

G.E. Moore, “Certainty”

Moore is concerned with the following argument:

- P1) If it is not certain that I am not dreaming, then it is not certain that I am standing up.
- P2) I am not certain that I am not dreaming.
- C) I am not certain that I am standing up.

This is, of course, an argument that is familiar from Descartes and others. But is it *a good argument*?

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- P1) If I don't know that I am not dreaming, then I don't know that I am standing up.
- P2) I don't know that I am not dreaming.
- C) I don't know that I am standing up.

Moore thinks that P1 is true. Why?

Suppose I dream that I am sitting in a chair in Moscow. As it turns out, I *am* sitting in a chair in Moscow—this is where I've fallen asleep. While dreaming, I've got a belief (that I'm sitting in a chair in Moscow) that turns out to be true. Do we want to say that I *know* I'm sitting in a chair in Moscow?

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- P1) If I don't know that I am not dreaming,
then I don't know that I am standing up.
- P2) I don't know that I am not dreaming.
- C) I don't know that I am standing up.

No. Knowledge requires *more* than this. To say that I know some proposition *P*, the following conditions need to be met:

- 1) I must believe that *P*.
- 2) I must be *justified* in believing that *P*.
- 3) *P* must be true.

On this view, knowledge is understood as *justified true belief*. We'll call this the JTB theory of knowledge.

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- P1) If I don't know that I am not dreaming, then I don't know that I am standing up.
- P2) I don't know that I am not dreaming.
- C) I don't know that I am standing up.

So P1 looks safe to Moore. If I don't know that I am not dreaming, then my belief that I am standing up is not *justified*.

This is not enough, though, to persuade Moore that he should accept C.

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“This first part of the argument is a consideration which cuts both ways”:

- P1) If I don't know that I am not dreaming, then I don't know that I am standing up.
- P2) I know that I am standing up.
- C) I know that I am not dreaming.

Notice that this argument is formally valid. As Moore says, “The one argument is just as good as the other, unless my opponent can give better reasons for asserting that I don't know that I'm not dreaming, than I can give for asserting that I do know that I am standing up.”

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Here’s a similar argument against skepticism about the external world:

- P1) If I am unsure that the external world exists, then I am unsure that I have hands.
- P2) I am sure that I have hands.
- C) I am sure that the external world exists.

Has Moore restored our knowledge of the external world? Has he defeated skepticism conclusively?