# Lecture 2 Moore and Dogmatism

#### 1. <u>Review and Set-up</u>

Last week we looked at a couple of different arguments for scepticism. Before we begin to look at responses to scepticism, it is worth briefly stating the version of scepticism with which those responses engage.

#### **Argument from Ignorance**

**S**CEPTICAL **H**YPOTHESIS. I do not know I am not in a sceptical scenario (e.g. dreaming/B.I.V/evil demon/etc).

**C**LOSURE. If I do not know I am not in a sceptical scenario, then I do not know I have hands.

**¬O**RDINARY **K**NOWLEDGE. I do not know I have hands.

With this to hand, we can understand the two arguments from last week as arguments *for* accepting **SH** and *against* accepting **OK**.

### 2. Moore's Defence of Ordinary Knowledge, a.k.a "Look mum! Two Hands!"

So notorious is Moore's argument against scepticism that you may have already heard of it. Moore argues that there are somethings that I clearly know, like that I have two hands. And if I know that I have hands, then I know I'm not in a sceptical scenario.

#### **Moorean Argument**

- **OK** I know I have hands.
- **C** If I do not know I am not in a sceptical scenario, then I do not know I have hands.
- -SH I know I am not in a sceptical scenario.

While Moore's response might immediately sound like question-begging, there is much more to the argument than this.

Notice that both the Argument from Ignorance and the Moorean Argument are deductively **valid**. They also both accepts **C**, i.e. the Closure Principle (we'll return to this next week).

Whenever we are faced with a deductively valid argument, we can (broadly) do one of two things to challenge it: (1) contest the validity of the argument, or (2) show at least one of the premises to be false.

Moore's argument amounts to rejecting the truth of  $\neg OK$ . In defence of this move, he argues that he is (and indeed we ought to be) more confident in **OK** than in **SH**. He offers the following reasons for this:

- (1) It is false that "if I cannot prove [that *p*], I do not know [that *p*]" (28)
- (2) It doesn't follow from something's being possible that I do not know that it is false (29)
- (3) To say that **SH** is "not logically incompatible with anything that I know [...] would be [...] question begging" (29), since that is to assume ¬**OK**
- (4) The argument for accepting SH depends on the premise "since there have been dream-images similar in important respects to some of the sensory experiences I am now having, it is logically possible that there should be dream-images exactly like all the sensory experiences I am now having, and logically possible, therefore, that all the sensory experiences I am now having are mere dream-images" (33). But this the sceptic cannot both accept the antecedent (which turns on knowing that we have had dreams) and deny that we know we're not dreaming.
- (5) No good reason has been given for thinking that "it is logically possible both that you should be having all the sensory experiences you are having, and also that you should be remembering what you do remember, and yet should be dreaming" (34).

There are, however, several weaknesses to Moore's arguments. First, (4) and (5) concern dream scepticism alone. They have no force against sceptical hypotheses that do not turn on knowledge of our previous states (like in (4)), and that guarantee the consistency of our sensory experiences with the sceptical hypothesis (e.g. BIV).

What is more, Moore doesn't give us any positive account of what he thinks it does take to know that p. He tells us that we can know that p even if we cannot offer a proof for p. And he implies that we can know that p even if we cannot state our evidence for p. But in the face of a sceptical argument that includes a clear theory of knowledge (e.g. Hume's and Unger's), Moore's argument suffers.

Since Moore, there have been a number of attempts to bolster the Moorean Argument with such accounts. One such attempt comes in the form of **contextualism**. We'll set that one aside for now as we'll be looking at contextualism in Week 4.

# 3. Sosa's Defence – Sensitivity v. Safety

One way of understanding Unger's argument for scepticism is as claiming that knowledge must be unfailingly **sensitive**.

**SENSITIVITY** S knows that p only if, if  $\neg p$  then S would not believe that p.

On Unger's argument, to know that p requires that there be *no possibility* on which  $\neg p$  and S believes that p, since knowledge requires certainty, and certainty requires ruling out every possibility that  $\neg p$ .

Sosa suggests that rejecting SENSITIVITY in favour of SAFETY can provide us with a means of defending the Moorean Argument against the Argument from Ignorance.

**SAFETY** S knows that *p* only if, if *p* then S would believe that *p*.

Sosa argues that we should reject SENSITIVITY because it faces counterexamples that SAFETY does not.

# **Counterexample 1**

Consider the following two propositions:

(1) p

(2) I do not believe falsely that p

Suppose that S believes both of these. It seems as though it should be the case that if S then knows (1) they also know (2) and vice versa. However, (2) can never be sensitive! If S's belief that (2) were sensitive, the following would have to be true:

If it were the case that  $\neg(2)$ , then S would not believe that (2)

But this is to say that

*If it were the case that S did believe falsely that* p*, then S would not believe that they believe truly that* p.

And this is impossible. Or at least, it is impossible as long as you accept that 'I believe that Q' and 'I believe that Q is false' are inconsistent. After all, to believe something *just is* to believe that it's true.

But it's highly implausible for knowledge of (1) and of (2) to come apart in this way. So we should reject SENSITIVITY.

#### **Counterexample 2**

From Sosa:

On my way to the elevator I release a trash bag down the chute from my high rise condo. Presumably I know my bag will soon be in the basement. But what if, having been released, it still (incredibly) were not to arrive there? That presumably would be because it had been snagged somehow in the chute on the way down (an incredibly rare occurrence), or some such happenstance. But none such could affect my predictive belief as I release it, so I would still predict that the bag would soon arrive in the basement. My belief seems not to be sensitive, therefore, but constitutes knowledge anyhow, and can correctly be said to do so. (145-6)

If we can know predictions like this before the occurrence of the relevant event, then there is reason to deny SENSITIVITY. In this case, we're meant to consider the prediction before it turns out that the bag doesn't get to the basement. Compare the belief that the bag will arrive in the basement to your belief that our third lecture will be next Monday. Before thinking about scepticism, you would happily accept that you *know* that the lecture is next Monday. So too for the garbage bag belief. But, of course, our predictions are not sensitive. It is never the case for any predictive believe that I would not have believed that *p* if *p* were to be false. Nevertheless, when we make predictions about highly likely events like the one described in Sosa's example, we (ordinarily) take ourselves to *know* their contents. And if this is so, then we should reject SENSITIVITY.

In addition to these two counterexamples, Sosa presents a third problem. In the case of any "apodictically necessary truth A", he argues that "sensitivity is doubtful as a condition for our being correctly said to have knowledge [...] given how hard it would be to make sense of the supposition that not-A" (146).

Sosa then argues that, where *uncontentious* cases are concerned, SAFETY can accommodate our intuitions just as well as SENSITIVITY can. And if this is the case, and if SENSITIVITY faces the counterexamples/problems above while SAFETY does not, then we should reject the former in favour of the latter.

#### **Defending the Moorean Argument**

With this positive account of knowledge to hand (recall that lack of the same was one of the problems for Moore's case), we now have an argument for accepting **OK** over **SH**. Our belief that **OK** (and, indeed, that  $\neg$ **SH**) is *safe*, and there is independent reason to prefer SAFETY as a necessary condition for knowledge over SENSITIVITY.

Finally, Sosa argues that this argument also has the tools necessary to explain what made scepticism (and in particular **SH**) so compelling in the first place. (This is not to say that a sensitivity-based approach lacks such an explanation; we'll see that it doesn't in Week 4, in fact.) He argues that it is the similarity between safety and sensitivity that leads us to find **SH** believable. The two conditions *look* like they are contrapositives; and, "[i]t is easy to overlook that subjunctive conditionals do not contrapose" (148).

# 4. Pryor's Dogmatism

Pryor defends what he calls 'dogmatism' about perceptual justification.

# **Dogmatism about Perceptual Justification**

When it perceptually seems to you as if p is the case, you have a kind of justification for believing p that does not presuppose or rest on your justification for anything else, which could be cited in an argument (even an ampliative argument) for p. [...] No further awareness or reflection or background beliefs are required. Of course, other beliefs you have might defeat or undermine this justification. But no other beliefs are required for it to be in place. (519)

A **dogmatist about knowledge**, then, claims that the justification you gain from having perceptual experience as of *p* can sometimes suffice for knowledge that *p*.

In the context of the Moorean Argument from above, the dogmatist position can be understood as a reason for accepting **OK** over **SH**.

Pryor argues that the sceptical argument depends on the following premise:

If you're ever to know anything about the external world on the basis of your perceptual experiences, then you have to be in a position to antecedently know you're not then being deceived by an evil demon. (528)

And he denies this (or more precisely, the correlate pertaining to justification). He argues that perception can give us immediate, *prima facie* justification for perceptually basic beliefs (e.g. I see that I have hands). He argues that this is motivated by, and founded on, "sensible philosophical conservativism" (538). "We start with what it seems intuitively natural to say about perception," he writes, "and we retain that natural view until we find objections that require us to abandon it" (538).