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## How to Read Moore's "Proof of an External World"

Kevin Morris and Consuelo Preti

We develop a reading of Moore's "Proof of an External World" (PEW) that emphasizes the connections between this paper and Moore's earlier concerns and strategies, especially his earlier engagement with idealist conceptions of reality. Our reading has the benefit of explaining why the claims that Moore advances in PEW would have been of interest to him, and avoids attributing to him arguments that are either trivial or wildly unsuccessful. Part of the evidence for our reading comes from unpublished drafts which, we believe, contain important clues concerning Moore's aims and intent. While our approach to PEW may be classified alongside other broadly "metaphysical" readings, we believe that a proper recognition of the continuity in Moore's philosophical concerns and strategies across his philosophical career shows that the customary distinction between "epistemological" and "metaphysical" interpretative approaches to PEW is at best superficial.

# How to Read Moore's "Proof of an External World"

Kevin Morris and Consuelo Preti

## 1. Introduction

G. E. Moore's standing as a central figure at the dawn of analytic philosophy rests in part on the credit his early work is given in the demise of neo-Hegelian monistic idealism, whose influence was extensive in Anglophone philosophy in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries.<sup>1</sup> His very earliest work—his Trinity Fellowship Dissertations of 1897 and 1898, and his 1899 "The Nature of Judgment" (NJ)—develop Moore's key position: that the metaphysics of monistic idealism involved a mistaken view about the relationship between thought on one hand and the objects of thought on the other (see Baldwin and Preti 2011). Moore is held to have brought his dismantling of monistic idealism to its full fruition in 1903: in his groundbreaking *Principia Ethica* (PE), he attacked the monistic notion of "organic wholes"; in "The Refutation of Idealism" (RI), he pinpointed the key plank of any idealist account of reality—the view that "esse is percipi"—arguing that a proper understanding of the distinction between perception and the objects of perception renders it indefensible.

The standard account of Moore's philosophical development, however, is that whatever interest he may have shown in these kinds of metaphysical issues waned not long after the early 1900s. On this picture, Moore's post-PE concerns turned epis-

<sup>1</sup>Russell (1903, 1959, 1967) is responsible for the most fulsome credit given to Moore on this. For the contextual history here see Baldwin and Preti (2011), Griffin (1991) and Hylton (1990).

temological, as he produced his now-classic examinations of knowledge, certainty, and proof, with the putative aim of refuting or otherwise challenging skepticism while vindicating a common sense conception of the world.<sup>2</sup> Thus Braithwaite (1961, 27) captures the general sense of Moore's philosophical reputation by noting that the "main feature in the public image of Moore is his appeal to 'common sense' in his refutation of what Hume called 'excessive skepticism'". On this story, there is perhaps no place where Moore's epistemological and common-sense concerns come together more closely than in his 1939 paper, "Proof of an External World" (PEW). Here, Moore is taken to issue a challenge to anyone who denies that we *know* that there is an external world by displaying his hands and asserting that he *knows* that he has hands.

Moore's *oeuvre* between 1903 and 1939 does show a concern to get clear on a variety of forthrightly epistemological issues: it includes discussions of the nature of knowledge, the conditions of certainty and proof, the status of sense data, and a defense of a common sense picture of the world. We believe, however, that it is a mistake to hold that Moore exhibits a near wholesale shift in his philosophical interests and orientation, as the traditional picture would have us suppose. Our focus here will be on PEW, one of Moore's most important and well-known papers.

<sup>2</sup>See for example Regan (1986b). It is not clear whether Regan endorses this account, as he remains ambivalent on the extent to which the "later Moore" remained a metaphysically-oriented philosopher. The picture of Moore as relinquishing interest in the metaphysical issues that occupied him early in his career is also suggested by the treatment of Moore's work in Soames (2003), which focuses almost entirely on his epistemology and ethics. It is also suggested by recent work in epistemology (see note 4) that focuses on Moore's discussions of knowledge, proof, skepticism and common sense, often without considering any connection between these discussions and his earlier metaphysical concerns, as well as by treatments, such as that in Warnock (1958), which portray Moore as lacking interest in metaphysics throughout his philosophical career.

Long the object of scholarly interest,<sup>3</sup> two broad approaches to PEW have taken hold in the literature, where the main interpretative dispute concerns the nature of Moore's goals and the standing of the arguments that he brings to bear to achieve those goals. On a common so-called *epistemological* approach, consonant with the customary picture of Moore's philosophical development sketched above, Moore's primary target in PEW is taken to be a skeptic who denies our *knowing* that there is an external world, though it is a matter of controversy just how Moore intended to challenge such a skeptic.<sup>4</sup> Thus Soames (2003, 14) contends that PEW should be read as a comment on the "epistemological problem of escaping from something like the skeptical position of Descartes' First Meditation". On this reading, however, Moore is often held to have failed to make good on his aim, despite perhaps revealing something interesting and important about skeptical challenges and how they should be understood.<sup>5</sup> On a somewhat less common, so-called *metaphysical* approach to PEW, by contrast, Moore's central critical target is held to be idealist metaphysics.<sup>6</sup> Yet on the views of

<sup>3</sup>See the references in notes 4 and 6.

<sup>4</sup>There is a large literature on this. Most recently, see Coliva (2004, 2010), Lycan (2001), Neta (2007), Pryor (2000, 2004), Soames (2003), Sosa (1999), Stroud (1984), Wright (2002), and several of the papers in Part II of Nuccetelli and Seay (2007b). See also Ambrose (1942), Malcolm (1942), and Wittgenstein (1969).

<sup>5</sup>While disagreeing on precisely where the proof goes wrong, it has seemed to many that it does go wrong, typically in virtue of some form of question-begging (see Coliva 2004, Stroud 1984, and Wright 2002). Ambrose (1942), Malcolm (1942), Neta (2007) and Soames (2003) contend that while Moore's proof may not refute skepticism in the sense of proving that we know that there is an external world, it yet reveals something important and worthwhile about skeptical doubt. Pryor (2000, 2004) is more sympathetic to what he takes to be Moore's "dogmatist" rejection of skeptical doubt.

<sup>6</sup>Baldwin (1990), Klemke (2000), O'Connor (1982), and Worrell (unpublished) all consider metaphysical readings of PEW; see Section 5 for discussion of Klemke and O'Connor and Section 6 for discussion of Baldwin. See also Ewing (1970), which attacks the idea that Moore was not only un-

some scholars, so understood, Moore's arguments in PEW fail perhaps even more wretchedly.<sup>7</sup>

Here we will defend a reading of PEW that accomplishes two goals. One will be to emphasize the connections between PEW and Moore's early concerns and strategies, for we believe that there is more continuity here than has generally been appreciated. The other goal will be to show that recognizing this continuity, both in his philosophical concerns and the strategies that he employs, can help to understand and resolve what otherwise look like perplexing and problematic aspects of PEW. Our account has the advantage of explaining why the claims that Moore advances in PEW would have been of interest to him, and crucially avoids attributing to him arguments that are either trivial or wildly unsuccessful. Part of the evidence for our view will come from unpublished drafts of PEW which, we believe, contain important clues concerning Moore's aims and intent.<sup>8</sup> While our approach to PEW may be classified alongside other "metaphysical" readings, we take it that the customary distinction between "epistemological" and "metaphysical" interpretative approaches to this paper is at best superficial. And if our reading is on track, the common picture of Moore's philo-

interested, but hostile, to metaphysical inquiry. Few commentators resist the temptation to *oppose* epistemological readings of PEW with metaphysical ones; but see Sosa (2007) for one exception. Sosa takes Moore to be targeting idealism, but his discussion all the same focuses on the nature of proof. Likewise, Coliva (2004) takes Moore to be offering an anti-idealist argument, but instead focuses on the extent to which it can be read as presenting an anti-skeptical argument (for discussion, see Section 3). At best, therefore, even these commentators formulate what they take to be an engagement with the idealist by way of an account of specifically epistemological arguments.

<sup>7</sup>See, for example, Baldwin (1990) and Coliva (2004); see Section 6 for discussion.

<sup>8</sup>Moore retained a set of drafts of PEW, which are archived in the Cambridge University Library. The versions that survive of PEW are given separate classmarks, as follows: an autograph version of PEW in near final form (Add. 8875 15/3/1); and five drafts (Add. 8875 15/3/2-6), each one differing in length and all paginated separately by Moore.

sophical development sketched above must be regarded as at best misleading: it draws a sharper distinction than is strictly supported by Moore's work, and in doing so fails to recognize important points of continuity in Moore's concerns across his philosophical career.

## 2. "Presented in space" and "to be met with in space"

The main line of argument in PEW concerns how we should understand the notion of *things outside of us*, and in turn that of an *external world*: if our aim is to prove "the existence of things outside of us," what is it that we are aiming to prove? What is "the point in question"? Moore (1939, 147) begins by citing Kant's lamenting the lack of any such proof. But rather than consider the proof that Kant himself offers in the 2<sup>nd</sup> edition of the *Critique of Pure Reason*,<sup>9</sup> Moore turns his attention to the expression "things outside of us", which Moore regards as "an odd expression ... the meaning of which is certainly not perfectly clear" (149). Moore suggests that the expression "external things" sounds "less odd", and that "external to our minds" is perhaps clearer still. Yet this expression is *also* "far from perfectly clear" (ibid). It is in this context that Moore, drawing from Kant, appeals to the notion of *a thing to be met with in space* to elucidate what is at issue. Examples of things to be met with in space include, but are not limited to, "material things" like bodies, stones, mountains, the moon, planets, chairs, tables, and so on (150).

Moore advances his argument by making a critical distinction between the concept of a *thing to be met with in space* and the concept of a *thing presented in space*. After-images, pains, and hallucinations are examples of things that are *presented in*

*space* but not *to be met with in space*: an after-image, for example, is presented in space, but is not to be met with in space (152). He emphasizes what may be regarded as the "privacy" of things merely presented in space, which contrasts with the "public" character of things to be met with in space. It is *absurd*, Moore asserts, to suppose that someone could see the very same after-image that I see, or feel the very same pain that I feel (157). However, to say that I see a thing to be met in space, such as a hand or a soap-bubble is to say that it might have been perceived by others as well as by myself (152). And while there are things presented in space that are not to be met with in space, so also are there things that are to be met with in space but not presented in space: that something might be perceived does not imply that it *is* perceived; but if a thing is not perceived, it is not presented in space, since it is not *presented* at all. That is, for things to be met with in space (155):

... there is no absurdity in supposing with regard to any one of them which is, at a given time, perceived, both (1) that it might have existed at that very time, without being perceived; (2) that it might have existed at another time, without being perceived at that other time; and (3) that during the whole period of its existence, it need not have been perceived at any time at all.

While there may be cases where it is not clear whether something is a thing to be met with in space, Moore insists that there are clear cases of such things, and that (157):

In the case of each of these kinds, from the proposition that there are things of that kind it *follows* that there are things to be met with in space ... e.g., from the proposition that there are plants or that plants exist it *follows* that there are things to be met with in space ...

For example (164):

If I say of anything which I am perceiving, "That is a soap-bubble," I am, it seems to me, certainly implying that there would be no

<sup>9</sup>Moore (Add. 8875 15/3/3, 4) does, however, discuss Kant's proof in his unpublished drafts; see Section 4.

contradiction in asserting that it existed before I perceived it and that it will continue to exist, even if I cease to perceive it . . . a thing would not be a soap bubble unless its existence at any given time were *logically independent* of my perception of it at that time; unless that is to say, from the proposition, with regard to a particular time, that it existed at that time, it *never* follows that I perceived it at that time . . .

It seems clear that Moore is arguing here, in his characteristic manner, that there is a *logical difference* between being a thing to be met with in space and being a thing that is merely presented in space, where the logical features of a kind of thing concern what sort of propositions imply, and follow from, the claim that *x* is such a thing. For example, from the proposition that I perceive a thing to be met with in space, it follows that what I perceive might have existed without ever being perceived; from the proposition that I perceive a soap-bubble, it follows that I perceive a thing to be met with in space; from the proposition that I have an after-image or hallucination, it follows that nobody else has the numerically same after-image or hallucination.

Significantly, this difference is taken by Moore to support a distinction between those things that are mind-dependent or “in the mind” and those that are mind-independent or “outside of us.” Things that are merely presented in space are not “outside of us”; they are “in the mind” in that their very existence depends on being perceived, and by a particular individual (153–54):

... there is an absurdity in supposing that [another person] could feel *numerically the same* pain which I feel. And pains are in fact a typical example of the sort of “things” of which philosophers say that they are *not* “external” to our minds, but “within” them. Of any pain which I feel they would say that it is necessarily *not* external to my mind but *in* it.

Things that are merely presented in space, then, are mind-dependent or “in the mind” in that the very existence of such a

thing implies that there is an experience, and every such thing is unique to the individual that experiences it. In contrast, things to be met with in space are “outside of us”, they are “external to our minds” in that the existence of them does not depend on being perceived. Further, Moore evidently holds that for various sorts of things, part of what it is to *be* that sort of thing *is* to be a thing that is to be met with in space. For example, it is a contradiction to say that something is a soap-bubble, but is not a thing to be met with in space.

Of course much of the attention on Moore’s paper has concerned its final pages, in which Moore displays, and then asserts, that he has hands. Since if there are hands, then there is an external world, Moore thus claims to prove that there is an external world (166). In this context, he remarks that he *knows* that he has hands, though he cannot *prove* it, and so denies that everything that is *known* can be *proven* (168–70).

### 3. “Epistemological” approaches to PEW

As we noted above, a number of discussions and assessments of PEW take its central critical target to be a skeptic who denies our knowing that there is an external world, and that Moore’s main interest in this paper is in exploring notions like knowledge, certainty, and proof.<sup>10</sup> We will first explain our reasons for favoring an alternative strategy for understanding PEW.

Moore’s paper does appear to consider a number of important epistemological issues, such as the relationship between knowledge and proof. We deny, however, that his primary aim was to combat a skeptic, and we believe that the discussions of proof and knowledge are of secondary importance. For one thing, as others have noted (see e.g., Coliva 2004, 400 and Baldwin 1990, 282), Moore (1942, 668–72) explicitly rejected an epistemological reading of his paper not long after it was pub-

<sup>10</sup>See notes 4 and 6 for references.

lished. Moreover, Moore's 1942 reply to critics of PEW concedes that the arguments in PEW do not succeed against skepticism; but, markedly, he did not disavow them. We also take it that an account of PEW most faithful to Moore's intent cannot simply disregard the discussions that occupy the bulk of the paper—which seem to have been of considerable importance to Moore, given his extensive revisions of them (see Section 4)—as epistemologically-oriented approaches to PEW have sometimes done.<sup>11</sup>

Importantly, the considerations that may be offered in favor of an epistemological approach do not undermine the *prima facie* case just outlined against it. For instance, in the final pages of PEW, Moore does indeed discuss the relation between knowledge and proof. But Moore's conception of philosophical inquiry and his notions of proof and refutation are not particularly concealed or ambiguous. In PEW, he tells us that in a "perfectly rigorous proof" one must *know* the premises (166). Likewise, in *Some Main Problems of Philosophy* (SMPOP; 1953, 1), originally delivered as lectures at Morley College in 1910–11, Moore expressed his belief that the most important and interesting thing that philosophers try to do is:

... to give a general description of the whole of the Universe, mentioning all the most important kinds of thing which we *know* to be in it, considering how far it is likely that there are in it important kinds of things which we do not absolutely know to be in it, and

<sup>11</sup>Thus Wright (2002, 330) mentions Moore's distinctions between objects as "external", "outside our minds", "presented in space" and "to be met with in space", but asserts that "nothing particularly consequential emerges" from these discussions, and then moves on to consider the "proof" in the final pages of PEW. Similarly, while Ambrose (1942, 408–09) notes that things to be met with in space do not depend for their existence on our perceiving them, she takes Moore to be advancing a broadly semantic point about knowledge claims in his "proof". For a related reading, see Malcolm (1942). Likewise, while Soames (2003) discusses Moore's distinction between things to be met with in space and things merely presented in space, he immediately turns to Moore's "proof" at the end of PEW.

also considering the most important ways in which these various kinds of things are related to one another.

And in a set of lectures from 1928–29, he furthermore attests that (1966, 44):

In order to refute a prop. *q*, all that you need to do is to find some prop. *p*, which (1) you *know* to be true, which (2) is inconsistent with the prop. in question, & (3) is such that in arguing "Since *p* therefore not *q*" you are not arguing in a circle: e.g., in order to refute "There are no black swans" you have only to find a black swan, i.e., to find a proposition of the form "This is a swan & is black", which you *know* to be true.

These remarks suggest that given Moore's conception of philosophical inquiry, the use of an expression like "knows" is inescapable: proof, and philosophical inquiry generally, involves *knowledge*; so giving a proof, or offering a refutation, entails attention to the concept of knowledge. It will not follow, however, that a proof or argument must target a *skeptic* who denies knowledge of the conclusion, or that the primary concern is with knowledge and how it is related to proof. We thus claim that the discussions of proof and knowledge in PEW do not provide evidence that Moore's primary target is a skeptic, or that his primary concern is with the relationship between knowledge and proof. We do not deny the philosophical import of his discussions of proof and knowledge in PEW and elsewhere; rather, our claim is that these discussions are not the centerpiece of the paper. We would argue that they are akin to Moore's remarks in RI about refutation, and the extent to which his arguments may be said to constitute a refutation of idealism. And as the primary focus of RI is idealism, not refutation, so also are the discussions of proof and knowledge in PEW compatible with its primary focus being the external world, not proof, knowledge, and other notions standardly taken to provide the subject matter for epistemological inquiry.<sup>12</sup>

<sup>12</sup>Although this requires sustained discussion that would take us too far

There are, of course, questions that arise in distinguishing an argument for a proposition  $p$  with an argument for our knowing that proposition. It is on this basis that Coliva (2004, 402–04 and 2010, 27–8) urges that even if Moore’s aims are conceded as broader than merely epistemological, PEW can and perhaps should be read as targeting a skeptic.<sup>13</sup> But Moore himself distinguished between an argument for a proposition  $p$  with an argument for our knowing that proposition, and this distinction plays a role in his own rebuff of epistemologically-oriented approaches to PEW (1942, 668–72). Further, Moore seems to have had a rationale for that distinction, consonant with arguments he gave elsewhere. In (1966, 47) and (1953, 127) he noted that arguments against our knowing that there are material things do not correspond one-to-one with arguments against there being material things. He thus allows that one could argue for the existence of the material world without establishing knowledge that there is such a world, at least in *not* addressing skeptical arguments *against* such knowledge. And this seems to be how he pursues his attack on idealism elsewhere. For example, in RI he argues for the existence of mind-independent reality by targeting key premises and assumptions in idealist thinking, *without* addressing skeptical arguments against our knowing that there is a mind-independent reality.

We believe that these considerations provide ample motivation for moving away from an epistemologically-oriented reading of PEW and placing less emphasis on its discussions of proof, knowledge, and related notions. Indeed, we take it that they provide motivation for questioning a strict bifurcation between “epistemological” and “metaphysical” readings of PEW, and toward an approach that locates PEW on a continuum in

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afield, we believe that to Moore himself, not only at this period, but throughout his career, the distinctions that we would draw today between so-called “metaphysical” and “epistemological” concerns would have been mystifying.

<sup>13</sup>See also Nuccetelli and Seay (2007a, 7). For a related discussion, see Baldwin (1990, 279–89) and Forster (2008).

the development of Moore’s thinking over his career. To develop a reading of Moore’s paper that draws out what we believe to be important links between PEW and his earlier work, we turn our attention next to the apparatus developed in the first part of PEW, drawing in part from unpublished drafts of PEW, as well as Moore’s early engagement with idealist metaphysics.

#### 4. PEW in draft form: archival material

Moore’s earliest work concerns the view that the distinction between acts and objects of thought (or perception) was crucial to understanding and ultimately undermining idealist metaphysical views. In NJ, Moore emphasized the distinction between a judgment and the objects of that judgment and attacked what he viewed as Bradley’s account of the matter. In RI, he argued that idealists failed to appreciate the distinction between an experience and the objects of that experience. Moore continues to endorse the connection between the nature and structure of perception and idealist conceptions of reality in “A Defense of Common Sense” (DCS; 1925, 125):

I hold, then, that in the case of some physical facts, there is no good reason to suppose that there is some mental fact, such that the physical fact in question could not have been a fact unless the mental fact in question had also been one. . . .

In holding this I am certainly differing from some philosophers. I am, for instance, differing from Berkeley, who held that that mantelpiece, that bookcase, and my body, are all of them, either “ideas” or “constituted by ideas”, and that no “idea” can possibly exist without being perceived.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>14</sup>The issue of the relationship between perception and its objects is also discussed in Moore (1916–17) and Moore (1917–18), and remained an active area of debate well after the publication of RI. Likewise, it would be a mistake to think idealism was dead by the time Moore wrote PEW. For example, Ewing’s comprehensive *Idealism: A Critical Survey* was published in 1934, and we

Though rarely remarked on by commentators, PEW would seem to continue with this line of thought. Indeed, PEW contains one of Moore's most extensive discussions of the issue of mind-independence. As we saw, his contention is that the very issue of whether there is an external world is the issue of whether there are mind-independent entities, in the sense of things that we perceive but that do not depend for their existence on our perceiving them.<sup>15</sup>

Moore's published text of PEW contains his characteristic extensive and nuanced deliberations on this issue, as we sketched in Section 2. But we believe that his unpublished drafts further highlight that it was of considerable importance to him to get clear on the issue of mind-independent reality, as well as the continuity between his concerns in PEW and those that were at the center of his earliest work. Thus Moore substantially reworked the first part of PEW on several occasions. Consider, for example, the short paragraph in the published version of PEW that begins with Moore's quoting Kant on the "unavoidable ambiguity" involved in the expression "outside of us", and which ends by introducing the crucial expression "things which are to be met with in space" (149–50). In (Add. 8875 15/3/1, 5), in contrast, Moore here includes an extended discussion of Kant's

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know that Moore provided written comments to Ewing on "large portions" of Ewing's manuscript; see Ewing (1934, v).

<sup>15</sup>Moore also endorses the connection between the issue of the external world and relationship between perception and its objects in his notebooks; thus his *Commonplace Book* (notes dated 1926, published 1962) has it that:

To say that anything is 'external to my mind' means, I think, that it is something such that from its existence at any time it does not follow that I am conscious at that time. (106)

And later in notes dated 1942–43 notes, he writes:

"There are external objects" = there are now & have been in the past objects of some kind,  $\phi$ , such that  $(\exists x) \phi x t_1$  does not entail  $x$  was being perceived at  $t_1$ . (202)

suggestion that we might explicate "things outside of us" in terms of "things which belong to external appearance". Moore rejects this on the ground that "external" is either being used as a synonym for "outside of us", in which case "the explanation is circular", or it is not being so used; but if it is not being so used, "some explanation of how it is being used is certainly required". Later in this same draft, Moore expands on the discussion in the published version of PEW (159–60) of the relevant sense of "in my mind" (Add. 8875 15/3/1, 15):

What is it that is true of pains, which makes them say that any pain which anyone feels is "in" the mind of the person who feels it? It has often been suggested that what "in" is here a metaphor for is "dependent on". And I think that this is the right answer to our question, provided we insist that by "dependent on" is meant "logically dependent on." There is an absurdity in supposing that any pain which I feel at a given time, *could* have existed either at that time or at any other without being felt by me.

Here, Moore explicitly characterizes the notion of a thing being "in my mind" in terms of its dependence on my mind, which is then characterized, as we sketched in Section 2, in terms of the absurdity of such a thing existing without my having an experience of that thing.

Likewise, consider Moore's introduction of the topic that occupies the bulk of PEW—the question of "what is the point in question" concerning a proof of "things outside of us" (149). In (Add. 8875 15/3/2, 4), Moore motivates inquiry into the proper meaning of "things outside of us" by contending that a "man who was perfectly familiar with the way in which 'outside' is used in English, and also with the way in which 'us' is used, would yet be apt to be puzzled by the combination 'outside of us'". We thus cannot avoid a detailed analysis of "things outside of us" by claiming that we antecedently understand "outside" and "us". This is representative of the theme, which we find both in the published version of PEW (149, 159) and in unpublished draft notes (Add. 8875 15/3/2, 4; Add. 8875 15/3/4,

6), that there is something strange or peculiar about expressions like “external world”, “outside of us”, and “external to us”, and that it is important to get clear on just how these expressions have been, and ought to be, used. The notes also include extensive discussions of the relationship between what “passes in my mind” and “what I do with my mind”, as well as mental dispositions or powers (Add. 8875 15/3/2, 5–9), which receive comparably little attention in the published version of PEW. What is clear is that it was of considerable importance to Moore to properly explicate what is at issue concerning “things outside of us”, and to clarify the issue of mind-independent reality.

In the unpublished drafts Moore also explicitly identifies the connection between perception and its objects on one hand and the issue of the external world on the other. Thus, in addition to further discussion of the content and structure of Kant’s proof (Add. 8875 15/3/3, 4), Moore specifically attends to the role of perception in Kant’s proof, noting that insofar as Kant’s proof *does* establish the existence of external things, it establishes that we sometimes *perceive* external things (ibid). Moore does not reject the suggestion, which he finds in Kant, that a proof of “things outside of us” will involve an account of perception and its objects. Indeed, he does not reject the claim, which he identifies in Kant, that “it is impossible to prove that there are external things except by a proof which proves at the same time that we sometimes perceive external things” (ibid).<sup>16</sup> This is in harmony with Moore’s strategy in PEW, with its emphasis on the relationship between objects of perception and our perception of them, but is also plausibly linked to the concerns manifest in his earliest papers, especially RI.

We note, finally, that in addition to Moore’s remarks in the published text (160, 162–63), it is apparent from his drafts that his aim was to capture what philosophers have been interested

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<sup>16</sup>See also an entry from the late 1930s published in the *Commonplace Book* (1962, 116–17), which discusses Kant’s proof.

in concerning “things outside of us”. Thus we see Moore introducing the initial discussion of “existence of things outside of us” in a draft as an attempt to get clear on what Kant meant by this expression (Add. 8875 15/3/1, 3). Likewise, here Moore remarks that the connection between “things external to us” and “things external to our minds” occurs not only in Descartes, as he notes in the published version of PEW, but also in Berkeley, Hume, and Mill.<sup>17</sup> Moreover Moore states, characteristically, that he is interested in the expression “external things” as used by philosophers, and that it is taken by them to be equivalent to “things that are not in our minds” (Add. 8875 15/3/2, 5). The task, of course, is then to spell out what it is for a thing to not be in our minds. Finally, the discussion in PEW of the resemblance between seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, and having pain on one hand, and remembering, thinking, and imagining on the other, turns up in Moore’s drafts of PEW in the context of his discussion of Locke’s remarks on perception and what “passes in the mind” (ibid).

The evidence we have adduced from Moore’s drafts of PEW shows the importance to him of properly characterizing the issue of “things outside of us”, and that he aimed for his characterization to capture what philosophers have been interested in when addressing this and related questions. Moreover, the approach to mind-independent reality that Moore takes in PEW is continuous with much of his earlier work. We believe that placing PEW in this context can help us to understand the motivation for distinguishing between things to be met with in space and things merely presented in space. In his rejection of idealism in RI, Moore argued that for *anything* we experience or perceive, its being is separable from our experience of it. But even though it seems clear that Moore never gave up on the thesis that there is some distinction between the acts of the mind and its objects, and that this distinction is important in the assess-

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<sup>17</sup>Interestingly, Kant was included here, but then crossed out.

ment of idealist metaphysics, he does appear to concede the mind-dependence of *some* objects of experience.<sup>18</sup> Thus in responding to Ducasse's critique of RI in 1942, he distinguishes between different kinds of things, now denying that "in no case is the *esse* of anything *percipi*," allowing that for some kinds of things, *percipi* does follow from *esse*. We suggest that the distinction between things to be met with in space and things merely presented in space in PEW functions, at least in part, to mark the difference between those things for which the "esse is *percipi*" formula holds and those for which it does not. The existence of things merely presented in space does depend on being perceived, and it is this inseparability that Moore concedes to Ducasse. Yet not everything depends for its existence on being perceived, since there are also things to be met with in space. By making this distinction, Moore can potentially avoid a "slippery slope" that O'Connor (1982, 28) suggests may have been in the background of his early wholesale rejection of the "esse is *percipi*" formula: it allows him to concede that the be-

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<sup>18</sup>This was perhaps inevitable, given the introduction of "sense data" into Moore's philosophy of perception, though he sometimes allowed that sense data might not depend for their existence on being experienced (1916–17, 425–27).

It would take us too far afield here to take on Moore's struggles with sense data and the issues that they generate for the philosophy of perception. It may be that, as Braithwaite (1961, 57) puts it, "Moore ... sees the reasons against any view [on perception] so clearly he could never make up his mind which was on the whole the most defensible"; and throughout his career he wavered between "direct realist", "representationalist", and "phenomenalist" views, and rarely did he come to any definite conclusions. But we are making the case that Moore was unwavering in his commitment to things that do not depend for their existence on being perceived, and that we sometimes perceive such things. He was aware that this did not sit easily with his commitment to sense data. In (1942, 658–59), for instance, Moore expresses that he is strongly inclined to hold both that we directly apprehend the surfaces of physical objects, but also that what we directly apprehend are sense data, and that no sense datum is identical with a physical surface, concluding that he is "completely puzzled about the matter".

ing of some things consists in their being perceived, without conceding that being *in general* consists in being perceived.

## 5. Moore's engagement with idealist metaphysics

In the previous section, we drew on Moore's unpublished drafts and notes to show how the distinctions and concerns in PEW are continuous with his earlier engagements with idealist metaphysics, and used this to explain why it would have been of interest to him to draw the core distinction, in PEW, between those things that are to be met with in space and those that are merely presented in space. In this section, we will discuss two related, broadly methodological, issues in Moore's work. Doing so will function to ward off certain worries that might be raised about Moore's reasoning in PEW as we have presented it, and also to distinguish our approach from some related readings of PEW.

The first issue we will here consider is that in arguing for mind-independent reality, in PEW and elsewhere Moore *seems* to freely move from the claim that something that *I* perceive does not depend on *my* perceiving it, to the conclusion that what *I* perceive does not depend on being perceived quite generally. Thus as far back as RI Moore asks (451):

But if we never experience anything but what is *not* an inseparable aspect of *that* experience, how can we infer that anything whatever ... is an inseparable aspect of *any* experience? How utterly unfounded is the assumption that 'esse is *percipi*' appears in the clearest light.

And in the 1916–17 paper "Are the Materials of Sense Affections of the Mind?" Moore resolves to focus on whether "every sensation presented to *me* [is] an affection of *my* mind" (420), given that

... for my part, if I cannot be sure that all the sensations presented to me are affections of my mind, I do not see how I could possibly

be sure that they are all affections of some mind.

Finally, in PEW he writes (165):

But if, when I say that anything which I perceive is a soap bubble, I am implying that it is external to *my* mind, I am, I think, certainly implying that it is also external to all other minds. I am implying that it is not of a sort such that things of that sort *can* only exist at a time when somebody is having an experience.

It could thus seem tempting to say that Moore is claiming, fallaciously, that from the premise that something that *I* perceive does not depend for its existence on *my* perceiving it, it strictly follows that it does not depend for its existence on *any* perception. And it may be further tempting to contend that this is just what Moore's idealist opponents *deny*.

But we do not think Moore is making this inference in PEW (or elsewhere). For one thing, while in PEW Moore does emphasize that when I perceive a thing to be met with in space, its existence does not depend on my perceiving it, he does not use this as a *premise* in claiming that things to be met with in space do not depend for their existence on being perceived at all. In particular, the claim that if something is a thing to be met with in space, there is no absurdity in supposing that it might have existed without being perceived at all (155) is not *premised* on the claim that when *I* perceive such a thing, its existence does not depend on *my* perceiving it. Further, insofar as Moore supposes that there *is* a logical connection between the dependence of what I perceive on my perceiving it, and the dependence of something on being perceived at all, we think that Moore should be viewed as offering a *challenge*, as follows: if something that I experience could be without my experiencing it, why should we think that it could not also be without anyone experiencing it? Or: if there is no particular individual such that the existence of a thing depends on being perceived by *that* individual, why think that the existence of a thing depends on

being perceived by *some* individual at all? According to Moore (1903b, 451), this would be "utterly unfounded."

Second, and related to the previous point, we note that despite repeatedly and explicitly criticizing the idealist views of Berkeley, Bradley, Hegel, Joachim, Kant, and McTaggart over many years (see, e.g., Moore 1899, 1901–02, 1903a, 1903–04, 1907, 1917–18, 1922, 1925), Moore *never* claimed to directly refute the idealist thesis that reality is spiritual or mental. For example, in RI Moore is clear that his aim is *not* show that the idealist view that reality is spiritual or mental view is *false*; rather, his aim is to "refute a single proposition which is a necessary and sufficient step in all Idealistic arguments" (435). This step, as we know, is the "esse is percipi" formula.

We believe that PEW should be read with this in mind. Thus, insofar as PEW is of a piece with Moore's broadly metaphysical concerns, we must be careful not to overstate his aims, especially in advancing the distinctions that occupy the first part of the paper. For instance, when addressing the worry that even if we can prove that there are things to be met with in space, we may still have to further prove that there are things external to our minds, Moore evidently allows that there *may* be a conception of "external to our minds" according to which such a further proof will be needed. He just fails to see what this conception could be (158–59). We think that Moore is again best viewed as offering a challenge to a defender of mind-dependence: if one is to claim that such further proof is needed, one ought to be prepared to say exactly what one means by "external to our minds" and why we should think that this is what philosophers have meant when using this and related expressions. This is Moore's strategy elsewhere, and we see no good reason to think that he is aiming to do more than this in PEW.

In advancing these claims, we part ways with some other more metaphysically-oriented readings of PEW. For example, Klemke (2000, 31) rightly emphasizes that for Moore, the issue

of “ontological realism” concerns the existence of things independent of the awareness of minds and perceivers. He also rightly emphasizes the role of Moore’s “definitional project” in the first part of PEW (328–29). But he also holds that Moore has more ambitious aims in PEW than, we believe, he does. In particular, Klemke holds that whereas the earlier RI merely aims to undermine the premise that “to be is to be perceived”, in PEW Moore seeks to positively establish the falsity of the idealist thesis that “all reality is spiritual or mental” (34–5, 212–13). We do not think that there is good evidence in PEW for committing Moore to such a bold strategy for dealing with idealism, which moreover he nowhere else appears to employ. Likewise, O’Connor (1982, 34) rightly takes both DCS and PEW to continue Moore’s early critique of idealist metaphysics. However, he also takes the later work to be aimed more at developing a more positive metaphysical outlook than, for example RI, and in this sense having more ambitious aims. We doubt that this is the case. Rather, we take Moore to be *less* ambitiously urging for the independence of *some* objects of perception from our perception of them, and challenging a metaphysical idealist to provide a clear sense of “external to our minds” under which more than this is needed to show that there is an external world.<sup>19,20</sup>

<sup>19</sup> O’Connor (1982, 62) also treats Moore’s argument in PEW as closely corresponding to arguments in SMPOP; indeed, he takes them to be “counterpart” arguments. The problem with this is that the passages from SMPOP that O’Connor cites in this context concern our knowledge that there is a pencil, and whether we could likewise claim to know, with the same degree of certainty, any principles that would contravene this claim to knowledge. This sort of reasoning is absent from PEW, though it does recur in “Certainty” (1959). Furthermore, the distinctions that Moore makes in PEW are absent from the relevant passages in SMPOP.

<sup>20</sup>We note that our contention that Moore’s aims in PEW should not be overestimated is compatible with his claim to be offering a *proof* of an external world. Further, while Moore says (166) that it would be absurd to deny that he knows “what [he] expressed by the combination of certain gestures with saying the words ‘There is one hand and here is another’”, he nowhere says that it would be absurd to deny the claims, crucial to the success of his proof,

## 6. A response to some criticisms of PEW

In the previous section, we highlighted Moore’s ways with idealist metaphysics throughout his career and suggested that we should take care to not overestimate his aims in PEW. Because of this, we distinguished our reading of PEW from those approaches that, we claimed, threaten to attribute to Moore aims far more ambitious than may be warranted. In this section, we will address some prominent criticisms of the arguments in PEW insofar it is taken to be concerned with idealist-oriented metaphysics as we have claimed. This will help to further distinguish our reading of PEW from similar approaches.

We will begin by addressing Baldwin’s important critical discussion of PEW. Baldwin (1990, 295) agrees with us that the concerns of PEW are broadly metaphysical. But he also thinks that so understood, it is a “total failure”:

At this point Moore has defined the issue in such a way that few philosophers will want to deny that there is an external world in the sense Moore has defined. For to deny that there is an external world, in Moore’s sense, one must deny that there are objects ‘to be met with in space’, i.e., perceptible by more than one person and capable of existing unperceived. The crucial case is that of a phenomenalist; for if Moore’s proof is to be a proof of metaphysical realism, and a refutation of idealism, it must surely be such that its conclusion is inconsistent with phenomenalism. But Moore’s conclusion in this case is not one that a phenomenalist will want to dispute . . . Even Berkeley allows . . . that a phenomenalist can speak with the vulgar and talk of unperceived material objects.

. . . Moore’s ‘Proof’ is not a refutation of skepticism, nor was it intended to be. It was intended to be a refutation of idealism; as such it is a total failure. (Baldwin 1990, 294–95)

This could be read as an objection to a metaphysically-oriented

that he advances the first part of the paper. These claims, we suggest, are what Moore takes to be the central point of dispute with the idealist, and his challenge is for the idealist to offer a clear and compelling account of “what is at issue” regarding the external world.

interpretation of PEW, in that that if we approach Moore's paper in this way, the conclusion that it establishes is trivial, and trivial in a way that Moore should have been able to discern. The worry is that Moore's case against "idealism" hardly threatens any idealism that is worth defending or, indeed, has been defended—any idealism that permits, in some manner, objects that do not depend for their existence on being perceived by some particular finite being. This is problematic, from an interpretative point of view, if it is implausible to suppose that Moore so gratuitously misunderstood his critical target.

Setting aside the issue of what Baldwin calls "phenomenalism", to which we shall return below, Baldwin is surely right that idealists have wanted in some manner to endorse objects "perceptible by more than one person and capable of existing unperceived". In response, we take it that Moore's claim is that upon reflection, it is apparent that the idealist *cannot*, in fact, accept the existence of objects to be met with in space: idealists have *wanted* to claim, sensibly enough, that reality does not in its entirety depend on the perceptions and experiences of finite subjects. Moore claims, through the distinctions offered in the first part of PEW, that once this is granted, an idealist conception of reality proves groundless, and the existence of a mind-independent world should be granted absent some argument to the contrary. Somewhat differently, we do not think that Moore is falsely supposing defenders of mind-dependence to explicitly contend that there are only things that are merely presented in space. Rather, we take him to be arguing, through the distinctions offered in the first part of PEW, that absent some reason to think otherwise, this *is* a commitment of defenders of mind-dependence. This is best viewed as a challenge to the defender of mind-dependence: if more is required to show that there is an external world, one should be prepared to say just what one means by "external world", and to say it clearly.

Baldwin claims that any decent criticism of idealism must

show that "phenomenalism" is false. But whether the conclusions of PEW—and, indeed, Moore's earlier attacks on idealist metaphysics—are incompatible with "phenomenalism" will depend on the phenomenalism at issue. In RI, for instance, Moore argues that being does not depend on being perceived; in PEW, he restricts this conclusion to things to be met with in space. Now, on one hand, if "phenomenalism" asserts that things consist of actual perceptions—as Berkeley apparently did in assigning objects unperceived by finite beings to the mind of an infinite God—Moore's conclusion *does* challenge such a view: a "phenomenalism" that analyzes material things as collections of actual experiences does suppose the "esse is percipi" formula. It supposes that to be is to be in a mind, in the sense of being incapable of existing without being an object of experience. Moore would claim that this is false, or at least unsupported, if there are things to be met with in space. On the other hand, the existence of things to be met with in space is perhaps compatible with a phenomenalism that analyzes things in terms of actual and possible experiences, a view that Moore (1918–19, 5) associates with Russell, and before him Mill. But it is not clear that Moore would have thought that an argument against idealism must be incompatible with phenomenalism in *this* sense: he took all forms of idealism to suppose that being consists in being perceived, and this is false on the present view, as it allows for things to exist independently of experience and perception.<sup>21</sup> Moore seems to have been aware of this in PEW (155):

I have taken 'to be met with in space' to imply, as I think it naturally may, that a 'thing' *might be* perceived ... To use a Kantian phrase, the conception of 'things which are to be met with in space' embraces not only objects of actual experience, but also objects of *possible* experience; and from the fact that a thing is or was an object of *possible* experience, it by no means follows that it either was

<sup>21</sup>For related lines of thought, see Wilson (1996) and O'Connor (1982, 96).

or is or will be ‘presented’ at all.

Moore here seems to be conceding that things to be met with in space are “objects of possible experience”. But the issue, he thinks, is *not* whether such things are merely objects of possible experience, but rather whether such things must be experienced to exist. And as we have seen, his claim is that they do not. We thus take it that insofar as PEW targets idealist metaphysics, it is neither uninteresting nor a total failure, as Baldwin contends. In this way, while we certainly agree with Baldwin that Moore’s aims in PEW are best understood as broadly metaphysical in character, we deny that this has the rather unpalatable consequences that Baldwin identifies.

It has also been claimed that insofar as Moore’s critical target in PEW is idealist metaphysics, he is at least as guilty of question-begging as if his target were a skeptic about our knowledge of the external world (Coliva 2004, 399–401). What is true, and what ought to be conceded, is that a defender of the mind-dependence of reality could deny Moore’s claim that if there are hands, then there is an external, mind-independent world. But this is not to charge Moore with begging the question against defenders of mind-dependence. It is rather to say that insofar as an idealistically-inclined philosopher denies Moore’s conclusion that there is an external world, he or she must deny one of his premises. Again, it may be useful to recall the argument in RI, where Moore appears to be urging us to accept the existence of mind-independent reality, in part, on the grounds that we have experiences of blue, and that if we have experiences of blue, then there is a mind-independent reality. Here, the first premise is hardly up for dispute, and the second premise was the main source of controversy between Moore and his opponents.<sup>22</sup> What is clear is that a charge of question-begging would be illegitimate, at least

<sup>22</sup>See, for example, Hicks (1904–05), Mackenzie (1906) and Strong (1905). Others offered the non-exclusive response that, against Moore, even if an ob-

because Moore *argued* for the premise that if we have experiences of blue, then there is a mind-independent reality. We suggest that the same is true of the corresponding claims in PEW. Moore argues that if hands exist, then there is an external world; it is beside the point for a defender of idealist metaphysics to note that he or she denies Moore’s premise. When put in these terms, the machinery developed in PEW—and on a continuum with the strategy in RI—in effect functions to show that even if we deny that mind-independent reality follows from our having experiences of blue, we may yet support a commitment to mind-independent reality by appealing to other objects of experience—for example, hands and soap-bubbles—that defenders of mind-dependent reality would be hard pressed to deny.

## 7. Conclusion

In their examinations of PEW others have acknowledged Moore’s contention that things to be met with in space are independent of and separable from our experience of them.<sup>23</sup> But they more often than not seem to pass this over without sufficiently considering its significance. On our reading of PEW, however, Moore’s position concerning the separability of some objects of perception from the act of perception is the cornerstone of his position. This reading, we contend, is well-motivated and even substantiated, given Moore’s post-RI concession that at least some of the objects of experience *do* depend for their existence on our experience of them, and is supported by the evidence in his unpublished drafts.

We do not claim that Moore’s case in favor of mind-independent reality in PEW is ultimately successful, or that

ject of perception does not depend on my perceiving it, there may be reasons to think that it yet does depend on being perceived; see Stace (1934).

<sup>23</sup>See note 11.

there are no conceivable replies available. What we do claim, though, is that there are significant advantages to our reading with respect to a faithful account of Moore's aims. The traditionally bifurcated readings of PEW impose on Moore a blunt distinction in concerns and strategies; but each finishes either by perplexingly distorting Moore's position or by attributing to Moore a number of peculiar errors. By emphasizing continuity in both Moore's philosophical concerns and strategies, our reading, by contrast, avoids attributing to him aims that he explicitly denied, and avoids concluding that the main line of argument in PEW is either trivial or hopelessly flawed; flawed, moreover, in ways that Moore himself should have been able to recognize.

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