's "difference between mistake and mental disturbance" is much like Moore's difference between local and global doubt. See *On Certainty*, §§71,73.

[18] I have traced Wittgenstein's appreciation for common sense as far back as the *Blue & Brown Books*, written 1933-1934. There is reason however, to believe he may have entertained it perhaps a year earlier. In *Philosophical Grammar*, which he started writing in 1932, he seems to take the common sense approach to be the "correct" approach: "A proposition like 'there is no last cardinal number' is offensive to naive--*and correct*--common sense" [my emphasis], see Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Grammar*, 465.

an inconsistency in maintaining it. Under the Cartesian model, for the global skeptic to even pose his question demands he accept *something* about the world, as Moore explains,

> one way in which they [skeptics] have betrayed this inconsistency, is by alluding to the existence of other philosophers. Another is by alluding to the existence of the human race, and in particular by using 'we' do so and so, e.g., that 'we sometimes believe propositions that are not true,' is asserting not only that he himself has done the thing in question, but that *very many other human beings, who have had bodies and lived upon the earth*, have done the same.[19]

Skeptical philosophers *do know* something, says Moore. Propositions about "other minds" are accepted as true, even if these philosophers have elsewhere denied such propositions as true. "The strange thing," Moore tells us,

> is that philosophers should have been able to hold sincerely, as part of their philosophical creed, propositions inconsistent with what they themselves *knew* to be true; and yet, so far as I can make out, this has really frequently happened.[20]

In *On Certainty*, Wittgenstein also detects a similar inconsistency held among skeptical philosophers: "If you tried to doubt everything you would not get as far as doubting anything,… doubting itself presupposes certainty."[21] The skeptic simply takes for granted that his

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[19] G.E. Moore, "Defense of Common Sense," *Philosophical Papers* (New York: Collier Books, 1962), 40.

[20] Ibid., 41.

[21] Wittgenstein, *On Certainty*, §115. Wittgenstein also makes the interesting observation that doubt of such magnitude would not take us very far because, if truly global, it would require questioning the very

grounds for doubting are solid. But in order to begin an inquiry, *any inquiry*, Wittgenstein insists that something must be accepted: at some point "[g]iving grounds… justifying the evidence, comes to an end."[22]

"Certainty," for Wittgenstein, seems to be something quite "fundamental," something more "primitive" than our capacity to doubt, something more basic than knowledge, something, it seems to me, very similar[23] to Moore's common sense propositions (or as both Anthony Kenny and Marie McGinn refer to them, "Moore-type" propositions).[24]

Moore-type propositions form an important class and occupy an equally important place in our lives. Wittgenstein situates them at "the rock bottom of [our] convictions."[25] Echoing Moore's refrain,[26] he believed these propositions

> simply get assumed as truism[s], never called into question, perhaps not even ever   formulated. It may be for example that *all inquiry on our part* is set so as to exempt certain propositions from doubt, if they are ever formulated. They lie apart from the route traveled by inquiry.[27]

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meaning of one's words too: "If you are not certain of any fact, you cannot be certain of the meaning of your words either." Ibid., §114.

[22] Ibid., §204.

[23] Though not the same.

[24] Sometimes common sense propositions are called "Moore-type propositions," see chapter one, 7, footnote 20.

[25] Wittgenstein, *On Certainty*, §248.

[26] Some propositions are "such obvious truisms as not to be worth stating," see Moore, "Defense," 32.

[27] Wittgenstein, *On Certainty*, §§87-88.

With such strikingly similar views, we might be tempted to think that Wittgenstein agreed with *all* of Moore's common sense method, but this was not the case. It is true, he believed Moore had offered important insight about our understanding of the world; he also thought Moore was correct in implementing a division of doubt;[28] correct in thinking common sense propositions formed a "fundamental"[29] class; and correct in drawing on them to dismantle the Cartesian edifice. But where Moore went wrong, thought Wittgenstein, was in thinking he *knew* such propositions at all, not because these propositions were false but because his claim to knowledge of them was wrongly applied. Wittgenstein believed Moore had misused the phrase, "I know that *p*."

Moore's Misuse Of "I Know."

Although Wittgenstein believed there was *something* right about the common sense approach, it wasn't simply to state "I know that *p*," and then to reiterate it when asked for support, as Moore had done. If one "knows" anything, one ought to be able to provide evidence for it. Moore however, offered no evidence for his knowledge claim; Moore-type

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[28] Similarly, Wittgenstein talks about a "difference between mistake and mental disturbance." See Wittgenstein, *On Certainty*, §§71,73. For Moore's "Division of Doubt," see my chapter one, 12-14.

[29] Wittgenstein, *On Certainty*, §§238, 512, 514, 517, 670.

propositions provided no justification. Wittgenstein believed Moore was not "defending" common sense, if "defending" meant refusing to answer skeptical questions and simply reiterating what one "knows." He found this "unjustified and presumptuous"[30] of Moore. He thought this as early as 1933-34:

> [t]here is no common sense answer to a philosophical problem. One can defend common sense against the attacks of the philosophers only by solving their puzzles, i.e., by curing them of the temptation to attack common sense; *not by restating the views of common sense.*[31]

Because Moore thought he knew his propositions to be true and unquestionable, he saw no need to offer support. Wittgenstein realized however, that Moore's use of the phrase "I know that *p*" did not curb skeptical inquiry but *invited* it. "I know that *p*" cannot be the epistemological end point of an investigation, for it offers not a guarantee, but instead demands further inquiry. Yet, what Moore seems to be offering with "I know that *p*," *is* a guarantee, a guarantee that what he "knows" is an unquestionable, indubitable fact. But why, thought Wittgenstein, should we believe him? Why should Moore's assurance that he "knows" *this* or *that* be a reliable source

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[30] Ibid., §553.

[31] Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Blue & Brown Books*, 58-59, my emphasis. Wittgenstein's use of the medicinal metaphor ("curing") is often employed in his later works. As a reaction to both Cartesianism and scientism, he sometimes describes his method as "therapeutic." See appendix, 7-14.

of justification for us?

Moore's guarantee that he knows he has two hands does not ensure that he really *does know it*, only that *he thinks he knows it*;[32] "[t]hat he *does know* takes some showing," says Wittgenstein.[33] "Showing" means Moore must be capable of *supporting* what he knows,[34] otherwise to accept Moore's assurances amount to taking him at his word, on "mere faith."[35] "It would surely be remarkable," notes Wittgenstein, "if we had to believe the reliable person who says 'I can't be wrong'; or who says 'I am not wrong.'"[36]

Moore-type propositions are just as susceptible to doubt as any other proposition that takes the form "I know that *p*," and Moore's anticipatory response to the skeptic, "I don't know *how* I know, but I do in fact *know*," only serves to make him seem that much more cavalier. As he says in "Proof of an External World," after asserting "Here is a

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[32] Wittgenstein, *On Certainty*, §137.

[33] Ibid., §14, my emphasis.

[34] But he has already said he could not or would not. I think it is safe to assume that he wouldn't rather than couldn't. His refusal to do so was, as I said in chapter one, due to his hesitation of getting caught in an infinite regression of questions from the skeptic.

[35] Recall Kant's condemnation of those accepting on "mere faith" that an external world existed. This was the "scandal" of philosophy, see Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, Norman Kemp Smith translation, (New York: St Martin's Press, 1965), 34. Moore opened with this Kantian quote in "Proof Of An External World"; by the end of his article however, he believed he had "shown [this view] to be wrong" with his own "rigorous proof." See Moore, "Proof of an External World," *Philosophical Papers* (New York: Collier Books, 1962), 148.

[36] Wittgenstein, *On Certainty*, §22.

hand," it would be "absurd," says Moore, "to suggest that I did not know it… and that perhaps it was not the case!"[37]

Common sense propositions were so *obvious* to Moore, he believed they were *certain*. He seems to have thought he need not provide justification for propositions that are evident to everyone.[38] Wittgenstein however, rejected this line of reasoning: "[f]rom its *seeming* to me-or to everyone-to be so, it doesn't follow that it *is* so."[39] It may seem obvious I have two hands, but Moore's principal error was in the way he came to express it. When Moore, Wittgenstein, or anyone else, makes a knowledge claim, regardless how "obvious" it may be, it still makes sense, and is perfectly legitimate for someone to ask, "How do you know?" or "What justification do you have?" "I know that *p*" invites skeptical questions and therefore requires some support, some explanation.

Wittgenstein accused Moore of failing to see how "very specialized the use of 'I know' is."[40] That Moore knew *anything at all* required more than his saying so; he also had to justify it. But, as we've seen, Moore never offered

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[37] Moore, "Proof," 145.

[38] "I can know things, which I cannot prove; and among the things that I certainly did know, even if (as I think) I could not prove them, were the premises of my two proofs." Ibid., 148.

[39] Wittgenstein, *On Certainty*, §2.

[40] Ibid., §11.

proof that he knew; he never offered support for his common

sense propositions,[41] rather, he merely asserted time again

that he did in fact *know*.[42]

This unwavering assertion that he "knew it" did not

help to strengthen Moore's position,[43] but revealed that he

did not have "the right grounds"; that he had failed to

address perhaps the single most important aspect of any

knowledge claim, the issue of evidence. In short, what

Wittgenstein called Moore's "grammatical mistake" has

carried with it a large justificatory problem. Although

Moore-type propositions were located, as Wittgenstein had

said, at the "rock bottom" of our convictions, talking about

them in the grammatical form that Moore chose, created a

problem of justification that forced him to revisit the

skeptic's question: *"How do you know?"* But instead of

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[41] It is easy enough to understand *why* Moore did this, he wished to avoid the traditional problems the Cartesian skeptic might raise against him. But, as Wittgenstein says, the use of the phrase "I know that *p*" is very specialized; it requires support. Because Moore offered no support for his common sense propositions, Wittgenstein, obviously with Moore in mind, once said that, "the trouble with the [common sense] realist is always that he does not solve but skip the difficulties which his adversaries see." Wittgenstein, *Blue & Brown Books*, 48.

[42] "How am I to prove now that 'Here is 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," Moore, "Proof," 148.

[43] Nor does this type of argumentation serve to convert people to his way of thinking, in fact, I should think it would have the very opposite effect! As Wittgenstein seems to think.

addressing the question, Moore insisted, even more boldly, that he not only knew his common sense propositions were true, he knew, *with certainty*, of their truth.

"I Know, With Certainty."

In the opening pages of *On Certainty*, Wittgenstein makes an important observation: "The difference between the concept of 'knowing' and the concept of 'being certain' isn't of any great importance at all, except where 'I know' is meant to mean: I *can't* be wrong."[44] This important *conceptual* distinction between "knowledge" and "certainty" is not simply a linguistic or "grammatical" distinction.[45] "'Knowledge and 'certainty'" says Wittgenstein, "belong to different *categories*,"[46] they differ in *kind*, not merely degree. Moore, on the other hand, often used "certainty" to *emphasize* what he "knew," supposing that it offered stronger justification against the skeptic. For Moore, certainty

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[44] Wittgenstein, *On Certainty*, §8.

[45] A linguistic division would simply push the problem of justification back one step. "Well, ok, why are you so *certain?*" or "How are you so *certain?*" The question once again turns on the skeptic's demand for grounds, (e.g., "What grounds have you to make such a claim?"). In chapter four I offer an answer, or more precisely, an account of how I think Wittgenstein would answer the question of justification. I also provide a short section in the appendix addressing the difference between knowledge and certainty. For our purposes now, I think it is enough to say that our grounds for "certitude" will be different than our grounds for "knowing." "Knowledge" and "being certain" are two distinct *concepts*.

[46] Wittgenstein, *On Certainty*, §308.

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indicated a level of knowledge, knowing in the highest degree.

In "Defense," for example, Moore begins "by enunciating...a whole long list of propositions...every one of which," he says, "I know, *with certainty*, to be true."[47] At the end of "Proof," he says his premises are "among things which I *certainly* did know."[48] And again, in a paper entitled "Certainty," Moore says "I know *with certainty* that I have clothes on."[49] For Moore, knowledge and certainty are not different in kind; Moore thought certainty marked a *level* of knowledge, the highest level.

But if certainty is merely a level, a degree within the larger body of knowledge, does it matter then if Moore offers a high, moderate, or low degree of certainty? If knowledge claims are susceptible to doubt, it seems any *degree* of knowledge is of little importance. How much or how little Moore knows seems of little consequence. What *does* matter however, is that Moore *does know* and, more importantly, *how he has acquired this knowledge.*

Unfortunately, we do not get this from Moore. "I know *with certainty* that *p*" requires as much justification as "I

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[47] Moore, "Defense," 32, my emphasis.

[48] Ibid., 148, my emphasis.

[49] Moore, "Certainty" *Philosophical Papers* (New York: Collier Books, 1962), 223.

know that *p*," but rather than addressing the issue of evidence, Moore's varying degrees of knowledge do nothing more than reiterate his view that common sense propositions are among the things he never questioned. Whether "known" or "known *with certainty*," if Moore-type propositions were in fact, indubitable, they would have to be, as Wittgenstein puts it, "*objectively* established."[50] Common sense propositions would have to be established not only for Moore, but *for everyone*. If what he *knows*, e.g., "I know that I have two hands," could be established for all, this knowledge claim would be such that everyone would find it unquestionable. But is it unquestionable? Can we imagine an instance where Moore's common sense proposition, "I know I have two hands," can be legitimately[51] questioned?

Although instances are not easy to come by, questioning this proposition might be legitimate in the following example. G.H. Von Wright once asked us to imagine a horrific case[52] where "I am the victim of an accident and...my hands

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[50] Wittgenstein, *On Certainty*, §15.

[51] We know the Cartesian skeptic can do this, but from Moore's own standpoint of common sense, is doubt here possible?

[52] Unfortunately, horrific instances such as this are not simply *imaginable* but all too *real*. If we change the proposition slightly to "I know that I perceive a hand" and close or similar variations on this proposition, we need not look far for examples. The following come from recent incidents in Israel, the terrorist attacks in New York City, and a boating accident off the coast of Turkey. On April 10, 2002, Reuters reported an eyewitness account of a Palestinian suicide bomber who killed eight passengers on an Israeli bus in Haifa. "I saw people blown out of the windows by the force of the explosion," witness Ely Levy said. "I saw hands and legs and other body parts on the road." In the

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[are] torn off."[53] As ghastly as this example may be, doubt about whether one still has one's hands is possible, say immediately after the tragedy.[54] After the accident, I might doubt what I *thought* I knew: "Well, I *thought* I knew I had two hands," after I made the grisly discovery that they had been severed. So, although we might agree with Moore that there is something fundamental about our having two hands, I think it is at least possible to question it. Hence, Moore's "knowing that *p*" or even his "knowing *with certainty* that *p*," does not guarantee that a mistake is impossible.

What then do Moore-type propositions actually express? If common sense propositions do not properly express what Moore *knows* about the world, what, if anything, *do* they tell us?

What, If Anything, Do Moore-Type Propositions Express?

Australian Newspaper, *The Age*, reporting on the subsequent clean up effort underway after the World Trade Center attack in New York, described the men who worked in the pit of "ground zero." They "had likely never seen a dead body, let alone bits of one....These men retrieved 19,500 bits of people from the remains of the World Trade Center: bones, hands, thumbs, a torso." And in Ankara, Turkey, the Associated Press reported on a man, "Abukalam Ajad, [who] clutched a piece of wood and floated in the cold sea for hours, amid severed hands and legs of other illegal immigrants killed when their ship split in two after hitting rocks off the Mediterranean shore." Perhaps the surreal nature of such incidents might make us doubt whether what we see is real, and I think in such contexts, we can imagine questioning someone else as to what they perceive.

[53] G.H. von Wright, "Wittgenstein on Certainty," edited by John V. Canfield, Volume VIII, Knowing, Naming, Certainty, and Idealism (New York: Garland Publishing, 1986), 173.

[54] Especially if, say, one knew of another case of someone whose hands were torn off in an accident.

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When Moore says "I know that *p*" or "I know *with certainty* that *p*," what is he actually saying? Moore, I think, is simply declaring what he *believes* about the world not what he *knows* about it. In other words, I think he inflates his *belief* about the external world into a *knowledge* claim about it.

As we've seen, when Moore says "I know that I have two hands," he offers no proof, no support for this knowledge claim, instead, he insists that he *knows* it; but is this not what we do when we express our *belief* about something? We may perhaps, provide some support, offer some evidence but as it is a *belief*, to cease offering justification and merely insist that this is what we *believe* is not so unheard of. It makes sense to demand justification for knowledge claims, but does it make sense to demand justification for "I *believe* that *p*"? One who claims to "know that *p*," when challenged, must back-up her claim with grounds that are open to non-subjective, interpersonal assessment. Such grounds are not necessary however, when one says, "I believe that *p*." One may believe for personal or subjective reasons and one may legitimately refuse to divulge them. As Wittgenstein puts it: "It would be correct to say: 'I believe…' has subjective truth; but 'I know…' not."[55]

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[55] Wittgenstein, *On Certainty*, §179.

The skeptic *can* ask us "*Why* do you believe that *p*?" but what Wittgenstein thinks is important is *in what contexts* his question makes any *sense*. That is, in what contexts would such a question actually arise, do any work, etc.?[56] Imagine asking someone why, for instance, she believes she has two hands. Is this a sensible question? What would justification of this belief be like? What evidence would be satisfactory? She might be confident that she has no doubt about her belief but, at the same time, might be unable to offer evidence to support it. If, for example, after having provided reasons the skeptic still questions her, if she has dug as deep as possible and has struck the "bedrock"[57] of her convictions, she may simply refuse to provide the skeptic any further reasons. This does not mean she doubts the existence of her two hands. She may have no doubt about her conviction, but no evidence to support it. This, I believe, sounds quite similar to Moore's defense. The crucial difference is that it *makes sense* to interrogate Moore; by framing his convictions in "I know that *p*," Moore simply invites skeptical, justificatory questions. But it *makes little (or no) sense* to interrogate someone who simply

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[56] "The confusions which occupy us arise when language is like an engine idling, not when it is doing work," Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, §132.

[57] Wittgenstein uses the bedrock metaphor in the *Investigations*. See Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, §217.

offers her "belief that *p*."[58] For all that Moore *claims* "to know" then, I think these claims were nothing more than inflated beliefs. His use of "I *know* that *p*" actually represented "I *believe* that *p*."

Despite these shortcomings, Wittgenstein thought Moore was *trying* to say something of great importance. It was not Moore's use of "I know that *p*" or "I know with certainty that *p*," that intrigued Wittgenstein, rather, it was the contents of Moore's list. Moore-type propositions "reveal"[59] something, he says, they play a "peculiar logical role"[60] for us.

Propositions With A 'Peculiar Logical Role'

Moore's statement "I know I have two hands" was supposed to reveal the way in which doubt, or asking "How can you be sure?" was to be ruled out. To respond to this skeptical question with "Because I see (my) hands" was to miss Moore's point. Both he and Wittgenstein were considering cases where there were no reasons to give, where there was no "because." The propositions that Moore lists, e.g., "I have not been far from the surface of the earth,"

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[58] Wittgenstein, *On Certainty*, §175. Perhaps it may make *some* sense to interrogate her, but if she simply deflects our questions by saying she "just believes it" or "for no reason" we may think her belief false or mistaken, and no longer have grounds for further challenge.

[59] Ibid., §6.

[60] Ibid., §136.

"I have two parents," are typically ignored, for they are not propositions we normally consider in what we say or what we think. The "peculiar role" of such propositions does not emerge until we try imagining what would happen if we doubted them. These are the cases where we *cease* asking for justification, doubting here no longer makes sense.

Although we cease asking for justification, Moore-type propositions do "reveal" something: a *necessity*. They provide a "foundation" that *must* be in place for knowledge to even occur.[61] This necessity implied in the term "must," is not the same as the necessity of the logical "must" but is precisely why Wittgenstein calls such propositions "peculiar": they play a *peculiar logical role*.[62]

As Daniele Moyal-Sharrock explains, Moore-type propositions play a "logical role" because they are "*necessary* to our making sense,"[63] that is, the sorts of propositions Moore enumerates must be in place, first and foremost, before doubt, inquiry, etc. can even begin. The necessity of Moore-type propositions belongs to what

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[61] Wittgenstein refers to these propositions as forming a "background," an "unmoving foundation." "To say of man, in Moore's sense, that he knows something; that what he says is therefore unconditionally the truth, seems wrong to me," says Wittgenstein, "It is the truth only inasmuch as it is an unmoving foundation of his language-games." Wittgenstein, *On Certainty*, §403.

[62] I say more about these propositions in chapters four, five, and six.

[63] Daniele Moyal-Sharrock, "Logic in Action: Wittgenstein's *Logical Pragmatism* and the Impotence of Skepticism," *Philosophical Investigations* 26, no.2 (April 2003), 125-148.

Wittgenstein calls, the "natural history of man."[64] This is

not as clearly expressed in *On Certainty* as it is in other

works.[65] In *Remarks On The Foundations Of Mathematics* he

says:

> What you say seems to amount to this, that logic belongs to
> the natural history of man. And that is not combinable with
> the hardness of the logical "must." But the logical "must"
> is a component part of the propositions of logic, and these
> are not propositions of human natural history ...The agreement
> of humans that is a presupposition of logic is not an
> agreement in opinions, much less in opinions on questions of
> logic.[66]

Logic, opinions, belief, doubt, presuppose this "must," it

is a requirement for intelligibility. Wittgenstein believed

that Moore-type propositions, the sort Moore claimed to

"know," articulate some of these "necessities."[67]

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[64] Wittgenstein, *Remarks On The Foundations Of Mathematics*, edited by G. H. von Wright, Rush Rhees, G. E. M. Anscombe, translated by G. E. M. Anscombe (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, first printed 1956, reprinted 1998), Part VI, §49. In *Philosophical Investigations*, he makes a similar remark: "[w]hat we are supplying are really remarks on the *natural history of human beings*; we are not contributing curiosities however, but observations which no one has doubted, but which have escaped remark only because they are always before our eyes." Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, §415 [my emphasis]. I say more about this "natural history of man" in chapters four, five, and six.

[65] Ibid. Cf. *Remarks On The Foundations Of Mathematics*, Part I, § 142, and Part VI, §49, cited above. Also see *Remarks On The Philosophy Of Psychology* Volume I, "The facts of human natural history...are difficult for us to find out, for our talk passes them by, it is occupied with other things. (In the same way we tell someone: 'Go into the shop and buy...'--not: 'Put your left foot in front of your right foot etc. etc., then put coins down on the counter, etc. etc.')," Wittgenstein, *Remarks On The Philosophy Of Psychology*, edited by G. E. M. Anscombe and G. H. von Wright, translated by G. E. M. Anscombe, Volume I (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, first published in 1980, reprinted 1998), §78.
[66] Wittgenstein, *Remarks On The Foundations Of Mathematics*, Part VI, §49.

[67] They are necessary in a kind of naturalistic way to our *form of life*. The "peculiar logical role" of these propositions seems to eventually lead to a kind of naturalism. Daniele Moyal-Sharrock argues for this interpretation in "Logic in Action: Wittgenstein's *Logical Pragmatism*

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Where Do We Begin?[68]

Moore's error showed Wittgenstein that the skeptic could not be answered in any traditional manner. A new approach was needed. Moore's use of "I know" revealed that the problem of skepticism was misconceived, "I know" is used in connection with propositions where testing is possible, but Moore had used it in such a way that, when coupled with his common sense propositions, he took them to be indubitable. Although Moore was accurately expressing his basic, common sense *belief* about the world, he was not expressing what he *knew* about it. Knowledge about the world requires evidence, but evidence for one's fundamental beliefs is, according to Wittgenstein, where one's "spade has turned."[69] With such beliefs, "justification comes to an end."[70]

In *On Certainty*, Wittgenstein tries to account for the status of our basic beliefs, and how these beliefs form the important framework of our practice and our convictions

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and the Impotence of Skepticism," *Philosophical Investigations* 26, no.2 (April 2003), 126, 141, 146. I look at her argument in chapter 5. I also look at P.F. Strawson's description of naturalism in his *Skepticism & Naturalism: Some Varieties* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1984).

[68] Wittgenstein once lamented: "[i]t is so difficult to find the *beginning*. Or, better: it is difficult to begin at the beginning. And not try to go further back." Wittgenstein, *On Certainty*, §471.
[69] Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, §217.

[70] Wittgenstein, *On Certainty*, §192.

about them. for Wittgenstein, these basic beliefs are *non-epistemic*. This may be somewhat misleading as we are used to thinking of beliefs in terms of true or false. To avoid ambiguity I will refer to these non-epistemic beliefs as "convictions." A conviction, then, is one that is not acquired epistemically and for which questions of justification never arise.[71]

According to Wittgenstein, we inherit a "framework"[72] (*Gerust*) of convictions that "stands-fast" (*feststeht*) for us while we investigate the world around us. In order to raise questions or even begin to doubt, there must be some things that cannot be doubted, some things must stand-fast. "If I want the door to turn," he says at one point, "the hinges must stay put."[73] This "framework" is so omnipresent, we rarely notice what makes it up. But when we do notice, and when we do express them, they often seem trivial, e.g., "The earth is very old," "I have two hands," "I have two parents," etc. Wittgenstein regards Moore-type propositions as articulating elements of this vital framework. They represent the core of our convictions "where doubt is

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[71] Part II of the dissertation is largely concerned with Wittgensteinian convictions.

[72] At *On Certainty*, §211, the editors translate *Gerust* as "scaffolding." It can also be translated as "structure" or, as I use it here, "framework."

[73] Ibid., §343.

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unreasonable."[74]

As we've seen, Wittgenstein agreed with much of Moore's methodology, however he distinguished himself from Moore in one very important way. By placing "knowledge" and "certainty" in different categories, and then stressing different justificatory requirements, or "grounds" for each, Wittgenstein begins laying the groundwork for an altogether new approach to this very old problem. In *On Certainty*, he attempts to show that although knowledge claims require justificatory responses when challenged--responses that are *propositional* in character--certainty *does not*. Certainty is altogether different than knowledge. Moore-type propositions may represent our most certain, most fundamental convictions, but not because we can justify them; our convictions "lie beyond being justified or unjustified."[75] A conviction, e.g., "The earth is very old," is not justified when we say it, reiterate it, or even supply further explanation for it. Rather, my conviction that the earth is very old is grounded "in the way I act."[76] Rather than saying "This is *why*…" at such a point, Wittgenstein says "I am inclined to say: 'This is simply what I *do*.'"[77]

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[74] Wittgenstein, *On Certainty*, §454.

[75] Ibid., §359.

[76] Wittgenstein, *On Certainty*, §395.

[77] Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, §217, my emphasis.

For Wittgenstein, then, certainty manifests itself in what we might call "*non*-propositional *action*." Action is the locus of certainty, it is not first and foremost expressed in words. Quoting Goethe, Wittgenstein summed up his view as follows: "Im Anfang war die Tat."[78]

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[78] "In the beginning was the deed," Wittgenstein quoting Goethe, *On Certainty*, §402.

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Chapter 4: *On Certainty*: A Rational Reconstruction

> I believe it might interest a philosopher, one who can think himself, to read my notes. For even if I have hit the mark only rarely, he would recognize what targets I had been ceaselessly aiming at.
>
> -Ludwig Wittgenstein, *On Certainty* §387

Background For Understanding On Certainty

On Certainty is a collection of first-draft notes[1] written at the end of Wittgenstein's life; he died before he was able to revise them. Although the book presents a number of new and interesting ideas, it should not be thought as expounding Wittgenstein's finished view on these matters.[2] Since *On Certainty* was exploratory, it is not clear to what degree Wittgenstein was ultimately committed to many of the remarks found therein.

On Certainty is not clearly linear. This is due in large part to the preferred style in which Wittgenstein wrote.[3] He described this style in the preface to his

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[1] The editors of *On Certainty*, G.E.M. Anscombe and G.H. von Wright, have divided the material into four parts: Part I: §§ 1-65, Part II: §§66-192, Part III: §§193-299, Part IV: §§300-676.

[2] As Avrum Stroll has noted in *Moore and Wittgenstein On Certainty*, "[m]any of the entries [in *On Certainty*] have the status of first thoughts, something to be put down on paper for further reflection or reconsideration," see Avrum Stroll, *Moore and Wittgenstein on Certainty* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 80.

[3] This was the style for the post-*Tractarian* Wittgenstein. In Malcolm's review of the *Philosophical Investigations*, for example, he said that a "likely first reaction to the book will be to regard it as a puzzling collection of reflections that are sometimes individually brilliant, but possess no unity, present no system of ideas," Norman Malcolm, "Wittgenstein's *Philosophical Investigations*," *Knowledge and Certainty* (New York: Cornell University Press, 1975), 96.

Philosophical Investigations:

> I have written down all these thoughts as remarks, short
> paragraphs, of which there is sometimes a fairly long chain
> about the same subject, while I sometimes make a sudden
> change, jumping from one topic to another… The best that I
> could write would never be more than philosophical remarks;
> my thoughts were soon crippled if I tried to force them on
> in any single direction against their natural inclination.[4]

This technique is continued in most of his later writings,

including *On Certainty*. Some scholars, like Avrum Stroll and

Pellegrino D'Acierno, have called this non-systematic form

of writing "broken text."[5] The purpose of the broken text

style, they argue, is to challenge standard (or traditional)

philosophy's precise and coherently organized style. "He

[Wittgenstein] is reacting against *any* attempt by

philosophers to understand the world in neat, sharp

categories,"[6] says Stroll.[7] His style is deliberately

unconventional; it lacks the structure of traditional

philosophical writing.[8]

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[4] Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, translated by G. E. M. Anscombe (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1953), vii.

[5] "Broken text," according to Avrum Stroll, is "interrupted thematically, and marked by rapid transitions from one subject to another." Stroll says, this term was suggested to him by Pellegrino D'Acierno. Avrum Stroll, *Moore and Wittgenstein on Certainty* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 88.

[6] Ibid., 89.

[7] This is quite different, notice, from the highly disciplined writing style of someone like Moore, whose great enthusiasm for accessibility and intelligibility was unparalleled. Wittgenstein himself once said that "if one were trying to find exactly the right words to express a fine distinction of thought, Moore was absolutely the best person to consult." See Norman Malcolm's *Ludwig Wittgenstein, A Memoir* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984), 67.

[8] *Tractatus-Logico-Philosophicus*, Wittgenstein's first and only book published during his lifetime, *did* accord to a logically structured

Given his unconventional approach to philosophy, the task of reconstructing Wittgenstein's ideas in *On Certainty* from broken text to linear narrative presents something of a challenge. Yet, I do believe this task is possible. Although his thoughts are unprogrammatic and sometimes cryptic, there is an identifiable direction and course to his thoughts. Therefore, in this chapter I intend to present a rational reconstruction of *On Certainty*. My aim is to lay out, in "unbroken" fashion, what, it seems to me, Wittgenstein's basic view in *On Certainty* was.[9]

Locating The Beginning[10]

What if epistemic justification terminated with common sense beliefs? What if these beliefs were offered as justifying premises for which no further justification was available? It would seem that justification for much of our knowledge would then rest on possibly false beliefs. No belief would therefore be justified. This is the uncomfortable conclusion we arrive at after reading Moore.[11] In *On Certainty* however, Wittgenstein challenges this

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style. In his later period, however, he came to reject much that he wrote in the *Tractatus*, including its style.

[9] For those unfamiliar with Wittgenstein's terms "language-game" and "form of life," please see the appendix, 15-16.

[10] The final section of my third chapter was entitled "Where Do We Begin?" a question Wittgenstein asks himself in *On Certainty*, §471.

[11] See chapters 1-3.

conclusion. There are not, nor can there be, any epistemic justifications for certain kinds of common sense beliefs because questions of justification "do not arise" or "make no sense" with respect to such beliefs. These beliefs are non-epistemic, and as Daniele Moyal-Sharrock argues, "where no epistemic route was followed, no epistemic fault is possible."[12]

In *On Certainty*, Wittgenstein identifies serious flaws in both Cartesian skepticism and Moore's arguments against it. By focusing on the implications of Moore's "misuse" of the expression "I know that *p*,"[13] he gradually realizes that knowledge and certainty must be treated separately, as different categories.[14] This is one of the most important ideas in *On Certainty*. Wittgenstein's main criticism of Moore is that certitude differs *in kind, not degree*, from ordinary knowledge and is therefore not subject to doubt, justification (proof), truth, or falsehood. Doubt, justification, etc., are all properties of propositions. But certainty, Wittgenstein comes to realize, is not first and foremost propositional; it is more a matter of embodied

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[12] Daniele Moyal-Sharrock, "Logic in Action: Wittgenstein's *Logical Pragmatism* and the Impotence of Skepticism," *Philosophical Investigations* 26, no.2 (April 2003), 131.

[13] Wittgenstein, *On Certainty*, edited by G.E.M. Anscombe and G.H. Von Wright, translated by Denis Paul and G.E.M. Anscombe (New York: Harper & Row, 1972), §6.

[14] Ibid., §308.

action than propositional thought.

How does Wittgenstein arrive at certainty manifested in action? How does he move from certainty as a species of propositional knowledge to non-propositional certainty? In order to answer these questions I'd like to begin this rational reconstruction with what Wittgenstein called "hinge-propositions."

Hinge-Propositions

In chapter three, I mentioned Wittgenstein's praise for Moore's articles. He believed they were of great importance but not for Moore's use of "I know that *p*" or "I know with certainty that *p*," rather, it was the *contents* of Moore's list that had intrigued him. Moore-type propositions "reveal"[15] something, he said; they play a "peculiar logical role"[16] for us. Wittgenstein initially refers to these peculiarly logical propositions as "hinge-propositions." Like hinges fixed on a frame, they must "stand-fast" for us in order for the door (knowledge, doubt, inquiry) to turn. The most important claim Wittgenstein makes about these hinge-propositions is their exemption from doubt:[17] they

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[15] Ibid., §6.

[16] Ibid., §136.

[17] Ibid., §341.

"lie beyond being justified or unjustified."[18] Their certainty, he says, is presupposed in all our judging: "somewhere I must begin with not-doubting; and that is not, so to speak, hasty but excusable: it is part of judging."[19]

In four consecutive passages of *On Certainty* (§§ 341-344), he describes these hinge-propositions.

> [T]he *questions* that we raise and our *doubts* depend on the fact that some propositions are exempt from doubt, are as it were like hinges on which those turn…That is to say, it belongs to the logic of our scientific investigations that certain things are *in deed* not doubted… But it isn't that the situation is like this: We just *can't* investigate everything, and for that reason we are forced to rest content with assumption. If I want the door to turn, the hinges must stay put… *My life* consists in my being content to accept many things.

For Wittgenstein, *being human*, the fact that we *have a life*, means we inherit certain convictions, convictions immune to doubt. We do not arrive at them through an empirical search, hinges are not based on investigation.[20] They are not supported by evidence because there are no more fundamental propositions on the basis of which they could be believed. "Reasons" *could* be provided for our hinges, but these are not the reasons we *hold them*. The reasons we might give for holding the fundamental conviction that "There are physical objects,"[21] for example, are no better than the actual

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[18] Ibid., §359.

[19] Wittgenstein, *On Certainty*, §150.

[20] Ibid., §138.

[21] Ibid., §35.

proposition itself. "That is just what their being 'fundamental' is,"[22] he tells us. As he explains elsewhere: "I do not explicitly learn the propositions that stand fast for me. I can discover them subsequently like the axis around which a body rotates. This axis is not fixed in the sense that anything holds it fast, but the movement around it determines its immobility."[23] Our hinges are *in place*, so to speak, but we only consider them or become aware of them through what we do *around* them. Consider a proposition like "Cut this rod in half!"[24] Such a command is conditioned by our certainty that "A rod *has* a length," or even by our *more* basic conviction that "There are physical objects."[25] Our certainty that a rod has length is "held-fast," or is "in place" by what we do to it, our "movement around it," e.g., our *measuring* it, our *cutting* it.

Unlike Cartesian foundationalism,[26] there is not a single proposition that makes-up this background, but many.[27] Together, our certainties provide "mutual support."

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[22] Ibid., §512.

[23] Ibid., §152.

[24] Daniele Moyal-Sharrock uses this example. See Daniele Moyal-Sharrock, "Logic in Action: Wittgenstein's *Logical Pragmatism* and the Impotence of Skepticism," *Philosophical Investigations* 26, no.2 (April 2003), 133.

[25] Wittgenstein, *On Certainty*, §35.

[26] I discuss foundationalism in chapters five and six.

[27] As Wittgenstein puts it: "[w]hat I hold fast is not *one* proposition but a nest of propositions," See Wittgenstein, *On Certainty*, §225.

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.[28]

At some point in *On Certainty* however,[29] Wittgenstein began to realize that although what he had been calling "hinge-propositions" do *contribute* to our "world-view," they do not do so *as propositions*, strictly speaking.

Giving grounds… justifying the evidence, comes to an end;--but the end is not certain propositions' striking us immediately as true, i.e. it is not a kind of seeing on our part; it is our acting, which lies at the bottom of the language-game. If the true is what is grounded, then the ground is not true, nor yet false.[30]

Here, Wittgenstein makes an important (perhaps the most important) move in *On Certainty*, connecting what he has been calling "hinge-propositions" with *acting*. "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*… Sure evidence is what we accept as sure, it is evidence that we go by in *acting* surely, *acting* without any doubt."[31] This marks a fundamental shift in his thinking.[32] The hinges

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[28] Ibid., §§141-142.

[29] Wittgenstein's broken text style precludes me from saying *precisely* where this occurs.
[30] Wittgenstein, *On Certainty*, §§204-205.

[31] Ibid., §§148, 196, my emphasis.

[32] Although I think one could make the case that Wittgenstein had been thinking about this in *Philosophical Investigations*, where he says "If I have exhausted the justifications I have reached bedrock, and my spade is turned. Then I am inclined to say: 'This is simply what I do.'" Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, §217.

framing the background of our convictions are not basically

propositional; certainty manifests itself in action: *action,*

not words.

Action

Unreflective, habitual, and instinctive, the kind of

certainties Wittgenstein is interested in are manifested *not*

in what we say, but in what we *do.* Many of these certainties

have probably never even occurred to us and seem quite

trivial when they do.[33] Consider, for example, something as

basic as "the earth exists." For Wittgenstein, the issue of

justification does not even arise here. To ask, "How do you

know?" simply makes no sense with respect to such basic

convictions. If one demands grounds, our certainty that the

earth exists can be seen in the various things *we do upon*

it, e.g., walk, plant trees, wage war, bury our dead, etc.

But if someone persisted in asking us whether we were

certain that the earth existed, we would probably respond

like Wittgenstein,

> half annoyed and half embarrassed, 'Yes, of course!' All the
> while we would be conscious   that on the one hand we are
> not at all capable of giving reasons for this because
> seemingly there are too many, and on the other hand that no
> doubt is possible, and that one cannot answer the questioner
> by way of one particular piece of instruction, but only by

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[33] "Removed from the traffic" of our thoughts, hinge-propositions "lie
apart from the road traveled by inquiry," Wittgenstein, *On Certainty*,
§§210, 88, respectively.

gradually imparting to him a picture of our world.[34]

There are countless "reasons" we could offer, but we are not certain *for these reasons*. That the earth exists simply "goes without saying."[35] Anyone seriously entertaining such a question, e.g., the skeptic, we would think not wrong but "mentally disturbed,"[36] or suffering from what Wittgenstein calls a "disease of thought,"[37] a "disease of the understanding,"[38] or sometimes simply, a "philosophical disease."[39] We might also extend Wittgenstein's "hinge" metaphor, as Martin Benjamin does, to say that those who ask such questions (e.g., as whether the earth exists) have come "un-hinged."[40]

One of our many basic certainties is our conviction that the earth exists. Questioning such certainties, asking

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[34] Wittgenstein, *Last Writings On The Philosophy Of Psychology*, edited by G.H. von Wright and Heikki Nyman, translated by C. G. Luckhardt and Maximilian A. E. Aue, Volume II (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, first published 1992, reprinted 1999), 53.

[35] More about that which "goes without saying" in the next section.

[36] Wittgenstein makes a distinction between "mistake" and "mental disturbance," see Wittgenstein, *On Certainty*, §§74 & 71, respectively.

[37] Wittgenstein, *Zettel*, edited by G. E. M. Anscombe and G. H. von Wright, translated by G. E. M. Anscombe, second edition (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers Ltd., 1967), §382.

[38] Wittgenstein, *Culture and Value*, edited by Georg Henrik von Wright in collaboration with Heikki Nyman, translated by Peter Winch (Oxford: Blackwell, first edition 1977, second edition 1978), 50.

[39] Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, §593.

[40] Martin Benjamin, *Philosophy & This Actual World* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2003), 61.

how we justify that which stands-*absolutely*-fast[41] for us, is senseless. There are beliefs open for question and decision in light of reason and experience, and there are convictions that are not. The former are legitimate matters of inquiry while the latter "go without saying." There are a few interesting points to consider about this division.

"Legitimate Matters Of Inquiry" & What *"Goes Without Saying"*

That which "goes without saying" is not simply *awarded* exemption; immunity is not granted due to its having passed some test or stood up to the scrutiny of empirical evidence-gathering or rule-following. Certainty is not first and foremost propositional but *pre-suppositional*,[42] it plays a necessary role,[43] a necessary role that allows "our method of doubt and inquiry"[44] to take place. When we *propositionalize* these certainties, they seem very peculiar, indeed. Consider how unusual certainties that "go without saying" sound when put to words, e.g., "The world exists," "I have a body," "There are other human beings." They sound trivial, so trivial in fact that there is hardly occasion to

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[41] I say more about this below.

[42] Stroll, *Moore and Wittgenstein on Certainty*, 151.

[43] Refer to chapters three and five for more about this odd use of "necessity."

[44] Wittgenstein, *On Certainty*, §151.

articulate them.[45] We use them *in* philosophy to spotlight certainties and *outside* of philosophy in unusual contexts, for example, uttering "I have a body" might be appropriate in the following scenario: a woman, no longer receiving the physical affection of her husband, exclaims "I have a body!"[46]

Conversely, knowledge and knowledge claims *are* propositional. When one claims to "know that *p*," others are entitled to ask "How?", "Why?", or "What reasons do you have for claiming that *p*?" Knowledge claims require justification. They are open to inquiry and criticism. Justification is necessary because knowledge is fallible. It is not hard to find evidence for this; even a cursory look at the history of science shows how what was once thought true can be (partially or even completely) in error.[47] Although we may be tempted to think that knowledge *guarantees* what is known, guarantees it as a fact, Wittgenstein reminds us, we "always forget the expression 'I thought I knew.'"[48]

But what does this mean for claims *within* the language-

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[45] Cf. Daniele Moyal-Sharrock uses this example. See Moyal-Sharrock, "Logic in Action," 125-148.

[46] Chapter one, 9, footnote 28.

[47] For instance, within physics, the move from a geo-centric to a helio-centric universe.

[48] Wittgenstein, *On Certainty*, §12.

game of knowledge? Is it simply, as W.V.O. Quine says in "Two Dogmas of Empiricism," that "no statement is immune to revision?"[49] Might not there be, within the language-game of knowledge, *some* statements that play a supportive role for *other* statements? Might not some statements "stand-fast" *within the language-game?*

Some twenty years after the publication of "Two Dogmas," a more mature Quine addressed this question in the following way:

> [s]uppose that from a combined dozen of our theoretical beliefs a scientist derives a prediction in molecular biology, and the prediction fails. He is apt to scrutinize for possible revision only the half dozen beliefs that belonged to molecular biology rather than tamper with the more general half dozen having to do with logic and arithmetic and the gross behavior of bodies. This is a reasonable strategy-*a maxim of minimum mutilation.*[50]

Although Wittgenstein offers no *maxim of minimum mutilation* in *On Certainty*, he seems to be developing a similar strategy. There are some propositions, occurring within the language-game of knowledge that *are* more secure than others. There are, what we might call, "relatively certain" propositions, but the certainty of these propositions remains *relative to a language-game.*

Propositions that stand-*relatively*-fast are captured in one of Wittgenstein's many metaphorical characterizations.

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[49] W.V.O. Quine, "Two Dogmas of Empiricism," *From A Logical Point of View*, second edition (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1980), 43.

[50] W.V.O. Quine, *Philosophy of Logic*, second edition (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1986), 7, my emphasis.

He compares propositions subject to (empirical) testing to the waters moving in a river, and those propositions which are not so subject to testing to the bed or banks of the river.

> It might be imagined that some propositions, of the form of empirical propositions, were   hardened and functioned as channels for such empirical propositions as were not hardened but fluid; and that this relation altered with time, in that fluid propositions hardened, and hard ones became fluid…But I distinguish between the movement of the waters on the river-bed and the shift of the bed itself; though there is not a sharp division of the one from the other…the same proposition may get treated at one time as something to test by experience, at another as a rule of testing… And the bank of that river consists partly of hard rock, subject to no alteration or only to an imperceptible one, partly of sand, which now in one place now in another gets washed away, or deposited.[51]

The metaphor emphasizes the fact that situations can change, there is a plasticity associated with norms, customs, rules; they need not be absolute.[52] But that something is *not* absolute *does not mean* that anything goes; it does not mean that knowledge is *merely subjective*. This mistake is often attributable to a misunderstanding of antonyms. The antonym of "relative" is "absolute" *not* "objective." Knowledge can be both objective *and* relative, for example, scientific knowledge.

I think Wittgenstein's metaphor also suggests that the role of propositions that have hardened over time may be

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[51] Wittgenstein, *On Certainty*, §§96-99.

[52] I think Wittgenstein's example that no human being has ever been on the moon could be another illustration of "relative certainty." Eighteen years after his death, this proposition was false. See Wittgenstein, *On Certainty*, §§108, 661-667.

relative in a *different* context. For example, "[m]y having two hands," he says, "in *normal* circumstances, [is] as certain as anything that I could produce in evidence for it. That is why I am not in a position to take the sight of my hand as evidence for it."[53] But now what about an *abnormal* circumstance, e.g., emerging from the rubble of a terrorist attack? At this point, Moore's proposition may become an empirical one, quite relative to its context. Martin Benjamin has suggested we think of such relatively certain hinges as "provisionally fixed points,"[54] *potentially* subject to revision.

An inquiry into propositions that stand-*relatively*-fast naturally leads to another question: if there are *relatively certain* propositions, are there not also propositions that are *absolutely certain*?[55] For Wittgenstein however, this is where the idea of hinges as "propositions" is to be jettisoned. Convictions or hinges that stand *absolutely*-fast are no longer to be thought of as *propositional* at all. Although the *propositional* character of the hinge falls out,

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[53] Ibid., §250, my emphasis.

[54] Benjamin, *Philosophy & This Actual World*, 62.

[55] This distinction has been described in at least two different ways. Michael Kober has characterized it in terms of "elaborate" and "primitive" certainties, while Avrum Stroll describes them in terms of "relative" and "absolute." See Michael Kober, "Certainties of a world-picture: The epistemological investigations of On Certainty," *The Cambridge Companion to Wittgenstein* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 422; Stroll, *Moore and Wittgenstein on Certainty*, 138,

something *non-propositional* remains in place. Hinges that stand-*absolutely*-fast frame the background of our thoughts and statements; these certainties manifest themselves in what we do, *not in what we say*. This marks a profound shift in Wittgenstein's thought: a move away from propositionalized certainty toward *non*-propositionalized certainty; certainty manifested in action.[56]

Hitting The Mark: Wittgenstein's Targets

I opened this chapter with a quote from *On Certainty*. In it, Wittgenstein encouraged us to read his notes so that we might recognize the "targets" he was "ceaselessly aiming

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respectively.
[56] "Giving grounds,…justifying the evidence, comes to an end;-but the end is *not certain propositions' striking us immediately as true*, i.e. it is not a kind of seeing on our part; *it is our acting*, which lies at the bottom of the language-game" See Wittgenstein, *On Certainty*, §204, my emphasis. I think it is also worth noting that Quine too accords a special status to that which "holds his holistic web of belief up." In an article entitled "The Scope and Language of Science," Quine says "[w]e cannot significantly question the reality of the external world, or deny that there is evidence of external objects in the testimony of our senses; for to do so is simply to dissociate the terms 'reality' and 'evidence' from the very applications which originally did most to invest those terms with whatever intelligibility they may have for us." See W.V.O. Quine, "The Scope and Language of Science," *The Ways of Paradox and Other Essays* (Cambridge & London: Harvard University Press, 1976), 229. What I find most interesting however, is that Quine accords this special status to "common sense." "We imbibe an archaic natural philosophy with our mother's milk. In the fullness of time, what with catching up on current literature and making some supplementary observations of our own, we become clearer on things. But the process is one of growth and gradual change: we do not break with the past, nor do we attain to standards of evidence and reality different in kind from the vague standards of children and laymen. Science is not a substitute for common sense, but an extension of it. The quest for knowledge is properly an effort simply to broaden and deepen the knowledge which the man in the street already enjoys, in moderation, in relation to common-place things around him. To disavow the very core of common sense, to require evidence for that which both the physicist and the man in the street accept as platitudinous, is no laudable perfectionism; it is pompous confusion, a failure to observe the nice distinction between the baby and the bathwater." Ibid., 229-230.

at." I'd like to conclude this chapter with a discussion of what I think his targets in *On Certainty* were, and whether he successfully "hit the mark."

In the early sections of *On Certainty*, Wittgenstein began to differentiate certainty from knowledge. He soon realized certainty was different in *kind* from knowledge but found it difficult to characterize. As his thoughts deepened however, he proposed a radical interpretation of certainty. This radical interpretation was to dismiss certainty as propositional at all, instead insisting that certitude is achieved in what we *do*, not in what we *say*. Knowledge and other language-games, presuppose this non-propositional, *actional*, certitude. Certainties are reflected and borne out not in our words but in our deeds, stemming from our immersion in a community, our form of life. *Non-propositional* action is *necessary* in a kind of "foundational" way[57] for the entire system of *propositional* knowledge to turn; certitude, "our hinge," stands-fast.

Insisting that that which stands-fast for us is not something we can be mistaken about, Wittgenstein's first target was the Cartesian skeptic. Certainty is not something Descartes' dream hypothesis[58] nor even his more radical

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[57] This kind of *necessary* foundationalism was hinted at above and will be discussed in fuller detail the next chapter.

[58] "The argument 'I may be dreaming,'" Wittgenstein says, "is senseless for this reason: if I am dreaming, this remark is being dreamed as well-and indeed it is also being dreamed that these words have any meaning,"

global skepticism could call into question. This, Wittgenstein believed, was because the Cartesian framework was based on a fundamental mistake. Cartesian doubt cannot provide a basis for knowledge. Knowledge is a function of our language-games and doubt only makes sense *within* our language-games. If we are to have language at all, some things "go without saying." That which goes without saying makes up our background, our framework.[59]

Wittgenstein's target was not only the Cartesian skeptic, it also included Moore's arguments against Cartesian skepticism. Wittgenstein found Moore's attempt to *prove* that an external world exists to be both mistaken and superfluous. Mistaken because the existence of what stands fast is beyond doubt; and superfluous because if it is beyond doubt, no proof of its existence is necessary. Moore's claim to "know that *p*" implied no grounds could be more conclusive, so Moore believed he need not offer any support. But his confidence that no grounds could be stronger than his own claim to know, was to misuse "I know." "When one hears Moore say 'I know that that's a tree,'" says Wittgenstein, "one suddenly understands those who think that that has by no means been settled. The matter strikes one

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Wittgenstein, *On Certainty*, §383.

[59] Wittgenstein sometimes calls this the "world-picture." See Wittgenstein, *On Certainty*, §167. He has a number of other names for this, as I mentioned above, e.g., "inherited background," "axis," "substratum," "scaffolding," "hinge," §§94, 152, 162, 211, 341,

all at once as being unclear and blurred. It is as if Moore had put it in the wrong light."[60]

If one is in a position to know something, it means this claim must be open to some sort of "objective assessment," there must be, what Wittgenstein elsewhere calls a "criterion of correctness."[61] A criterion of correctness is required for measuring whether someone does indeed *know* what she says she knows. Knowledge claims must therefore occur openly, within a community; they cannot be what Moore *himself* knows or what he *thinks he knows*. "An inner experience cannot show me that I *know* something," says Wittgenstein.[62] Knowledge cannot occur within the private arena of one's own mind; objective grounds will not be found by looking inward. But Moore's use of "I know that *p*" effectively barred any outside, objective verification from taking place. It lacked a criterion of correctness.[63]

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respectively.
[60] Ibid., §481.

[61] Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, §258.

[62] Wittgenstein, *On Certainty*, §569.

[63] Wittgenstein's "criterion of correctness" occurs in a section of the *Philosophical Investigations*, §§243-315, where he rejects the possibility of a private language. Wittgenstein's private-language argument (PLA) is a refutation of the logical possibility of a language comprehensible to only the speaker; it also serves to elucidate the grammatical absurdity of a "language" that is, in principle, incommunicable. Briefly, for our purposes here, the PLA starts from the premise: if a language were capable of being private, there would be no independent checking of putative associations between its sign and the signified, no first-person 'criterion of correctness.' A private language, it is argued, is therefore inconsistent. Knowledge claims must therefore occur openly, within a community; they cannot be what Moore *himself* knows or what he *thinks he knows*.

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At the same time, what Moore was *trying to say* was something Wittgenstein strongly agreed with, namely, that many common sense propositions are exempt from doubt. But he disagreed with Moore prefixing these "exemptive" propositions with "I know that…" To do so, Wittgenstein believed, was to simply invite skeptical criticism; worse, it was to slip back into the Cartesian model.[64]

In an attempt to salvage what was right about Moore's approach, Wittgenstein wondered why Moore, rather than saying "I know that *p*," couldn't have said: "'It stands fast for me that…'"[65] At this point, when Wittgenstein began separating knowledge from certainty, he recognized how distinct these two concepts were and that they must be characterized quite differently. Knowledge, he argued, was a function of our language-games and was subject to rules applicable to language-games. Certainty however, was quite different and characterizing it became his focus, his new and final target.[66]

This characterization of certainty was, as we've seen, to suggest that what "stands fast" is not subject to

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[64] A flagrant violation, as this was the very model Moore was supposed to be railing against!

[65] Wittgenstein, *On Certainty*, §116.
[66] See appendix for a brief explication of knowledge compared to certainty.

justification, proof, the adducing of evidence, or doubt;[67] "it is not true, nor yet false."[68] Whatever is subject to the above list is propositional in form and belongs to the language-game. Certainty however, is non-propositional in form and stands *outside* the language-game. Certainty, he says, is grounded in *action*, the "hinge" upon which all our knowledge (all our language-games) turn.

Cartesian skepticism, Moore's response to it, and providing a new, non-propositional characterization of certainty were, I believe, the "targets" Wittgenstein was "ceaselessly aiming at" in *On Certainty*.[69] For all its originality however, *On Certainty* still leaves open some important questions. For instance, is the approach Wittgenstein takes here unprecedented? Where exactly does *On Certainty* fit within the larger philosophical terrain? These

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[67] Avrum Stroll, *Moore and Wittgenstein on Certainty*, 138.

[68] Wittgenstein, *On Certainty*, §205.

[69] Wittgenstein's targets in *On Certainty*, do not occur in the order I list above, a more linear account, in accordance with the text, would run as follows. First, Wittgenstein wanted to get clear on Moore's odd use of "I know that *p*." He identified knowledge as a function of language-games where certain rules were applicable and others inapplicable, some properties legitimate, others illegitimate. This provided a scope and limitation to knowledge, a scope and limit set by inquiry and evidence gathering. Second, throughout much of *On Certainty*, Wittgenstein slowly began separating the concept of knowledge from the concept of certainty. Language and language-games require a "frame," he says, something that "stands-fast." But what stands-fast is different from language-games, what stands-fast must be certain. Third, he began to characterize the nature of certainty. With this characterization, the serious flaws in Cartesian skepticism and in Moore's arguments against it begin to emerge. Fourth, what *can* be doubted is propositional and belongs to the language-game, but what is certain *cannot possibly be doubted*. So, certainty cannot be first and foremost propositional, certainty must be *non-propositional*. Hence, certainty is "actional."

remain disputed issues among scholars, issues to which I now
turn.

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Chapter 5: Current Debate: Wittgenstein's *On Certainty*

> Attempts to locate [Wittgenstein] on the received maps of philosophical possibilities have inevitably led to distortion.
>
> -P.M.S. Hacker

Three Views

Scholars often disagree about what Wittgenstein was doing in *On Certainty*. To wit:

- [T]here are two main themes in *On Certainty*,…[o]ne is a reply to skepticism… the other… a relativistic one which undermines the claims constituting the first theme.[1]

- [I]n *On Certainty*… Wittgenstein's *ultimate* and crucial depiction of our basic beliefs is in terms of a *know-how*, an *attitude*, *a way of acting*. Here, he treads on pragmatist ground.[2]

- [I]n *On Certainty*, Wittgenstein develops a highly original form of foundationalism.[3]

There is, I think, a natural temptation to want to place Wittgenstein into some pre-existing philosophical category. The problem however, is that his thoughts are so original and different from anything before him, he is difficult to categorize.[4]

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[1] A.C. Grayling, "Wittgenstein on Skepticism and Certainty" in *Wittgenstein: A Critical Reader* (Malden: Blackwell, 2001), 305-306.

[2] Daniele Moyal-Sharrock uses this example. See Daniele Moyal-Sharrock, "Logic in Action: Wittgenstein's *Logical Pragmatism* and the Impotence of Skepticism," *Philosophical Investigations* 26, no.2 (April 2003), 125.

[3] Avrum Stroll, *Moore and Wittgenstein on Certainty* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 138.

[4] In his 1930-31 lectures, Wittgenstein told his students that the philosophy he was now doing was "a new subject," not merely a stage in a "continuous development." G.H. Von Wright, believes Wittgenstein's thoughts are "entirely outside any philosophical tradition,…[he has] no

I believe the three quotations cited above each contains *some* truth.[5] In this chapter I intend to identify the strengths and weaknesses of the three views cited. In chapter six, I will attempt to blend their strengths and avoid their weaknesses.

Two Conflicting Themes (Grayling's View)

According to A.C. Grayling, there are two main themes in *On Certainty*:

(1) a reply to skepticism "of a broadly foundationalist stamp,"[6]

and

(2) "classically strong relativism."[7]

Grayling asserts these two themes are in conflict: the relativism he finds in *On Certainty* poses a threat to Wittgenstein's reply to skepticism.[8] Moreover, Grayling thinks Wittgenstein recognizes this tension, but finds his

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ancestors in philosophy." G.H. Von Wright, "A Biographical Sketch," in Norman Malcolm's *Ludwig Wittgenstein: A Memoir* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984), 15.

[5] Some more than others.

[6] Grayling, "Wittgenstein," 305.

[7] Ibid., 308.

[8] Grayling finds this tension so great, he divides his exegesis of *On Certainty* in two. He refers to the first theme, the reply to skepticism bearing the stamp of foundationalism, as OC_1, and the second theme, relativism, as OC_2. Ibid., 305-306.

attempt at resolving it to be "fudged."[9]

I believe Grayling's interpretation of *On Certainty* is important and *partially* correct. Wittgenstein's reply to skepticism *does* have "a foundational stamp," and the relativism present in *On Certainty* is, I think, evident.[10] However, I disagree with Grayling that these two themes create a "tension." The relativism present in *On Certainty* does not "undermine" Wittgenstein's foundational reply to skepticism[11] because the *kind* of foundationalism in *On Certainty* is quite different from that of the traditional, Cartesian variety. For Wittgenstein, knowledge is fallible--

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[9] Ibid., 306. Beyond these discordant themes (and what Grayling sees as Wittgenstein's "fudged" attempts to harmonize them), Grayling also believes *On Certainty* exhibits a change in Wittgenstein's negative assessment towards philosophy: "*On Certainty*," he says, "appears to represent Wittgenstein's acceptance, at last, of philosophy's legitimacy as an enterprise," ibid., 305. The reason, according to Grayling, is that in this work, Wittgenstein finally focuses on traditional, philosophical problems, i.e., skepticism and knowledge, and tries to provide solutions to these problems, "a refutation of skepticism and a characterization of knowledge and its justification," ibid. I believe this meta-analysis of Wittgenstein's approach to philosophy is a large issue, one superficially glossed over by Grayling. To adequately address this issue however, would require an historical analysis of the Wittgensteinian corpus. Still, I believe some remarks are warranted here. I agree with Grayling, *On Certainty* is a departure from Wittgenstein's earlier work, but not for the reason he provides. It is not due to Wittgenstein's "acceptance, at last, of philosophy's legitimacy." It is true that Wittgenstein does attempt a characterization of knowledge but this, in turn, leads him to try to characterize non-propositional certainty. Non-propositional certitude, it seems to me, is quite *outside* the traditional philosophical enterprise. I believe Grayling was correct in noticing the "foundational stamp" present in *On Certainty*, but I think he failed to observe how truly novel this *kind of* foundationalism was. This approach is far from falling into some accepted philosophical model.

[10] See Wittgenstein, *On Certainty*, edited by G.E.M. Anscombe and G.H. Von Wright, translated by Denis Paul and G.E.M. Anscombe (New York: Harper & Row, 1972), §§65, 95, 97, 99, 166, 256, 336.

[11] Grayling, "Wittgenstein," 306.

thus in some sense "relative"--but this does not mean it cannot be *objective*, nor does it mean we cannot be *objectively certain*[12] of many things. As Gertrude Conway explains, "Wittgenstein's position allows for an objectivism rather than...an absolutism."[13]

As I suggested in the previous chapter, just because something is *not* absolute *does not mean* that anything goes.[14] It does not mean that knowledge is *merely subjective* This is a mistaken understanding of antonyms. The antonym of "relative" is "absolute" *not* "objective," knowledge can be both objective *and* relative.[15]

There is *something* foundational in Wittgenstein's reply, but as we saw in chapter four, the *kind of*

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[12] "Objective certainty" is a phrase Daniele Moyal-Sharrock uses. See Moyal-Sharrock, "Logic in Action," 145. I examine Moyal-Sharrock's position below. I previously mentioned this in chapter four, 10.

[13] Gertrude Conway, *Wittgenstein On Foundations* (Amherst: Prometheus Books, 1989), 143.

[14] We might call this "anything goes" relativism.

[15] In chapter four I also pointed to an implicit distinction in *On Certainty* between "legitimate matters of inquiry" and what "goes without saying." There are beliefs that, in light of reason and experience, are open for debate and question. These are matters of legitimate inquiry occurring in the language-game. They are, in some sense, "relative"; but this kind of relativity is not a license for *anything goes relativism*. We can have *relative-objectivity*, but at the same time I think there are beliefs (convictions) that no sensible person would question, e.g., "the earth exists." This belief "goes without saying." Convictions that "go without saying" are *outside* the language-game. Convictions which go without saying *do not* have propositional content. They *can* be put to words but how trivial they seem when we do. They do not really function as full-blooded propositions. Wittgenstein here separates propositional beliefs from non-propositional action. Wittgenstein says that not everything that has the form of a proposition is one: "I am inclined to believe that not everything that has the form of an empirical proposition is one." Wittgenstein, *On Certainty*, §308.

foundationalism present here occurs when Wittgenstein connects hinge-beliefs with *acting*, a move Grayling either ignores or grossly overlooks.[16] Had he considered this move, he might have recognized that Wittgenstein's turn away from traditional, propositionalized certainty toward a new, *non-propositionalized* certainty, a certainty manifested in action, constitutes not only a new kind of foundationalism but also permits an objective relativism to consistently reside within its framework.[17] Instead, Grayling insists these two themes are "not comfortably consistent with each other,"[18] and goes so far as to say that *On Certainty*, at its worst, is a "lost opportunity,"[19] a "self-defeating,"[20] "fatally flawed"[21] text.

I think Grayling's unfavorable view of *On Certainty* stems from a failure to recognize the importance of Wittgenstein's transition from hinge-propositions to non-propositional certitude. Although the *marks* of a

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[16] In chapter four I said §§204-205 exhibited perhaps the most important move in *On Certainty*, because Wittgenstein connects "hinges" with *acting*, see chapter four, 6. Grayling however, makes no mention of these two very important passages.

[17] I say more about both these points below.

[18] Grayling, "Wittgenstein," 305.

[19] Ibid., 317.

[20] Ibid., 312.

[21] Ibid., 313.

"foundationalist stamp"[22] are clearly present in *On Certainty*, it is important to note that the *kind of* foundationalism it exhibits is unique. As we've seen, certitude, for Wittgenstein, is manifested in the things we do (unreflective and un-problematically); certainty has its "foundation" in action.[23] Surprisingly however, Grayling pays no attention to this important move. Instead, he uses foundationalism in its traditional, Cartesian sense, a point that becomes evident when he "anatomiz[es] *On Certainty*."[24]

In order "to get a good feel for the tension,"[25] Grayling divides *On Certainty* into two parts: OC_1 and OC_2, where "OC_1…constitutes a version of a foundationalist refutation of skepticism"[26] while "OC_2," he says, "is classically strong relativism."[27] When we catalogue and compare the list of passages comprising OC_1 and OC_2, we become aware of the "tension" Grayling describes. Compare §103 with §97; §494 with §256; or §512 with §559, and the relativism of OC_2 *does* seem to undercut the foundationalism

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[22] Wittgenstein does employ a lot of "foundational language" while characterizing this non-propositional certitude. Avrum Stroll counts "more than sixty places in which Wittgenstein uses explicitly foundational language." See Avrum Stroll, *Moore and Wittgenstein on Certainty*, 142.

[23] See chapter four, 7-8.

[24] Grayling, "Wittgenstein," 306.

[25] Ibid., 308.

[26] Ibid., 306.

[27] Ibid., 308.

of OC$_1$.

§103 And now if I were to say 'It is my unshakeable conviction that etc.,' this means in the present case too that I have not consciously arrived at the conviction by following a particular line of thought, but that it is anchored in all my questions and answers, so anchored that I cannot touch it.

§97 The mythology may change back into a state of flux, the river-bed of thoughts may shift. But I distinguish between the movement of the waters on the river-bed and the shift of the bed itself; though there is not a sharp division of the one from the other.

§494 'I cannot doubt this proposition without giving up all judgment.' But what sort of proposition is that? (It is reminiscent of what Frege said about the law of identity.) It is certainly no empirical proposition. It does not belong to psychology. It has rather the character of a rule.

§256 On the other hand a language-game does change with time.

§512 Isn't the question this: 'What if you had to change your opinion even on these most fundamental things?' And to that the answer seems to me to be: 'You don't have to change it. That is just what their being 'fundamental' is.'

§559 You must bear in mind that the language-game is so to say something unpredictable. I mean: it is not based on grounds. It is not reasonable (or unreasonable). It is there--like our life.

However, noticeably absent in Grayling's OC$_1$ list are §§ 204-206.

§204 Giving grounds, however, justifying the evidence, comes to an end;-but the end is not certain propositions' striking us immediately as true, i.e. it is not a kind of seeing on our part; it is our acting, which lies at the bottom of the language-game.

§205 If the true is what is grounded, then the ground is not true, nor yet false.

§206 If someone asked us 'but is that true?' we might say 'yes' to him; and if he demanded grounds we might say 'I can't give you any grounds, but if you learn more you too will think the same.' If this didn't come about, that would mean that he couldn't for example learn history.

I believe these latter passages are *crucial* in understanding

Wittgenstein's move toward a new kind of foundationalism. Not only does Grayling fail to address these passages, but nowhere in his article does he discuss this move from propositional certainty to non-propositional action.

I think the "tension" Grayling perceives between foundationalism and relativism is only apparent if we ignore what Wittgenstein was doing in *On Certainty* and instead construe relativism not *objectively* but *subjectively*.[28] Furthermore, this subjective relativism must then be paired with traditional or *Cartesian foundationalism*.[29] On *this* interpretation, Grayling is right, foundationalism *is* inconsistent with subjective relativism. But this is not what Wittgenstein says in *On Certainty*.

A distinction now begins to emerge between two kinds of foundationalism. On the one hand, there is the kind of traditional foundationalism championed by Descartes, grounded in certain, invariant propositions. On the other hand, there is the kind of foundationalism Wittgenstein

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[28] Grayling defines relativism in a subjective way: "truth and knowledge are *not* absolute or invariable, but dependent upon viewpoint, circumstances or historical conditions. What is true for me might not be true for you; what counts as knowledge from one viewpoint might not do so from another; what is true at one time is false at another." Grayling, "Wittgenstein," 308. But, as I mentioned above, just because something is *not* absolute *does not mean* that knowledge is *merely subjective*, or "dependent upon viewpoint." Knowledge, for instance, can be both objective *and* relative, e.g., medical knowledge that is supported by well conducted, well designed randomized clinical trials.

[29] The *Cartesian foundationalist* maintains that there are certain invariable *propositions* of truth and knowledge that are not subject to doubt, and that these propositions serve as the ground or "foundation" upon which further knowledge is built.

introduces in *On Certainty*: a non-propositional foundationalism whose locus is found not in word but in *deed* (or action). We might call this new kind of foundationalism, *actional foundationalism*. *Actional foundationalism* is quite different from the classic Cartesian variety. As Daniele Moyal-Sharrock says, "Wittgenstein's foundationalism breaks away from Cartesianism, the doctrine that what is foundational is also propositional.…[W]ith *On Certainty*," she continues, "foundationalism sheds its old skin."[30]

Although *On Certainty* bears a "foundationalist stamp," I agree with Moyal-Sharrock: the *kind* of foundationalism Wittgenstein introduces is new. A "tension" in *On Certainty* arises only if we ignore Wittgenstein's move from hinge-propositions to non-propositional certitude. Grayling's interpretation falls short of the mark because he overlooks this important step.

Treading On Pragmatist Ground (Moyal-Sharrock's View)

In her article "Logic in Action," Daniele Moyal-Sharrock advances a new and interesting interpretation of *On Certainty*. Blending aspects of logic, pragmatism, and anthropology, she argues that Wittgenstein, in an attempt to

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[30] Daniele Moyal-Sharrock uses this example. See Moyal-Sharrock, "Logic in Action," footnote 6.

depict the nature of our basic beliefs (convictions), is a foundationalist,[31] but that his foundationalism is "neither ahistorical, nor decontextualized: it is a *human-bound* foundationalism."[32] This foundationalism is restricted to, or "bounded" by, human sensibility, "a *know-how*, an *attitude*, a *way of acting*."[33] It is here she says, that Wittgenstein "treads on pragmatist ground."[34]

I think there are some interesting parallels[35] between pragmatism and Wittgenstein, and I think it is clear pragmatism had an *influence* on Wittgenstein's thought,[36] but I am hesitant to identify Wittgenstein with pragmatism.[37] He

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[31] Ibid., 127.

[32] Ibid., 128.

[33] Ibid., 125.

[34] Ibid., 125.

[35] In a recent book entitled *Wittgenstein and William James*, Russell Goodman begins his preface with a reference to the *Wittgenstein Workbook*, by Coope, Geach, Potts, and White. "Near the end of this…volume," Goodman writes, "is a one-page list of parallel passages from James' *the Principles of Psychology* and Wittgenstein's *Philosophical Investigations*," Russell Goodman, *Wittgenstein and William James* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), viii.

[36] As Martin Benjamin says, "Wittgenstein greatly admired certain of James's writings and read them more than once. Even when he disagreed with him, Wittgenstein felt James's work on psychology and religion had unusual depth and was, for that reason, worth taking seriously," Martin Benjamin, *Philosophy & This Actual World* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2003), x. In the Introduction to *Wittgenstein and William James*, Russell Goodman says, "Wittgenstein learned from James…In James's texts, Wittgenstein discovered an acute sense of the 'variety' of human experience-religious, secular, emotional, cognitive, receptive, active, extraordinary, ordinary-that was deeply congenial as he worked on what he called his 'album' of 'remarks' and 'sketches' of human life (PI, v)." See Russell Goodman, *Wittgenstein and William James* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 3.

[37] Wittgenstein has been aligned with many schools of thought. I think we ought to be wary of anyone who thinks Wittgenstein belongs to *this*

admits he is "trying to say something that *sounds like* pragmatism,"[38] but elsewhere he rejects the pragmatist label: "But aren't you a pragmatist?" his interlocutor asks him. "No. For I am not saying that a proposition is true if it is useful."[39] Moyal-Sharrock thinks Wittgenstein does not want to be affiliated with pragmatism because "he does not want *his* use of *use* to be confused with the *utility* use of *use*."[40] I agree. Wittgenstein's application of "use" is concerned with the *meaning* or *sense* of the proposition, *not* the pragmatic application of "use" where a proposition is *true* if it is *useful*.[41] Wittgenstein's application of the term is first demonstrated in the *Philosophical Investigations*[42] and repeated in *On Certainty*: "it is only

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one group. I prefer to think of Wittgenstein's thoughts in terms of "paralleling" other thinkers, or as having "affinities" with other groups.

[38] Wittgenstein, *On Certainty*, §422, my emphasis. It should also be pointed out that, as Goodman says, "The possibility that his [Wittgenstein's] own philosophy sounds 'something like pragmatism' was not for him a happy one." Goodman, *Wittgenstein and William James*, 17.

[39] *Remarks On The Philosophy of Psychology*, edited by G. E. M. Anscombe and G. H. von Wright, translated by G. E. M. Anscombe, Volume I (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, first published in 1980, reprinted 1998), §266, translation slightly altered. Also see *Philosophical Grammar*: "If I want to carve a block of wood into a particular shape any cut that gives it the right shape is a good one. But I don't call an argument a good argument just because it has the consequences I want (Pragmatism)" Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Grammar*, edited by Rush Rhees, translated byAnthony Kenny (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, first published 1974, reprinted 1993, 185.

[40] Moyal-Sharrock, "Logic in Action," 125.

[41] This application of "use" is typically associated with William James, however it is controversial, as I mention below.
[42] "For a large class of cases--though not for all--in which we employ the word 'meaning' it can be defined thus: the meaning of a word is its use in the language," Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*,

in *use* that the proposition has its *sense.*"[43] Wittgenstein's

"use" is not connected to truth at all and, in this way, *not*

pragmatic, at least not in William James's controversial

sense.[44] Consider again what Wittgenstein says at §§ 204-

206:

§204 Giving grounds, however, justifying the evidence, comes to an end;-but the end is not certain propositions' striking us immediately as true, i.e. it is not a kind of seeing on our part; it is our acting, which lies at the bottom of the language-game.

§205 If the true is what is grounded, then the ground is not true, nor yet false.

§206 If someone asked us 'but is that true?' we might say 'yes' to him; and if he demanded grounds we might say 'I can't give you any grounds, but if you learn more you too will think the same.' If this didn't come about, that would mean that he couldn't for example learn history.

Given his rejection of the pragmatic application of

"use," why does Moyal-Sharrock insist on calling

Wittgenstein a pragmatist? Because, she says, of the

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translated by G. E. M. Anscombe (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1953), §43. Also see *Philosophical Investigations* Part II, xi, 212, "Let the use *teach* you the meaning."

[43] Wittgenstein, *On Certainty*, §10, my emphasis.

[44] This controversial sense seems to imply that if a certain belief is *immediately* useful, it is true. But this is quite dubious, as Hilary Putnam explains: it is a "common misreading" of James. Perhaps the most famous misreading of James comes from Russell who ignores James's "obvious indications that what we have is a thematic statement, and not an attempt to formulate a definition of 'true.'" See Hilary Putnam's *Pragmatism* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1995), 8-9. What James actually says, in his sixth lecture from *Pragmatism*, "Pragmatism's Conception of Truth," is as follows: "'[t]he true,' *to put it very briefly*, is only the expedient in the way of our thinking, just as the right is only expedient in our way of behaving. Expedient in *almost any fashion*; and expedient in the long run and on the whole of course; for what meets expediently all the experience in sight won't necessarily meet all further experiences equally satisfactorily. Experience, as we know, has ways of *boiling over*, and making us correct our present formulas" [first two emphases are mine]. Reprinted in *Pragmatism & The Meaning of Truth* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1978), 106.

importance he places on the "*deed* over the word."[45] She

locates Wittgenstein among a "broadly conceived... family of

[pragmatic] philosophers who... stress... the primacy of

acting."[46] Moyal-Sharrock acknowledges that this makes him a

rather "unexceptional pragmatist,"[47] but what he succeeds in

doing, she argues, is "add[ing] a new strain to

pragmatism,"[48] a "logical" strain, but "logical *on no*

grounds."[49] This, she calls "Wittgenstein's *logical*

pragmatism."[50]

Moyal-Sharrock's characterization of Wittgenstein as a

logical pragmatist is interesting but, I think, misleading.

There are other affinities in *On Certainty* besides the

logically pragmatic one Moyal-Sharrock emphasizes. For

example, there is a very dominant *common sense* dimension

present,[51] and, as P.F. Strawson has indicated, there is

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[45] Moyal-Sharrock, "Logic in Action," 126.

[46] Ibid., 126, my emphasis. Moyal-Sharrock says she drew this distinction between broad and narrow pragmatism from a lecture by Robert Brandom entitled "Pragmatics and Pragmatisms," at the University of London in March 2000. Among the "broadly conceived" pragmatists, Moyal-Sharrock places Wittgenstein in with philosophers like C.S. Peirce and Hilary Putnam, philosophers who emphasize the primacy of practice.

[47] Ibid.

[48] Ibid.

[49] Ibid.

[50] Ibid., 128.

[51] Nicholas Wolterstorff, "Reid on Common Sense, with Wittgenstein's Assistance," *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly*, 74, no.3 (Summer 2000), 491-517; see Avrum Stroll's "Foundationalism & Common Sense" in *Philosophical Investigations* 10, (1987), 279-298. Also see Colin

also the presence of a *naturalist* dimension.[52] Moyal-Sharrock's decision to "give Wittgenstein's stance a name"[53] fails to recognize the breadth and depth of other equally important influences upon his thought. There is an *affinity* between Wittgenstein and pragmatism, but no more than the affinity between Wittgenstein and common sense or Wittgenstein and naturalism. I think it is *misleading* to characterize Wittgenstein as either a pragmatist, a common sense philosopher, or a naturalist. Rather than saddling Wittgenstein with the pragmatist label, Martin Benjamin has described Wittgenstein as having a "pragmatic temperament."[54] I think this is a better characterization. A pragmatic temperament avoids placing Wittgenstein into any particular camp and tacitly recognizes his wide range of thought.

Moyal-Sharrock also says Wittgenstein's logical

McGinn's *The Making of a Philosopher* (New York: Harper Collins, 2002), 152.

[52] This naturalism is a somewhat qualified account, following Strawson's model. See P.F. Strawson, *Skepticism & Naturalism: Some Varieties* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1984). I say more about this form of naturalism below.

[53] Moyal-Sharrock, "Logic in Action," 128. Sharrock says she wants to allow Wittgenstein's thought to emerge from the haze under which it has been obscured.

[54] Benjamin, *Philosophy & This Actual World*, 64. In his introduction, Benjamin explains that his approach "differs from the letter of the classical pragmatists," but "shares an important aspect-the *pragmatic temperament.*" This temperament, he says, "refuses to accept…sharp line[s]." Ibid., 3.

pragmatism is "logical *on no grounds*."[55] In chapter three I mentioned that some of our certainties are often times ignored or simply passed over; as these certainties are so fundamental, we don't even consider them, we just accept them without thought. Wittgenstein put it this way:

> Isn't the question this: 'What if you had to change your opinion even on these most fundamental things?' And to that the answer seems to me to be: 'You don't have to change it. That is just what their being 'fundamental' is.[56]

Moyal-Sharrock describes Wittgenstein's depiction of our certainties in terms of a *logical* know-how:[57] certainty is both *necessary* and *non-ratiocinated*. At first blush, this may seem an unusual use of "logical."[58] However, before Wittgenstein makes the transition from propositional certitude (hinge-propositions) to non-propositional action, he says these hinge-propositions play a "peculiar *logical* role"[59] for us. It is in this way that necessity is *peculiarly logical*. Moyal-Sharrock states that under

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[55] Moyal-Sharrock, "Logic in Action," 126.

[56] Wittgenstein, *On Certainty*, §512.

[57] Moyal-Sharrock, "Logic in Action," 128. G.H. von Wright, in a similar move, gives the name *Vor-Wissen*, "pre-knowledge," to this depiction of our basic beliefs, and says that this *Vor-Wissen* is not propositional knowledge but "a kind of *praxis*." See G.H. Von Wright, "Wittgenstein on Certainty," edited by John V. Canfield, Volume VIII, Knowing, Naming, Certainty, and Idealism (New York: Garland Publishing, 1986), 178. Wittgenstein tempts us to think in this direction when he talks about conceiving the certainty embedded in our form of life "as something which lies beyond being justified or unjustified; as it were as something animal," Wittgenstein, *On Certainty*, §§358, 359.

[58] I discussed this briefly in chapter three, 16-17. Here I again take up what Wittgenstein calls propositions with a "peculiar logical role."

[59] Wittgenstein, *On Certainty*, §136.

Wittgenstein's direction, *logical necessity* undergoes "a reformation."[60] "In Wittgenstein's hands," she tells us, "logical necessity sheds its metaphysical, meta-human features, and becomes *Einstellung*, an unhesitating attitude."[61] Moyal-Sharrock is right, at least in part. This necessity *is* understood in terms of an attitude, but because Wittgenstein also finds it "peculiar," rather than "reforming" it I believe he *distinguishes* it from what we might call "ordinary" logical necessity.

"Ordinary" logical necessity is a modal property and occurs in the language-game of logic, but "peculiar" logical necessity (*Einstellung*) is different: it lies outside the language-game of logic. Unfortunately, Wittgenstein glosses[62] over this distinction in *On Certainty*, but in *Remarks On The Foundations Of Mathematics*, he offers a fuller explication:

> [T]he logical "must" is a component part of the propositions of logic, and these are not propositions of human natural history.…The agreement of humans that is a presupposition of logic is not an agreement in opinions, much less in opinions on questions of logic.[63]

If we break this passage down, "the logical 'must,'" that

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[60] Moyal-Sharrock, "Logic in Action," 133.

[61] Ibid., 133-134.

[62] Moyal-Sharrock also points this out. Ibid., 133.

[63] Wittgenstein, *Remarks On The Foundations Of Mathematics*, edited by G. H. von Wright, Rush Rhees, G. E. M. Anscombe, translated by G. E. M. Anscombe (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, first printed 1956, reprinted 1998), Part VI, §49. I cited this passage earlier in chapter three, 24.

is, logical necessity, "is a component of," or occurs within, "the propositions of logic," the language-game of logic. But the language-game of logic, says Wittgenstein, is different from "human natural history," in fact, the language-game of logic presupposes it. If I understand Wittgenstein, he is referring to something *other than* our language-game of logic, something *prior* to it. This is not a "reformation" of logical necessity but a very fine distinction between two kinds of necessity. In Wittgenstein's hands, then, "logical necessity" does not undergo a "reformation," as Moyal-Sharrock contends, but is instead *distinguished* from its "peculiar" counterpart. What is prior to the language-game of logic, for that matter, what is prior to *all* our language-games is something *peculiarly logical*, a "peculiar 'must'", an "unhesitating attitude." This "unhesitating attitude" is uncovered through what Wittgenstein calls our "human natural history." He is never very clear about what he means by this, but in *Philosophical Investigations*, he offers a hint:

> What we are supplying are really remarks on the *natural history of human beings*; we are not contributing curiosities however, but observations which no one has doubted, but which have escaped remark only because they are always before our eyes.[64]

And again, in *Remarks On The Philosophy Of Psychology*, he offers this further clue:

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[64] Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, §415.

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> The facts of human natural history…are difficult for us to find out, for our talk passes them by, it is occupied with other things. (In the same way we tell someone: 'Go into the shop and buy…'--not: 'Put your left foot in front of your right foot etc. etc., then put coins down on the counter, etc. etc.').[65]

I believe Wittgenstein is telling us that our unhesitating attitude stems from our (human) natural history of performing non-ratiocinated acts. Because these acts do not explicitly cross our minds we never doubt them. When we tell someone to go to the bakery and buy a loaf of bread, she does not become paralyzed with overwhelming doubt. She may have *some* doubt concerning, say, the *whereabouts* of the bakery or *what kind* of bread is being requested, but her doubt does not require explicit instructions how to walk, what it means "to walk," whether she has legs, what a bakery is, what bread is, what coins are, what coins are used for, where to place them, etc. For Wittgenstein, doubts such as these do not arise. His point here is that we hold many convictions without explicit thought and in total absence of argumentation. We *cannot help*[66] but accept many things. This unhesitating attitude is *peculiarly logical* in that it is necessary and has developed *naturally* from our (*human*)

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[65] Wittgenstein, *Remarks On The Philosophy Of Psychology*, edited by G. E. M. Anscombe and G. H. von Wright, translated by G. E. M. Anscombe, Volume I (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, first published in 1980, reprinted 1998), §78.

[66] Strawson uses this phrase, comparing this to the naturalism we find in Hume. I look more closely at Strawson's position below. See Strawson, *Skepticism & Naturalism: Some Varieties*, 11.

history.

Although "peculiar," there is nothing philosophically "new"[67] about this kind of necessity. P.F. Strawson reminds us "it is at least as old as Hume."[68] Indeed, Wittgenstein's "human natural history" is remarkably similar to the kind of naturalism we find in Hume's *A Treatise of Human Nature.*[69] A main part of Hume's project was to give a naturalistic account of how we come to believe certain things about the world. For instance, why do we believe there is a world independent of us, what is the source of this belief? According to Hume, it cannot be the result of argumentation. In fact, our belief in an external world is not founded on argument *at all,*[70] but by a *natural necessity.*

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[67] Moyal-Sharrock insists that Wittgenstein "adds a *new* strain to pragmatism." Moyal-Sharrock, "Logic in Action," 126.

[68] Strawson, *Skepticism & Naturalism: Some Varieties*, 10.

[69] I am omitting detailed discussion about what Strawson has called the "striking inconsistency" in Hume. "[H]aving said that the existence of body is a point which we must take for granted in *all* our reasonings, [Hume] then conspicuously does *not* take it for granted in the reasoning which he addresses to the causal question. Indeed those reasonings famously point to a skeptical question." Strawson, *Skepticism & Naturalism: Some Varieties*, 13. This "striking inconsistency" is acknowledged by Hume in Book 1, Part 4, Section 7, *passim*. Still, Strawson cannot help but "speak of two Humes: Hume the skeptic and Hume the naturalist." Strawson, *Skepticism & Naturalism: Some Varieties*, 12.

[70] As Robert Fogelin says, "for the great bulk of mankind is wholly unacquainted with any arguments on these matters. They believe, but do so in a total absence of justifying arguments...[F]or Hume, the common belief in an external world is not based on any sort of reasoning to begin with and cannot be supported by sound reasoning after the fact." See Robert Fogelin, "Hume's Skepticism," *The Cambridge Companion to Hume*, edited by David Fate Norton (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 90-116. Similarly, Strawson says Hume was really making a very simple point: "whatever arguments may be produced on one side or the other of the question, we simply *cannot help* believing in the existence of body, and *cannot help* forming beliefs and expectations...the

> Nature, by an absolute and *uncontrollable necessity* has determin'd us to judge as well as to breathe and feel…[and]Whoever has taken the pains to refute the cavilsof this total skepticism, has really disputed without antagonist, and endeavored by arguments to establish a faculty which Nature has antecedently implanted in the mind and rendered unavoidable.[71]

"[T]he skeptic," says Hume, "*must assent* to the principle concerning the existence of body,… nature has not left this to his choice, and has doubtless esteemed it an affair of too great importance to be entrusted to our uncertain reasonings and speculations."[72] That an external world exists, says Hume, "is a point, which we must take for granted in all our reasonings."[73]

The naturalistic themes we find in Hume are paralleled in *On Certainty*.[74] The peculiar necessity that unfolds in our *human natural history* is not based on reasoning or agreement "we simply cannot help" forming certain beliefs (convictions) about the world around us, it is just what we

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pretensions of critical thinking are completely overridden and suppressed by Nature, by an inescapable natural commitment to belief." Strawson, *Skepticism & Naturalism: Some Varieties*, 11-13.

[71] David Hume, *Treatise of Human Nature*, edited by L.A. Selby-Bigg, Book 1, section 2 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, first edition 1888, reprinted 1967), 183, my emphasis.

[72] Ibid., 187, my emphasis.

[73] Ibid.

[74] Strawson goes so far as to say "the most powerful latter-day exponent of [Hume's naturalism] is Wittgenstein" See Strawson, *Skepticism & Naturalism: Some Varieties*, 10. I don't wish to suggest that Wittgenstein was actually a Humean in disguise. In fact, it is not even clear that Wittgenstein ever read Hume. My only point here is that *what* Wittgenstein is saying in *On Certainty* is not unprecedented. We might say Wittgenstein had a Humean naturalistic temperament.

do. It manifests in our actions, actions that occur in our *form of life.* Wittgenstein, struggling to articulate this view, says at §§ 358-359:

§358 Now I would like to regard this certainty, not as something akin to hastiness or superficiality, but as a form of life. (That is very badly expressed and probably badly thought as well.)

§359 But that means I want to conceive it as something that lies beyond being justified or unjustified; as it were, as something animal.

And again at § 475:

§475 I want to regard man here as an animal; as a primitive being to which one grants instinct but no ratiocination.

Wittgenstein's naturalism is part of our *biological* human nature, that which has, through evolution, determined how we act and react. But our *biological* nature is only *part* of our history,[75] another important component is what Moyal-Sharrock calls our "*humanness.*"[76] Human natural history *is* a history of biology, a history of evolution, but it also consists of a *social* and *cultural* history. "Commanding, questioning, recounting, chatting are as much a part of our [human] natural history as walking, eating drinking, playing,"[77] says Wittgenstein. Our history is both

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[75] As I mentioned earlier, it would be misleading to pigeonhole Wittgenstein into one particular group. In this case, it would be wrong to identify Wittgenstein solely with *biological naturalism.* Again, I think Wittgenstein had affinities with several groups, e.g., pragmatism, common sense, and naturalism.

[76] Moyal-Sharrock, "Logic in Action," 144.

[77] Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, §25. Even mathematics and logic are, for Wittgenstein, "anthropological phenomena," Wittgenstein, *Remarks On The Foundations Of Mathematics*, Part VII, §33.

biological and "anthropological."[78]

Because of our biological and anthropological constitution, our natural history has imposed on us *human* constraints: what is *humanly* sensible and what is *humanly* nonsensical.[79] We are, as Moyal-Sharrock puts it, "*humanly-bound*" by these parameters of sensibility. Our history then brings with it boundaries *conditioned* by how *we are* and how the *world is*. We cannot exceed the scope of our human natural history, because our human natural history *determines* the scope. From our human natural history emerges a *natural human necessity*.

This, however, is not "the standard philosophical view" concerning logical necessity. The standard view, as Moyal-Sharrock reminds us, encompasses "not only the human world but *all possible worlds*."[80] The standard view then *exceeds* our bounds of human sensibility[81] and, so long as logical

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[78] Moyal-Sharrock, "Logic in Action," 146.

[79] 'Nonsense' is not a negative term for Wittgenstein but a technical one, applied to word/s that stand outside the bounds of sense.

[80] Moyal-Sharrock, "Logic in Action," 141.

[81] It is for this reason, Moyal-Sharrock believes Wittgenstein's use of logical necessity undergoes a "reformation." "…in the face of what it makes sense to say or think about certain things…the reform of logical necessity [proceeds] from its traditional depiction as an inexorable *law* to an inexorable *attitude*." Moyal-Sharrock, "Logic in Action," 133, citation slightly altered. I have already voiced opposition to this view and see no evidence to support this position. Wittgenstein never says implicitly or explicitly that he is altering, changing, or "reforming," logical necessity. What he *does* say explicitly is that there is a "different," a "peculiar," "another" *kind* of logical necessity. Again, Wittgenstein is not reforming logical necessity, he is distinguishing it from the peculiar logical necessity, the natural necessity that

necessity does not violate the law of non-contradiction, it is limited only by the imagination. We immediately rule out contradictions like round squares because they are unintelligible to us. But a scenario like Russell's hypothesis that the earth was created five-minute ago, while wildly *improbable*, is nonetheless *logically intelligible*.[82] Although we can understand such scenarios, intelligibility has had a "bewitching"[83] effect on philosophers. Starting from our *ability* to simply *imagine* intelligible, non-contradictory scenarios, philosophers, in the Cartesian tradition, have pushed imagination well beyond the boundaries of what is *humanly* sensible. Moyal-Sharrock rightly warns of the *illusion of possibility*: "[a] thought that has lost its human-boundedness… run[ning] wild on the uncharted tracks of the imagination is not a 'possibility,'" she says, but simply "a thought."[84] In order to contain these incredible, wild running thoughts, philosophical

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manifests itself in our human natural history. Rather than reforming logical necessity, I believe the most we can say is that Wittgenstein illustrates the shortcomings of relying upon "ordinary" logical necessity. One cannot extend "ordinary" logical necessity beyond the language-game of logic in an effort to explain, in some absolute sense, what is "objectively-certain," *humanly speaking*.

[82] I discussed Russell's hypothesis in chapter one, 10. See Bertrand Russell, *The Analysis of Mind* (London: Routledge, reprinted 1992), 159-160.

[83] At one point in *Zettel*, Wittgenstein says, "[o]ur motto might be: 'Let us not be bewitched.'" Wittgenstein, *Zettel*, edited by G. E. M. Anscombe and G. H. von Wright, translated by G. E. M. Anscombe, second edition (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers Ltd., 1967), §690.

[84] Moyal-Sharrock, "Logic in Action," 143.

speculation must be constrained, but constrained by what? How are we to reign in this age old model?

In chapter one, I discussed "Moore's Division of Doubt" as a way to distinguish the global (Cartesian) doubt from the kind of reasonable or "real" doubt that *jars* the man in the street.[85] The former sort of doubt despite its logical permissibility, is *extra*-ordinary and can be pushed to quite excessive and absurd heights, well beyond what reasonable people encounter. Conversely, in ordinary contexts, although doubt *is* logically permissible here, it is constrained by "local" boundaries or rules. These local rules keep skeptical questions from reaching the level of absurdity permitted in the Cartesian model. These "local" rules are our "logically *human* parameters." So, in order to contain these incredible, wild running thoughts, philosophical speculation must be constrained by logically *human* parameters, or, as Hilary Putnam says, by logical parameters, "*humanly speaking.*"[86] Exceeding these parameters may be *logically intelligible*, but not *humanly sensible*.

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[85] This "jarring" doubt is how David Annis describes it. See David Annis, "A Contextual Theory of Epistemic Justification," reprinted in *The Theory of Knowledge*, 3rd edition, edited by Louis Pojmon (Stamford: Wadsworth, 2003), 249. It is Annis' division that I base Moore's division on, as I say in my chapter one, 13.

[86] Moyal-Sharrock attributes this phrase to Hilary Putnam, who, in turn attributes it to David Wiggins. See Hilary Putnam, "Two Philosophical Perspectives" *Reason, Truth, and History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), 49-74.

If our bounds of sense are constrained by logically *human* parameters, our sensibility must be less than absolute; it does not (cannot) extend to *all possible worlds*. According to Moyal-Sharrock, there cannot be anything like *absolute necessity*.[87] But because there is no *absolute necessity*, this does *not* mean we lack *objectivity*, nor does it mean we cannot be, as Moyal-Sharrock puts it, "*objectively certain*" of many things.

All in all, I believe Moyal-Sharrock's article makes significant contributions to a better understanding of *On Certainty*.[88] Chief among them is her observation that for

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[87] "What *is* less formidable and utterly implausible, is the chimera of a superhuman, supernatural, imperturbable *absolute* logical necessity which by dint of being applicable to *all possible worlds* makes a farce of ours-forcing us, as it does, to consider evil geniuses, brains in vats, and zombies as *real* possibilities in our world." Moyal-Sharrock, "Logic in Action," 145.

[88] One of these contributions include her survey of all of Wittgenstein's uses of hinge-propositions. She then classifies them into four types. The first of these hinge propositions are, what she calls "linguistic hinges." Linguistic hinges are mentioned as benchmarks against which the other three types of hinge propositions are measured. They are not objects of analysis but correspond to Wittgenstein's grammatical rules. The second type include propositions that we might classify as more applicable to particular individuals, or what she calls "personal hinges." These are propositions that make up part of our subjective world picture, they make up the logical bedrock of the speaker, for example, "I am now sitting in a chair," or "I have just had lunch" (*On Certainty*, §659). That they are idiosyncratic does not preclude their being necessary bounds of sense for an individual for, like all other hinges, Sharrock explains, personal hinges are not empirically or cognitively grounded. There are two remaining types of hinge-propositions, *universal* and *local*. There are those hinge propositions that universally "stand fast" for any reasonable person. This is the belief system of all normal human beings. This belief system is poised from a very early age. For example, "There are physical objects" (*On Certainty*, §35). The second type of propositions might be discovered and supported by the best available information, but in light of *new* evidence, could be subject to revision. They play a pivotal role, serving as a standard, a benchmark for a community of people at a particular time. For example, "The earth is round," (*On Certainty*, §291) or "No one has ever been on the moon" (*On Certainty*, §106). See Moyal-

Wittgenstein, our certainties must be understood in terms of "a *know-how*, an *attitude*, a *way of acting*."[89] From this observation, she draws a distinction between humanly possible scenarios (what is *humanly-bound*) and humanly imaginable ones. Moyal-Sharrock makes two further contributions contributions that, I believe, go further than Grayling's interpretation. She recognizes that we can be "*objectively* certain" while not being "*absolutely* certain," and also recognizes that the kind of foundationalism in *On Certainty* is different than the old Cartesian sort.

Although I agree with much of Moyal-Sharrock's article, I am unwilling to completely endorse it. My disagreements are minor, but as I stated above, I believe Moyal-Sharrock should not have tried to categorize Wittgenstein as a (logical) pragmatist. His philosophical views cover too wide a terrain and, because of this, I think it is more accurate, *pace* Benjamin, to define him as having a "pragmatic temperament." I also believe Moyal-Sharrock could have given a fuller account of Wittgenstein's uncharacteristic use of the term "logical." I think she should have attempted this for two reasons: first, I believe if she had investigated the matter in more detail, she would have determined that Wittgenstein was carefully *distinguishing* between what I

Sharrock, "Logic in Action," 129.

[89] Ibid., 125.

call "ordinary logical necessity" and "peculiar logical necessity," not "reforming" it. Second, I believe Moyal-Sharrock could have done more to explain how this uncharacteristic use of "logical" arises out of naturalism. She hints at this in many places, but never explicitly says it.

A Highly Original Form Of Foundationalism (Stroll's View)

In the penultimate chapter of his book, *Moore and Wittgenstein On Certainty*, Avrum Stroll says,

> for Wittgenstein, the applicability of doubt is one of the features that defines the language game,… where doubt is *inapplicable* we are dealing with matters that do not belong to the language game. A sub-case of this is… a highly original form of foundationalism… The foundations of the language game stand *outside of* and yet *support* the language game.[90]

What are these foundations? Stroll cites a handful of Wittgenstein's metaphors that stand for certainty[91] including, "the hinges on which others turn,"[92] "the rock bottom of our convictions,"[93] "the substratum of all my inquiring,"[94] and "that which stands fast for me and many

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[90] Stroll, *Moore and Wittgenstein on Certainty*, 138.

[91] Ibid.

[92] Wittgenstein, *On Certainty*, §341.

[93] Ibid., §248.

[94] Ibid., §162.

others."[95] Certainty, as a "frame" or "hinge" to the language-game, is not to be included as *part* of the language-game; rather certainty offers *external support* to the language-game but is not subject to the rules and requirements we apply *within* it, e.g., doubt, justification, proof, evidence, truth or falsehood.[96] It is this relationship between certainty and language-games that Stroll calls "Wittgenstein's foundationalism."[97] Certitude, he says, "stands in a foundational relationship to the language-game itself."[98]

Stroll offers some surprising statistical evidence in support of his thesis. Wittgenstein, he says, uses "explicitly foundational language"[99] in "more than sixty places" throughout *On Certainty*, roughly a tenth of the book. In addition, there are other, less explicit passages that have the "same foundational effect."[100] With such

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[95] Ibid., §116.

[96] Stroll, *Moore and Wittgenstein on Certainty*, 138.

[97] Ibid., 138.

[98] Ibid., 141.

[99] By 'explicitly foundational language' Stroll says he means Wittgenstein is using "three German words (and certain grammatical variations of them. These are *Boden* ('ground,' 'soil,') which occurs rarely; *Grund*, ('ground,' 'base,' 'bottom,' 'foundation'), which occurs frequently; and *Fundament* ('foundation,' 'basis') which," says Stroll, "occurs more frequently than *Boden* and less frequently than *Grund*." Stroll, *Moore and Wittgenstein On Certainty*, 142. I will say more about two of the three terms listed above, in chapter six.

[100] "[T]he text is replete with references that use a different idiom," says Stroll, e.g., *Gerust, feststehen, Ursache, festhalten.* See Stroll, *Moore and Wittgenstein On Certainty*, 142.

"overwhelming evidence,"[101] Stroll thinks it's clear:

Wittgenstein's foundationalism is "a major theme"[102] in *On Certainty*. Unlike Grayling however, Stroll's detection of a "foundational theme" does not elicit "conflict" or "tension." For Stroll, Wittgenstein's foundationalism is the mark of "high originality."[103]

While contrasting Wittgenstein's foundationalism with traditional (Cartesian) foundationalism, Stroll describes a characteristic unique to traditionalists. What traditional foundationalists identify as "foundational," he says, invariably belongs "to the *same category* as the items which rest upon them,"[104] a doctrine Stroll calls, "*homogeneous foundationalism.*"[105]

> [M]ost traditional forms of foundationalism, even those which are non-epistemological, assume or presuppose that what they identify as foundational items must belong to the same category as those items that rest upon them. Thus, for instance, the *cogito* is itself a piece of knowledge, though more fundamental than certain other pieces of knowledge that

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[101] Ibid.

[102] Ibid.

[103] Ibid., 138.

[104] Ibid., 141, my emphasis. It need not always be epistemic *propositions*, e.g., the *cogito*. Stroll notices a distinct similarity in all traditional foundational systems for example, in axiomatic logical systems like the one developed by Whitehead and Russell in *Principia Mathematica*. They begin, says Stroll, with a base "that expands upward and outward from it, forming a logical [system]." Ibid., 144. Here, as in a Cartesian system, Whitehead and Russell's system rests upon a set of primitives, five basic axioms, which was later reduced to one (due to Sheffer and his famous "Sheffer's stroke").

[105] Stroll, *Moore and Wittgenstein on Certainty*, 145.

depend on it.[106]

As Stroll correctly points out, Wittgenstein rejects this doctrine.[107] Certainty is neither a part nor a degree of knowledge.[108] As we've seen, for Wittgenstein, "'[k]nowledge' and 'certainty' belong to different *categories*."[109] His foundationalism consists in an important divide between these two concepts. It is Wittgenstein's rejection of this doctrine, that separates him from the traditionalists.[110]

I believe Stroll's argument that Wittgenstein is a new kind of foundationalist[111] is significant for two reasons: first, he recognizes the importance of Wittgenstein's move from certainty as something *propositional*, i.e., "hinge-propositions," to certainty as achieved in the things we *do*.[112] Second, Stroll understands that for Wittgenstein,

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[106] Ibid., 141.

[107] Ibid.

[108] See appendix, 16-18.

[109] Wittgenstein, *On Certainty*, §308.

[110] Stroll, *Moore and Wittgenstein on Certainty*, 145-146.

[111] Stroll offers variations on this "kind of foundationalism," e.g., he refers to Wittgenstein as a "foundationalist *of sorts*," and sometimes as a foundationalist "of no conventional sort," See Stroll, *Moore and Wittgenstein on Certainty*, 141, 143, respectively.

[112] Stroll put it this way: "[w]hy did Wittgenstein eventually discard the propositional account [of certainty] in favor of one that is not propositional? I believe the answer is that he recognized that if one thinks of certitude in propositional terms-as Descartes and Moore did-the tendency to think of such propositions as being *known* would be irresistible….[So] Wittgenstein began to move away from the propositional account….[H]e began to conceive of certainty as a mode of acting." Stroll, *Moore and Wittgenstein on Certainty*, 151.

knowledge and other language-games presuppose the "necessity"[113] of a *non-dependent*,[114] non-propositional, certainty. It is, he says, a "necessary condition" for Wittgenstein's foundationalism. Non-dependency is a necessity but, as Wittgenstein himself described it, and as we saw in both chapter three and the Moyal-Sharrock section above, it is a "*peculiar* necessity." This peculiarity is also acknowledged by Stroll as making an important contribution to a new kind of foundationalism.[115] Certainty unfolds through *human natural history;* "it is there -- like our life."[116]

Despite the merits of Stroll's argument, there are however, aspects I find surprising, awkward, and misleading.[117] For instance, Stroll insists that Wittgenstein

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[113] This "non-dependent, necessary condition," is what Wittgenstein referred to as the "peculiar logical necessity" that unfolds in our *human natural history*.

[114] "Non-dependency" is one among nine "strands" Stroll says help "flesh-out" the model of Wittgenstein's foundationalism. These nine strands include: (1) stratification, (2) aberrancy, (3) non-dependence, (4) particularism or Methodism, (5) publicity, (6) negational absurdity, (7) absorption, (8) certitude, and (9) standing fast. See Stroll, *Moore and Wittgenstein on Certainty,* 148-156.

[115] Under his third strand, *Non-dependence,* Stroll says that "the relationship between the foundations and what they support is one of presupposition. By 'presupposition' I do not mean...[that] the truth of a given presupposition, S, is a necessary condition for the truth or falsity of a related proposition, S'. This formulation will not do for Wittgenstein because it ascribes truth or falsity to the presupposition S." See Stroll, *Moore and Wittgenstein on Certainty,* 151.

[116] Wittgenstein, *On Certainty,* §559.

[117] There are other problems with Stroll's position as well, but these are not directly related to Wittgenstein as a foundationalist, rather, these problems stem from Stroll's misrepresentation of Quine. In a paper entitled "Quine, Wittgenstein, and Holism," Roger Gibson examines this

provides not one but *two* distinct accounts for the grounds

of certainty. Wittgenstein's foundationalism, he says, comes

in "two different forms, one *relative*, the other

absolute."[118] I believe this is only partially correct. This

"absolute form,"[119] we learn, is Wittgenstein's *new*

foundationalism: non-propositional certitude *standing*

outside yet at the same time *supporting* propositional

language-games. Stroll makes a strong case for this absolute

form of foundationalism and, as I have indicated above, I am

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misrepresentation. Stroll's main thrust in his final chapter primarily
focuses on what Quine says in "Two Dogmas of Empiricism," to the
exclusion of what Quine says elsewhere. Stroll says that "[t]he central
issue is whether there is something that stands fast in the sense that
it is neither eliminable nor revisable." Stroll, *Moore and Wittgenstein*
on Certainty, 166. Stroll's view is that *nothing* stands fast for Quine,
while something *does* stand fast for Wittgenstein. "There is thus a
sensible limit to revisability," says Stroll, "it has its parameters and
rules. One of these is that not everything is revisable, including
revisability itself. There is thus something that does stand fast,"
ibid., 177. Stroll then sides with Wittgenstein for certainty against
this kind of global skepticism stemming from Quine's revisability
thesis. The problem however, says Gibson, is that Stroll based his
entire construal of Quine's position on a few passages from "Two Dogmas
of Empiricism." A more balanced construal of Quine's position would
include two important points: (1) Quine's formulation of the holism
thesis refers explicitly to scientific theories, *not common sense*, and
(2) in a paper entitled, "The Scope and Language of Science," Quine
seems to agree with Wittgenstein and Moore that to "disavow the very
core of common sense, to require evidence for that which both the
physicist and the man in the street accept as platitudinous, is no
laudable perfectionism; it is pompous confusion." See Roger Gibson,
"Quine, Wittgenstein, and Holism," *Wittgenstein and Quine*, edited by
Robert L. Arrington and Hans-Johann Glock (New York: Routledge, 1996),
92. Also see W.V.O Quine, "The Scope and Language of Science," *The Ways*
of Paradox and Other Essays (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1976
revised and enlarged edition), 230.

[118] Stroll, *Moore and Wittgenstein on Certainty*, 138.

[119] Because it "develop[ed] gradually as the text was being written,"
Stroll sometimes calls this absolute form "the later account," ibid.,
146. This "later account" developed from an "earlier" *propositional*
account of Wittgenstein's certitude, i.e., his hinge-propositions, ibid.
This "early account" Stroll calls Wittgenstein's "relative
foundationalism."

inclined to agree with his argument. However, I find his argument for a "relative form" of foundationalism in *On Certainty* surprising in light of his earlier testimony concerning traditional foundationalism, or what he dismissively referred to as "the doctrine of *homogeneous foundations*."[120]

Recall, Stroll had said that this doctrine assumes or presupposes that what is identified as foundational must belong to the same category as those items that rest upon them. So, for instance, the *cogito* is itself knowledge, though more fundamental than certain other knowledge claims that depend on it.[121] What does this mean then for Wittgenstein's hinge-propositions? If hinge-propositions serve as a *propositional* account of certitude, then aren't some propositions that occur within the language-game more fundamental than others? Wouldn't these hinge-propositions serve as the foundation for ordinary knowledge claims? According to Stroll's doctrine of homogeneous foundations, hinge-propositions would have to belong to the *same category* as the remainder of those ordinary propositions which rest upon them. The certainty of one proposition (a hinge proposition) as opposed to another (ordinary proposition) would differ *at most* in *degree*, not in *kind*. On Stroll's

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[120] Stroll, *Moore and Wittgenstein on Certainty*, 141.

[121] Ibid.

interpretation then, within the language-game of knowledge, Wittgenstein *would be* a homogeneous foundationalist.

Not only is Stroll aware of this "interesting and important criticism," he thinks "it can be neutralized."[122] But his attempt at neutralizing the problem seems to quickly reduce to absurdity. Although he is right to describe Wittgenstein's hinge-propositions as "not ordinary propositions," he argues that his doctrine of homogeneous foundations does not apply here because Wittgenstein's hinge *propositions* are "not really propositions at all," rather, they are "proposition-like."[123] But when is a proposition *not* really a proposition? When is a proposition, proposition-*like*?

It seems clear Stroll is trying to say something like what Wittgenstein says at §308 of *On Certainty*: "not everything that has the form of an empirical proposition is one."[124] Stroll's awkward description of hinge-propositions notwithstanding, there is something "peculiar" about them, as we saw in the Moyal-Sharrock section above. Not only are hinge-propositions peculiar because of their *human* necessity, as Moyal-Sharrock maintains, they are also peculiar because they are convictions we often do not

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[122] Ibid., 146.

[123] Ibid.

express. Rarely, do we find a context in which uttering a certainty is appropriate. Although we are certainly *capable* of uttering these convictions, when we do, they seem not only peculiar, but trivial, e.g., "The world exists," "I have a body," "There are other human beings." They sound so trivial in fact, they "go without saying."[125]

Despite his muddled description of hinge-propositions, it is to Stroll's credit that he recognizes their peculiar status. In an earlier chapter, Stroll's description is less ambiguous:

> some propositions stand fast for us and are exempt from doubt, whereas other propositions do not stand fast and are not exempt from doubt. The hinge metaphor brings out the point beautifully. It discriminates between two categories of propositions: those that are certain and not susceptible to doubt and those that express knowledge claims, where doubting is apposite. The idea that some propositions are beyond doubt gradually gives way in *On Certainty* to a different, non-propositional account of certainty.[126]

Stroll does however face problems of ambiguity elsewhere. For instance, he describes what stands-fast in the language-

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[124] Wittgenstein, *On Certainty*, §308.

[125] Propositions that *go without saying* may sound reminiscent of an earlier Wittgensteinian theme, namely, *showing and not saying*. Stroll also recognizes this parallel, tracing the peculiarity of hinge-propositions back to the *Tractatus*. "The term he used for their 'peculiar' status [in the *Tractatus*] was 'pseudo-proposition.'" Stroll, *Moore and Wittgenstein on Certainty*, 146. "The concept of a 'hinge-proposition,'" he adds, "is his newest attempt to indicate their status," ibid. Others have argued for a continuous thread in Wittgenstein's philosophy from his early to late periods, most notably John Koethe. See his book, *The Continuity of Wittgenstein's Thought* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1996). Also, for a discussion on "what goes without saying," see my chapter four, the section entitled "Legitimate Matters Of Inquiry" & What "Goes Without Saying," 11-16.

[126] Stroll, *Moore and Wittgenstein on Certainty*, 134.

game as "foundational."

It seems to me that what "stands-fast" in the language-game could, without distortion, be expressed through *other non*-foundational theories, e.g., Quine's holism. In Stroll's relative foundationalism as in Quine's holism, virtually every proposition is up for revision, *but not equally so.*[127] Revising certain propositions might be avoided because it would be too disruptive for the system. Again, Wittgenstein's "relative" knowledge does not mean it cannot also be *objective*, as I've suggested both above and in the previous chapter, because something is *not* absolute *does not mean* anything goes; it does not mean that knowledge is *merely subjective*. But it seems clear to me that some of the *more secure* propositions within the language-game can be described in either *relative* foundationalist terms or in holistic nomenclature. Wittgenstein exhibits this in a number of passages:

§105 All testing, all confirmation and disconfirmation of a hypothesis takes place already within a system.…The system is not so much the point of departure, as the element in which arguments have their life.

§140 We do not learn the practice of making empirical judgments by learning rules: we are taught judgments and their connection with other judgments. A totality of judgments is made plausible to us.

§141 When we first begin to believe anything, what we believe

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[127] As Wittgenstein says, "[t]he propositions describing it are not all equally subject to testing." Wittgenstein, *On Certainty*, §162. Similarly, Quine has his *maxim of minimum mutilation*. See W.V.O. Quine, *Philosophy of Logic*, second edition (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1986), 7.

is not a single proposition, it is a whole system of propositions. (Light dawns gradually over the whole.)

§142 It is not single axioms that strike me as obvious, it is a system in which consequences and premises give one another mutual support.

§144 The child learns to believe a host of things. I.e. it learns to act according to these beliefs. Bit by bit there forms a system of what is believed, and in that system some things stand unshakably fast and some are more or less liable to shift. What stands fast does so, not because it is intrinsically obvious or convincing; it is rather held fast by what lies around it.

§152 I do not explicitly learn the propositions that stand fast for me. I can discover them subsequently like the axis around which a body rotates. This axis is not fixed in the sense that anything holds it fast, but the movement around it determines its immobility.

§225 What I hold fast to is not *one* proposition but a nest of propositions.

§248 I have arrived at the rock bottom of my convictions. And one might almost say that these foundation-walls are carried by the whole house.

§410 Our knowledge forms an enormous system. And only within this system has a particular bit the value we give it.

I believe Stroll's conclusion for a "relative-foundationalism" would be too narrow for Wittgenstein.[128]

Stroll's thesis may be aided by rejecting such a problematic

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[128] My point in this section is to show that Stroll ought not refer to Wittgenstein as a "relative foundationalist" because, in some cases depending on the context and circumstances, we'll want to emphasize certain foundational beliefs, in others we'll emphasize coherence, and in still others, we won't want to talk at all about what's more important. Within language-games, the extent to which various elements cohere is certainly an important consideration. But for me, and I think for Wittgenstein, foundational certitude is more basic or fundamental than coherence as a criterion *within* particular language-games. Sure there will also be what some might call "foundational" beliefs *within* some language-games. With respect to language-games I think I am closer to Susan Haack's "foundherentism" or something like that. I don't want to play the game of "what's more basic or fundamental or foundational" when talking about how we evaluate claims *within* language-games. Wittgensteinians are sensitive to context. They don't make pronouncements covering everything (the "craving for generality").

label as "foundationalism"[129] when it is applied to propositions occurring in the language-game. For although it is true that some propositions occurring therein enjoy "objectively certain" status, this status, it seems can be considered either "foundational" or "holistic."

Paradoxically, I believe Stroll's greatest contribution to a better understanding of *On Certainty* is one he never explicitly makes. His assessment of traditional, homogeneous foundationalism,[130] can be contrasted with what we might call "*non*-traditional, *non*-homogeneous foundationalism." If homogeneous foundationalists identify what is "foundational" as belonging "to the same category as the items which rest upon them,"[131] then *non*-homogeneous foundationalists identify two *different* categories: propositional knowledge and non-propositional, non-ratiocinated action; where the latter offers "foundational" support for the former. I believe Wittgenstein is a *non*-homogeneous foundationalist.

Blending Strengths

In this chapter I have tried to identify the strengths and weaknesses of three interpretations of *On Certainty*. While no single view proved totally satisfactory, I believe

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[129] I will discuss the problems with the foundational metaphor in chapter six.

[130] Stroll, *Moore and Wittgenstein on Certainty*, 145.

each had something to offer. Grayling, Moyal-Sharrock, and Stroll all recognized (in varying degrees) a foundational element present in *On Certainty*. I now turn to chapter six where I will attempt to blend the strengths of each position into a fourth, more adequate, position.

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[131] Ibid., 141.

Chapter 6: Developing A New Kind of Foundationalism

> I believe that my originality (if that is the right word) is an originality belonging to the soil rather than the seed.…Sow a seed in my soil and it will grow differently than it would in any other soil.
>
> -Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Culture & Value*

Blending Strengths For A More Adequate Position

In chapter five I examined the strengths and weaknesses of three scholarly views of Wittgenstein's *On Certainty*. Although none proved entirely satisfactory, I believe their strengths may be combined in a new, fourth position. This fourth position then will be a synthesis of the principal insights of Grayling, Moyal-Sharrock, and Stroll. By combining their strengths, I will provide a better understanding of the *new kind* of foundationalism that Wittgenstein was developing in *On Certainty*. I will now summarize each of these insights and then show how they may be integrated into a fourth, more adequate position.

Principal Contributions & Insights

A.C. Grayling's principal contribution is his recognition that "something like" foundationalism and relativism are both present in *On Certainty*. Although he was mistaken in believing that these two "themes" were in conflict, Grayling was correct to emphasize their overwhelming presence throughout the work. He does not

investigate the *kind* of foundationalism present but recognizes it as something new, "a reinvention, almost from scratch…of a broadly foundational stamp."[1] His observation of the presence of relativism is equally important. Language-games are (in an unproblematic way) "relativistic,"[2] and, as Moyal-Sharrock and Stroll both argue, are supported by a "reinvented" foundationalism.

Grayling's contribution is important, but, as I argued in chapter five, it is severely flawed.[3] Turning to Daniele Moyal-Sharrock, her contributions are more insightful and more numerous. Chief among them is her observation that for Wittgenstein, our convictions must be understood "in terms of a *know-how*, an *attitude*, a *way of acting*."[4] Certainty is manifested in non-propositional, non-ratiocinated action. They are also *necessary*, but this "necessity" is *not* that of the traditional, "logical"[5] sort, nor is it, as Moyal-Sharrock mistakenly contends, a "reformed"[6] logical

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[1] A.C. Grayling, "Wittgenstein On Skepticism & Certainty," *Wittgenstein: A Critical Reader*, edited by Hans-Johann Glock (Oxford & Malden: Blackwell Publishers, 2001), 305.

[2] Ibid., 306.

[3] See chapter five, 2-8.

[4] Daniele Moyal-Sharrock, "Logic in Action: Wittgenstein's *Logical Pragmatism* and the Impotence of Skepticism," *Philosophical Investigations* 26, no.2 (April 2003): 125.

[5] I discussed this briefly in chapter three, 16-17, and again in chapter five, 12-15.

[6] Moyal-Sharrock, "Logic in Action," 133.

necessity.[7] This "peculiar" necessity unfolds in our *human natural history*,[8] it is not based on reasoning or agreement; this kind of necessity is not optional. "We simply cannot help" forming certain beliefs (convictions) about the world around us, it is just what we *do*. These convictions manifest in our actions, actions that occur in our *forms of life*. Our human natural history includes adapting to our earthly environment as a result not only of evolutionary development but the development of our social/cultural norms.

Moyal-Sharrock also contributes to a greater understanding of *On Certainty* by explaining how our human natural history imposes certain constraints on us, in particular, constraints on what is humanly sensible and nonsensical. We are "*humanly-bound*," she says, by parameters of sensibility. Although *exceeding* these bounds may seem incredible --*humanly speaking*-- they are not unintelligible e.g., a scenario like Russell's five-minute old earth, although *incredible*, is nevertheless *intelligible*. Starting from our *ability* to simply *imagine* intelligible, non-contradictory scenarios, philosophers, in the Cartesian tradition, have pushed imagination well beyond the

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[7] As I argued in chapter five, Wittgenstein was *distinguishing* traditional, logical necessity, from a new, *peculiar* logical necessity, he was not "reforming" it.

[8] Wittgenstein never offers any explicit definition of what he means by "human natural history." In chapter five, 14-17, I offer one possible definition.

boundaries of what is *humanly* sensible. Wittgenstein, Moyal-Sharrock says, rejects this Cartesian idea that knowledge exceeds human parameters.

Her distinction between humanly possible and humanly imaginable scenarios leads Moyal-Sharrock to another important insight: we can be "*objectively* certain" about something, while not being "*absolutely* certain" about it. As our bounds of sense are constrained by our "being human" (or *human* parameters), our sensibility, says Moyal-Sharrock, must be less than absolute. Applying human sensibility to *all possible worlds* would mean human beings would have to exceed boundaries of human sensibility -- but how? How can we conceive or comprehend absolute, unconditional necessity?[9] Moyal-Sharrock says we cannot. *Human* sensibility does not (cannot) apply to *all possible worlds*, but because none of our convictions are *absolutely* necessary, this does *not* mean we lack *objectivity*, nor does this mean we cannot be "*objectively certain*" of many things. We can have "*objective* certainty," she says, while not being "*absolutely* certain."[10]

Finally, there are the contributions and insights of

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[9] "What *is* less formidable and utterly implausible, is the chimera of a superhuman, supernatural, imperturbable *absolute* logical necessity which by dint of being applicable to *all possible worlds* makes a farce of ours -- forcing us, as it does, to consider evil geniuses, brains in vats, and zombies as *real* possibilities in our world." Moyal-Sharrock, "Logic in Action," 145.

[10] See chapter five, 3-4.

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Avrum Stroll. Stroll recognizes the importance of Wittgenstein's move from certainty as a feature of hinge-propositions to certainty as achieved in the things we *do*. He also recognizes that for Wittgenstein, knowledge and other language-games presuppose the "necessity"[11] of a *non-dependent*, non-propositional, certainty. Like Moyal-Sharrock, Stroll believes non-propositional certainty is a "necessary condition"[12] for Wittgenstein's brand of foundationalism. Non-dependency is a necessity but, a *"peculiar* necessity."[13] What "stands-fast" is not subject to justification, proof, the adducing of evidence, or doubt;[14] "it is not true, nor yet false."[15] Whatever is subject to the above list is propositional in form, belonging to our language-games; certainty is *non*-propositional in form, standing *outside* while at the same time offering *support* for our language-games. Certainty, Wittgenstein says, is grounded in *action*, the "hinge" upon which all our knowledge (all our language-games) turns. Understanding certainty as

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[11] This "non-dependent, necessary condition" is what Wittgenstein referred to as the "peculiar logical necessity" that unfolds in our *human natural history*.

[12] Stroll, *Moore and Wittgenstein on Certainty*, 151.

[13] I discussed Wittgenstein's "peculiar logical necessity" above in the Sharrock section.

[14] See Stroll, *Moore and Wittgenstein on Certainty*, 138.

[15] Wittgenstein, *On Certainty*, edited by G.E.M. Anscombe and G.H. Von Wright, translated by Denis Paul and G.E.M. Anscombe (New York: Harper & Row, 1972), §205.

non-dependent necessity is, according to Stroll, a vital contribution to a new kind of foundationalism.

Stroll's greatest contribution however, is implicit. His assessment of traditional, homogeneous foundationalism[16] led me to distinguish between it and what in chapter five I referred to as "*non*-traditional, *non*-homogeneous foundationalism." Traditional homogeneous foundationalists identify what is "foundational" as belonging "to the same category as the items which rest upon them."[17] *Non*-homogeneous foundationalism, however, *differentiates* between two categories, propositional knowledge and non-propositional, non-ratiocinated action. Non-propositional, non-ratiocinated action offers "foundational" support for propositional knowledge.

Bringing the views of Grayling, Moyal-Sharrock, and Stroll together, we may say that in *On Certainty*, Wittgenstein advocates a foundationalism quite unlike anything offered before. It differs from the traditional sort by "necessarily" grounding our language-games in non-propositional, non-ratiocinated action. Empirical knowledge is based on a process of inquiry, evidence-gathering, and rule-following and is generally capable of being expressed

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[16] Ibid., 145. Also see my chapter five, 23-28.

[17] Ibid., 141.

propositionally; certainty, on the other hand, consists of none of these. Certainty is basically *non-propositional* and necessarily "in place" before inquiry and evidence-gathering (knowledge) occurs. In order to raise questions or even begin to doubt, there must be some things that cannot be doubted, some things must remain fixed and "exempt from doubt."[18] By categorically distinguishing knowledge from certainty and then showing the nature of the relationship between them, Wittgenstein offers a foundationalism *sui generis.*

Although the foundational metaphor is an effective way of conveying Wittgenstein's thoughts in *On Certainty*, due to its affinity with the more widely accepted and questionable conception of Descartes, it is often rejected as inaccurate,[19] outdated. I agree with the majority who find Descartes' *argument* mistaken,[20] but I believe the metaphor itself should be spared. Therefore, my first step in presenting a more adequate position for understanding Wittgenstein's *On Certainty* is to reclaim the foundational metaphor.

Conclusion: Reclaiming Foundationalism

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[18] Wittgenstein, *On Certainty*, §§88, 341.

[19] The accusation of inaccuracy comes in the form of infinite regress.

[20] There is overwhelming agreement that Descartes' argument is viciously circular. See chapter two, 7, footnote 20.

Reclaiming the foundational metaphor requires a broader conception of foundationalism than the conventional Cartesian one. What I call "non-homogeneous foundationalism" extends our conception of "foundations" from propositions belonging to the same category[21] as that which the foundation supports to a wider conception of foundationalism that consists of two *different* categories, propositional knowledge and non-propositional, non-ratiocinated action. With non-homogeneous foundationalism, as we've seen, it is this non-propositional, non-ratiocinated action that provides foundational support for our language-games. I believe, however, we can go still further, incorporating a human element into our conception of non-homogeneous foundationalism.

A broader conception of foundationalism does not mean we must completely abandon our use of traditional foundational language. In fact, I believe retaining *some* of this language will be helpful in extending our conception of the foundational metaphor even further.

On Certainty is replete with foundational language;[22] among the terms Wittgenstein uses are "*Grund*" and "*Boden.*" *Grund* is translated as "ground," "plot," "field," or "soil,"

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[21] Or "*homogeneous foundationalism.*" See Stroll, *Moore and Wittgenstein on Certainty*, 141.

[22] Recall, Stroll lists more than sixty places where Wittgenstein uses "explicitly foundational language." Stroll, *Moore and Wittgenstein on Certainty*, 142.

while *Boden* has an equally "earthy" translation, meaning "ground," "soil," "floor," or "land."[23] *Grund* and *Boden* are what we might call *terra* metaphors: foundational metaphors with an emphasis *on and with the earth.*[24] Of all the foundational nomenclature Wittgenstein uses in *On Certainty*, *Grund* and *Boden* are noteworthy because they invoke a human element: "ground" and "soil" metaphors suggest *human action and interaction* with the earth. Extending our conception of the foundational metaphor in this way includes what Sissela Bok describes as "*human stances and actions* on the earth's surface."[25]

Consider some of the metaphorical characterizations we use with the term "ground," characterizations that convey human action or interaction; e.g., being "well-grounded," "having both feet on the ground," "seeking common ground." "Soil" metaphors are also used to convey human interaction, for instance in social and political discourse, "preparing

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[23] *Harper Collins German Dictionary*, 4th ed., s.v. "Grund," "Boden."

[24] *Terra* metaphors are not unique to *On Certainty*, Wittgenstein uses them in other later writings too. E.g., in the *Investigations* Wittgenstein describes the "intolerable conflict" between logic and actual language in the following way: "We have got on to slippery ice where there is no friction and so in a certain sense the conditions are ideal, but also, just because of that, we are unable to walk: so we need *friction*. Back to the rough ground!" See Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, translated by G. E. M. Anscombe (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1953), §107.

[25] Sissela Bok, "What Basis for Morality? A Minimalist Approach," *Monist* 76, no. 3, (July 1993): 353, my emphasis.

the soil of popular sentiment for peace and democracy,"[26] and "[o]nly communities which renounce political power are able to provide the soil on which other virtues may flourish."[27]

Terra metaphors succeed in extending our conception of foundationalism by implicitly incorporating a *human element*; a human element that anchors us to the world. This kind of *human*-centered foundationalism distinguishes Wittgenstein from the *super*-human kind of traditional, Cartesian foundationalism. As Martin Benjamin explains,

> we who raise genuine questions about knowledge, reality, mind, will, and ethics are not, first and foremost, isolated, disembodied Cartesian observers *of* the world, but rather embodied social agents *in* it. When we reflect, we do so not from some point outside the world, but rather at a particular time and place-and with one or more practical purposes-within it.[28]

What Benjamin calls "embodied social agency" develops out of our *human natural history*. As I discussed in chapter five, our human natural history is partly *biological*: through evolution, it has determined how we act and react; but our *biological* nature is only *part* of our history,[29] another

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[26] John Braithwaite, *Restorative Justice & Responsive Regulation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 185.

[27] Max Weber, *Weber: Political Writings*, edited by Peter Lassman and Quentin Skinner, translated by Raymond Geuss (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 76.

[28] Martin Benjamin, *Philosophy & This Actual World* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2003), 18.

[29] As I mentioned earlier, it would be misleading to pigeonhole Wittgenstein into one particular group. In this case, it would be wrong to identify Wittgenstein solely with *biological naturalism*. Again, I

important component is what Moyal-Sharrock calls our

"*humanness,*"[30] our *social* and *cultural* history.[31]

Due to this human emphasis, Wittgenstein's new kind of foundationalism is quite different than the standard Cartesian variety. It makes no guarantees of absoluteness; instead, it offers a common groundwork, a common "footing"[32] for our language-games to rest. Wittgenstein's foundationalism provides our language-games stability upon which to undertake dialogue, debate, etc., but, perhaps most importantly, it does so in less than universal terms.

What Moore had once called our "obvious truisms" are, under Wittgenstein's direction, recognized as inherent in our human natural history. His foundationalism is a naturally *human* development, grounded biologically and socially in societies, cultures, *forms of life.*[33] This human

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think Wittgenstein had affinities with several groups, e.g., pragmatism, common sense, and naturalism.

[30] Moyal-Sharrock, "Logic in Action," 144.

[31] However, these too are shaped, in part, by natural selection. Essentially the point here is that there is no clear line between the biological and the social/psychological/cultural. "Commanding, questioning, recounting, [and] chatting," says Wittgenstein, "are as much a part of our [human] natural history as walking, eating drinking, playing." Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, §25. Even mathematics and logic are, for Wittgenstein, "anthropological phenomena," see Wittgenstein, *Remarks On The Foundations Of Mathematics*, edited by G. H. von Wright, Rush Rhees, G. E. M. Anscombe, translated by G. E. M. Anscombe (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, first printed 1956, reprinted 1998), Part VII, §33.
[32] At one point in the *Investigations* Wittgenstein, describing how difficult it can be to "*understand* people," says "[w]e cannot find our feet with them." Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, 223.

[33] "What has to be accepted," Wittgenstein says at one point in the *Investigations*, "the given, is--so one could say--*forms of life,*"

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centered foundationalism is the *new kind* of foundationalism of *On Certainty*. It is, to adapt a phrase from Hilary Putnam, foundationalism, *humanly speaking*.[34]

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Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, 226.

[34] Sharrock attributes this phrase to Hilary Putnam, who, in turn attributes it to David Wiggins. See Putnam's "Two Philosophical Perspectives" in *Reason, Truth, and History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), 49-74, specifically, 55.

Appendix

A. *Moore's Proof*

Much of Moore's argument leading to his conclusion that "Two hands exist outside of us" stems from what he sees as a conflation between Kant's use of "things to be met with in space" and "things to be presented in space." Kant, he insists, was wrong in asserting that "things presented in space" are "outside of us."

> The phrase 'things which are to be met with in space' can…be naturally understood as having a very wide meaning-a meaning even wider than that of 'physical object' or 'body.'…But wide as is its meaning, it is not, in one respect, so wide as that of another phrase which Kant uses as if it were equivalent to this one…The other phrase…is…the expression 'things outside us' [which] 'carries with it an unavoidable ambiguity.'[1]

Kant treats the phrase "presented in space" as if it were equivalent to "to be met with in space." Moore carefully begins to distinguish these two concepts.

What might be an example of something "presented in space"? Moore suggests negative after-images.[2] Although negative after-images are *presented* in space, he says, they

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[1] G.E. Moore, "Proof of an External World," *Philosophical Papers* (New York: Collier Books, 1962), 129-130.

[2] "If, after looking steadfastly at a white patch on a black ground, the eye be turned to a white ground, a gray patch is seen for some little time." (Foster's *Text-book of Physiology*, IV, iii, 3p. 1266; quoted in G. F. A. Stout, *Manual of Psychology* (Oxford: University Tutorial Press Ltd., 1899), 280. After reading this, Moore says he conducted the following experiment: "I took the trouble to cut out a piece of white paper a four-pointed star, to place it on a black ground, to 'look steadfastly at it,' and then to turn my eyes to a white sheet of paper: and I did find that I saw a gray patch for some little time-I not only saw a gray patch, but I saw it *on* the white ground, and also this gray patch was of roughly the same shape as the white four-pointed star at which I had 'looked steadfastly' just before-it also was a four-pointed star." Moore, "Proof," 130.

are not to be *met with* in space.

> Some of the 'things,' which are presented in space, are very
> emphatically *not* to be met with in space: or, to use another
> phrase, which may be used to convey the same notion, they are
> emphatically *not* 'physical realities' at all. The conception
> 'presented in space' is therefore, in one respect, much wider than
> the conception 'to be met with in space'; many 'things' fall under
> the first conception which do not fall under the second.[3]

The difference between "meeting" and "presenting" something
in space is that the former must be the kind of thing that,
at a given time, more than one person can see, touch, hear,
etc.; whereas the latter need not conform to these
standards. If the object lacks any of these "physical
realities" it is not "met with in space" but is still
perhaps "present in space." In this way, objects such as
negative after-images (objects offering no physical
composition) are conceptually much wider.

For an object to be external to our minds then it must
meet Moore's two constraints: it must necessarily be *present*
in space and must also be sufficiently capable of being *met
with* in space. Presentation then, is a necessary condition,
but being present, in and of itself, is not a sufficient
condition for an object to be external (or mind-
independent). Negative after-images are *"present* in space,"
but are we willing to say they are mind-independent? Moore
doesn't think so. For although negative after-images may be
present, what would it be like for *me* to meet any of *your*

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[3] Ibid., 133.

negative after-images? It sounds rather odd to talk like this, and Moore found it inconceivable that "anyone besides [himself] should have seen any one of them [i.e., *his* negative after-images]."[4] Others may well have after-images much like my own, perhaps even exactly like mine, "[b]ut there is an absurdity," says Moore, "in supposing that any one of the after-images which I saw could also have been seen by anyone else: [an absurdity] in supposing that two different people can ever see the *very same* after image."[5] We cannot *meet* a negative after-image in space in the same way we meet, say, an apple in space. When we meet an apple in space we are at the same time presented with it. More than one person can see, touch, hear an apple, at the same moment, but only one person can have a specific negative after-image.

Moore's careful analysis of what is external to our minds raises questions about what is *internal* to them. If there are some things *not* external to our minds,[6] are there some things *internal* to them? If, for instance, a negative after-image is the sort of object that cannot be "met with in space,"[7] that is, is not "external to our minds," where

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[4] Ibid., 131.

[5] Ibid. Here, I understand Moore to mean *numerically* the same after-image.

[6] Ibid.

[7] We understand that for an object to be "met with in space" it must

then does Moore think it is located? Is it internal, and if so, what else does he say about such privately observable objects? What else does he say about mind-dependent mental objects?

Unfortunately, nowhere in "Proof" does Moore offer an explicit argument concerning the privately observable. However, by discussing objects *not* external to our minds, I believe he makes an implicit division between external and internal objects. Moore distinguishes, or as Avrum Stroll says, "draws a line"[8] between the categories of mind on the one hand, and matter on the other. "Drawing a line" is not without precedent, it is most clearly seen in Descartes' division between the *res cogitans* and the *res extensa*. Dividing what is internal from what is external helped Descartes and his followers to assign items to one or the other category.[9] Oddly, in "Proof," Moore is right in step with Descartes. Moore, like Descartes, "draws a line" between things external and things internal to the mind: if

satisfy the necessary and sufficient conditions stated above.

[8] "Drawing the line" is a phrase Stroll uses to describe what philosophers have done to make a distinction between the public and the private realm. Stroll cites John Stuart Mill use of drawing the line in his *On Liberty*. "Mill," says Stroll, "tries to draw a defensible conceptual distinction between the private and public domain of human conduct. The line he draws is between those activities that concern only oneself and those that impinge upon others....The purpose of drawing the line is to defend private, idiosyncratic behavior from state and government interference and from the pressures of public opinion." Avrum Stroll, *Moore and Wittgenstein on Certainty* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 58.

[9] See chapter 2 for the Cartesian model and its influence.

x is a mental entity it cannot be a material or physical entity, and *vice versa*.

His list of "things…philosophers have…call[ed] 'physical objects,' 'material things,' or 'bodies'"[10] include:

> [m]y body, the bodies of other men, the bodies of animals, plants of all sorts, stones, mountains, the sun, the moon, stars, and planets, houses and other buildings, manufactured articles of all sorts-chairs, tables, pieces of paper, etc.[11]

And although Moore offers no list of objects falling under the mental category, such lists, interestingly enough, typically include certain sorts of visual experiences, e.g., negative after-images. Other objects in this list usually include thoughts, desires, aches, and pains. Moore says of pains, in particular:

> [b]odily pains can, in general, be quite properly said to be 'presented in space.' When I have a toothache, I feel it *in* a particular region of my jaw or *in* a particular tooth…It is certainly perfectly natural to understand the phrase 'presented in space' in such a way that if, in the sense illustrated, a pain is felt *in* a particular place, that pain is 'presented in space.' And yet of pains it would be quite unnatural to say that they are 'to be met with in space,' for the same reason as in the case of after-images…It is quite conceivable that another person should feel a pain exactly like one which I feel, but there is an absurdity in supposing that he could feel *numerically the same* pain which I feel.[12]

With this division between mental and physical, Moore

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[10] Moore, "Proof," 129.

[11] Ibid.

[12] Ibid., 132.

proceeds to offer his proof. In chapter five I mentioned Avrum Stroll's observation of two submerged premises in Moore's proof. Stroll said the existence of any human hand is not mind-dependent, and that anything whose existence is not mind-dependent exists outside of us.[13] Given these premises, the fact that two human hands exist outside us is not such a surprising conclusion for Moore to reach.

The significant point here seems to me this: in "Proof" we find Moore making the classic Cartesian distinction between objects in the physical world and objects only presented privately. But why does he do this? Recall, throughout Moore's career he argued against the disposition of traditional philosophy, insisting it had become an overly intellectualized discipline. Descartes, above all others, contributed to this atmosphere. Yet, in "Proof" Moore apparently accepts the Cartesian model, offering a proof to the skeptic that there is indeed an external world. His earlier articles had no use for proofs about the external world; a proof "for things outside us" went against one of the most obvious truisms of the common sense school.

I believe Moore's example of a negative after-image did two things for him. First, as we've seen, a negative after-image does not have a "physical reality," so it does not fall under one of Moore's constraints of being "met with in

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[13] See chapter one, 20. Stroll, *Moore and Wittgenstein on Certainty*, 56.

space." Moore is thus able, he believes, to expose Kant's internal/external division as overly simplified. Second, a negative after image is mind-*dependent* and anything mind-dependent (i.e., privately observable) is, for Moore, a mental object. The problem however is that Moore is making an internal/external division, a Cartesian division. Moore is therefore, as Stroll correctly points out, "bewitched by the Cartesian model."

B. *Wittgenstein's Therapeutic Method*

"There is not a philosophical method," Wittgenstein insisted, "though there are indeed methods, like different therapies."[14] Wittgenstein was opposed to the way philosophy was being co-opted by science. "In philosophy, our considerations [can]not be scientific ones…we may not advance any kind of theory,"[15] he insisted. He believed a great source of philosophical confusion stemmed from this temptation for philosophical explanation based on the scientific model. "This tendency," he argued, was "the real source of metaphysics, and [has led] philosophers into complete darkness."[16]

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[14] Ibid., §133.

[15] Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, translated by G. E. M. Anscombe (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1953), §109.

[16] Wittgenstein, *Blue & Brown Books* (New York: Harper & Row, 1958), 18.

To explain phenomena by reference to a small number of fundamental laws produced, what he called, a "craving for generality."[17] "[I]t can never be our job to reduce anything to anything, or to explain anything. Philosophy really *is* 'purely descriptive.'…(Elegance is not what we are trying for.)"[18] This desire[19] "to explain" on a grand level was nothing new to philosophy, but scientific theory was now offering it a level of legitimacy. "Philosophers constantly see the method of science before their eyes, and are irresistibly tempted to ask and answer questions in the way science does."[20] This produces a "contemptuous attitude toward the particular case,"[21] he says.

Wittgenstein took a different approach, divorcing himself from a scientific or generalizing approach to philosophical questions. "I am not interested in constructing a building," he says, "so much as in having a perspicuous view of the foundations of possible buildings.

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[17] Ibid., 17. Bouveresse describes this craving as a "generalizing impulse," Jacques Bouveresse, *Wittgenstein Reads Freud: The Myth of the Unconscious*, translated by Carol Cosman (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995), 42-68. Specifically, chapter three, "The 'Generalizing Impulse,' or the Philosopher in Spite of Himself."

[18] Wittgenstein, *Blue & Brown Books*, 18-19.

[19] In the Introduction to his *Philosophy and This Actual World*, Martin Benjamin, drawing on James, describes this "craving" in the following way: "From Plato to Descartes to the present day, philosophers often seek refuge from the multiplicity, pain, and confusion of the street in rarefied temples of their own making," Martin Benjamin, *Philosophy & This Actual World* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2003), 1.

[20] Wittgenstein, *Blue & Brown Books*, 18.

[21] Ibid.

So I am not aiming at the same targets as the scientists and

my way of thinking is different from theirs."[22] That

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[22] Wittgenstein, *Culture and Value*, edited by Georg Henrik von Wright in collaboration with Heikki Nyman, translated by Peter Winch (Oxford: Blackwell, first edition 1977, second edition 1978), 7. His opposition is not science *per se* rather, as Hans-Johann Glock puts it, he presents a "methodological resistance to *scientism*." Hans-Johann Glock, *A Wittgenstein Dictionary*, s.v. science, my emphasis. 'Scientism' is the mistake of applying to philosophy the standards we use to evaluate scientific theories. "Scientism," as Martin Benjamin explains, "is a *philosophical doctrine* that dubiously privileges the impersonal perspective and denies the value or reality of anything that cannot figure into scientific theories or methods." Benjamin, *Philosophy & This Actual World*, 85. Science and philosophy are fundamentally different intellectual activities; "they are," argues Paul Horwich, "distinct projects with distinct objectives." See Paul Horwich, "Wittgensteinian Bayesianism," reprinted in *Philosophy of Science: The Central Issues*, edited by Martin Curd and A.J. Cover (New York: W.W. Norton, 1998), 618. Horwich also points out that these two approaches "are not *wholly* unrelated to one another, but [they are] by no means simply parts of the same enterprise," ibid. Science, for the most part, aims at arriving at an accurate, true, comprehensive description of the world; it seeks to establish generalizations. Philosophy, on the other hand, aims at solving puzzles, dissolving paradoxes, eliminating contradictions and confusions; it seeks to break down generalizations. Some will object to the view that philosophy's objective is "puzzle-solving," this is of course, a very Wittgensteinian approach to the role of philosophy. The most notable philosopher to object to this view was Karl Popper. Popper believed philosophy posed "serious problems" that needed to be addressed. Popper once wrote, "[t]he later Wittgenstein used to speak of 'puzzles,' caused by the philosophical misuse of language. I can only say that if I had no serious philosophical problems and no hope of solving them, I should have no excuse for being a philosopher: to my mind there would be no apology for philosophy." Cf. David Edmonds and John Eidinow, *Wittgenstein's Poker: The Story of a Ten-Minute Argument Between Two Great Philosophers* (New York: Ecco Press, 2002), 221. Although philosophy and science have very different aims, philosophy, especially at the beginning of the Twentieth Century, became "entrapped in scientism," says P.M.S. Hacker. See P.M.S. Hacker, *Wittgenstein's Place in Twentieth Century Analytic Philosophy* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1996), 117. The success of science was so remarkable, says Hacker, that it easily seduced philosophers into believing that science held the answer to *everything*. Hacker describes this period in the following way: "the astonishing developments in physics, the triumph of Darwinism, the achievements of Freud, and the advances in social theory could indeed give the younger generation faith that science held the key to intellectual and social progress, that the future lay with scientific rationality, and that it was the task of philosophy, rearmed with the new logic [of Russell and Whitehead], to side with the future, eradicate irrational, pre-scientific modes of thought, extirpate metaphysical mystery-mongering, and reconstruct the edifice of human knowledge in the spirit of science." Ibid., 265. Wittgenstein however, was not seduced: "I may find scientific questions interesting," he says, "but they never really grip me,…[a]t bottom I am indifferent to the solution of scientific problems." Wittgenstein, *Culture and Value*, edited by Georg

philosophers should try to answer questions in any *absolute* fashion, Wittgenstein found absurd. This tendency to look for something in common to all the entities which we commonly subsume under a general term was wrong-headed.

> [W]e are inclined to think there must be something in common to all games, say, and that this common property is the justification for applying the general term 'game' to the various games. Games form a family, the members of which have family likenesses. Some of the members have the same nose, others the same eyebrows and others again the same way of walking; and these likenesses overlap. The idea of a general concept being a common property of its particular instances connects up with other primitive, too simple, ideas of the structure of language. It is comparable to the idea that properties are ingredients of the things which have the properties; e.g. that beauty is an ingredient of all beautiful things as alcohol is of beer and wine, and that we therefore could have pure beauty, unadulterated by anything that is beautiful.[23]

The "scientistic" philosopher is not to *blame*, nor is the Cartesian, rather, they are in need of help. They both possess this "craving for generality" that is so intense, they become compulsively-obsessed by it. They suffer from what Wittgenstein calls a "disease of thought,"[24] a "disease of the understanding,"[25] or sometimes simply, a "philosophical disease."[26] Not surprisingly, Wittgenstein's method has been widely characterized as "therapeutic."[27]

Henrik von Wright in collaboration with Heikki Nyman, translated by Peter Winch (Oxford: Blackwell, first edition 1977, second edition 1978), 79.

[23] Wittgenstein, *Blue & Brown Books*, 17.

[24] Wittgenstein, *Zettel*, edited by G. E. M. Anscombe and G. H. von Wright, translated by G. E. M. Anscombe, second edition (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers Ltd., 1967), §382.

[25] Wittgenstein, *Culture and Value*, 50.

[26] Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, §593.

[27] There is of course an irony here, at least in terms of Freudian

In his later period, Wittgenstein often used therapeutic language to describe his method, a method that, as James Edwards puts it, was "intensely personal."[28] "The philosopher is someone who has to cure many diseases of the understanding in himself, before he can arrive at the notions of common sense."[29] For Wittgenstein, this meant rejecting the grand theories of the past (e.g., rejecting the "scientistic" approach) and looking closely at how we actually *use* language, in order to get back to something

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psychoanalysis. Freud was convinced that the methods he employed in psychoanalysis were comparable to those in the natural sciences. As he says in *An Outline of Psychoanalysis*: "This hypothesis [of a psychical apparatus extended in space] has put us in a position to establish psychology upon foundations similar to those of any other science, such as physics. In our science the problem is the same as in others: behind the attributes (*i.e.*, qualities) of the object under investigation which are directly given to our perception, we have to discover something which is more independent of the particular receptive capacities of our sense organs and which approximates more closely to what may be supposed to be the real state of things." Sigmund Freud, *An Outline of Psychoanalysis*, translated by James Strachey (New York: Norton, 1940), 105. For Wittgenstein's part, he did not think Freud's theory scientific. "Freud is constantly claiming to be scientific," he once said in a conversation with his student, Rush Rhees, "[b]ut what he gives is *speculation*-something prior even to the formation of an hypothesis." *Lectures and Conversations on Aesthetics, Psychology, and Religious Belief*, edited by Cyril Barrett (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1967), 44. Another rather interesting point about Freud and Wittgenstein is how similar their views were concerning traditional philosophy and science. As Freud says in his *New Introductory Lectures on Psycho-Analysis*, "Philosophy is not opposed to science, it behaves like a science and works in part by the same methods; it departs from it however, by clinging to the illusion of being able to present a picture of the world which is without gaps and is coherent, though one which is bound to collapse with every fresh advance in our knowledge. It goes astray in its method by overestimating the epistemological value of our logical operations and by accepting other sources of knowledge." Sigmund Freud, edited by James Strachey, *New Introductory Lectures on Psycho-Analysis* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1933), 160-161.

[28] James C. Edwards, *Ethics Without Philosophy: Wittgenstein and the Moral Life* (Tampa: University Presses of Florida, 1985), 132.

[29] Wittgenstein, *Culture and Value*, 50.

more fundamental, more basic, i.e., "notions of common sense." It is possible, he says, "for the sickness of philosophical problems to get cured [but] only through a changed mode of thought and of life, not through a medicine invented by an individual."[30]

Wittgenstein's metaphor is apt because one cannot hope to be cured (philosophically) of this disease ("generalizing impulse") by simply taking one's medicine (accepting grand theories e.g., the Cartesian model or the scientific model). Rather, if I understand him correctly, the cure requires a whole new approach, a whole new style of thinking. For Wittgenstein the cure requires an active process of working on one's self; in this way, philosophy must be therapeutic. Therapy however, is a very slow-going process, curing this "philosophical disease" will take time. "It must run its natural course," he says, for "*slow* cure is all important."[31]

Many will find Wittgenstein's therapeutic remarks objectionable. However, I think it is important to point out that although Wittgenstein said philosophy is *like* therapy, he never said philosophy *is* therapy. Jacques Bouveresse, in

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[30] Wittgenstein, *Remarks On The Foundations Of Mathematics*, edited by G. H. von Wright, Rush Rhees, G. E. M. Anscombe, translated by G. E. M. Anscombe (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, first printed 1956, reprinted 1998), Part II, §23.

[31] Wittgenstein, *Zettel*, edited by G. E. M. Anscombe and G. H. von Wright, translated by G. E. M. Anscombe, second edition (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers Ltd., 1967), §382.

his book *Wittgenstein Reads Freud*, says that Wittgenstein was preoccupied with the relation between these two disciplines, "if only because of the characteristic misunderstanding to which it could, and indeed did, give rise."[32] O.K. Bouwsma recounts how

> Wittgenstein had himself talked about philosophy as in certain ways *like* psychoanalysis, but in the same way he might say that it was *like* a hundred other things. When he became a professor at Cambridge he submitted a typescript to the committee. Keynes was a member of that committee. Of 140 pages, 72 were devoted to the idea that philosophy is *like* psychoanalysis. A month later Keynes met him and said that he was much impressed with the idea that philosophy *is* psychoanalysis. And so it goes.[33]

C. *Language Games & Forms Of Life*

There are two terms Wittgenstein uses that overlap one another in significant ways: "language-games" and "forms of life."[34] The concept of a language-game is introduced by Wittgenstein to emphasize the wide variety of uses of language, its elasticity, and the active role played by language within a given community. Like a game, language is a rule-guided activity; grammatical rules determine what is correct and incorrect, sensible and senseless; but as the game occurs in a community, non-linguistic rules, norms,

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[32] Bouveresse, *Wittgenstein Reads Freud*, 8.

[33] O.K. Bouwsma, *Wittgenstein, Conversations, 1949-1951*, edited by Craft and Hustwit (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1986), 36, my emphasis.

[34] Readers unfamiliar with Wittgenstein's terminology and seeking a handy guide to more technical language might refer to Hans-Johann Glock's exhaustive *A Wittgenstein Dictionary* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 1996).

customs *also* play an important role. The term "language-game," as Wittgenstein uses it in *Philosophical Investigations*, "is meant to bring into prominence the fact that the speaking of language is part of an activity, or of a *form of life*."[35] Language and action are thus interwoven.[36] He provides a list of examples of language-games at §23 of the *Investigations*:

Giving orders, and obeying them--
Describing the appearance of an object, or giving its measurements--
Constructing an object from a description (a drawing)--
Reporting an event--
Speculating about an event--
Forming and testing a hypothesis--
Presenting the results of an experiment in tables and diagrams--
Making up a story; and reading it--
Play-acting--
Singing catches--
Guessing riddles--
Making a joke; telling it--
Solving a problem in practical arithmetic--
Translating from one language into another--
Asking, thanking, cursing, greeting, praying.

A "form of life" represents the totality of communal activities, practices, etc., in which language-games are situated. Forms of life consist of systems, practices, and activities that bind a community together. Groups in a community are bound by a shared set of complex, linguistic and non-linguistic practices that might include gestures, facial expressions, words, and activities, among other things. These include biological, social, and

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[35] Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, §23.

[36] Ibid., §7. Wittgenstein goes so far as to say that "words are also deeds" See Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, §546.

anthropological elements. To speak a language is to participate in such a culture; it is *part* of a form of life.

D. *Knowledge & Certainty*

For Wittgenstein, knowledge claims are defeasible. Even if these claims are well justified, there can be no guarantee against their turning out wrong.[37] As an epistemic concept, knowledge claims are subject to the sorts of ratio-logical tests we might expect, e.g., being true or false, justifiable, revisable. Although these properties may vary from practice to practice, discipline to discipline, they can only be given within a context where testing them is possible. If an epistemic property cannot be tested or no reasons can be given, then it falls outside of Wittgenstein's conception of knowledge. "Reasons," whether requested or required, must satisfy certain standards, rules, norms. Knowledge is a function of language-games. But this "language-game of knowledge" is conceptually distinct from certainty.[38] Language and language-games require a "frame," says Wittgenstein, something that stands-fast; what stands-fast must be certain.

Certainty, for Wittgenstein, conveys a very basic understanding of our world, an understanding so primitive it

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[37] This however, is not a license for skepticism, doubt too requires grounds. I discuss this in more detail below.

[38] Wittgenstein, *On Certainty*, §308.

is neither thought nor expressed, but as he puts it, "instinctual."[39] Employing a host of different metaphors, e.g., "inherited background," "axis," "substratum," "scaffolding," "hinge,"[40] the image of certainty is that of something that "stands-fast." "[B]eyond being justified or unjustified,"[41] certainty is something "exempt from doubt."[42] Unlike knowledge, certainty is not open to doubt, revision, or modification; it is not first and foremost propositional but something else, something primal, something "animal."[43] Borrowing a phrase from Arnold Johanson, we might say that for Wittgenstein, what underlies all our customs and practices is a "primitive system of action."[44] Our most basic certainties are manifested in what we *do*.[45] Certainty is "actional." Certainty must be in place for other things, including knowledge, to be possible. What makes the language-game of knowledge (what makes *all* language-games possible), is not "certain facts" but our *never questioning*

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[39] Ibid., §475.

[40] Ibid., §§94, 152, 162, 211, 341, respectively.

[41] Ibid., §359.

[42] Ibid, §§88, 341.

[43] Ibid., §§359, 475.

[44] This is a phrase I borrowed from Arnold Johanson's article "Peirce and Wittgenstein's On Certainty" *Living Doubt: Essays Concerning the Epistemology of C.S. Peirce*, edited by Guy Debrock and Menno Hulswit (New York: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1994), 171-186.

[45] Wittgenstein, *On Certainty*, §204.

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certain facts.[46]

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[46] "Certain propositions seem to underlie all questions and thinking."
Wittgenstein, *On Certainty*, §415.

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