

HPPH7010
KNOWLEDGE, REASON AND REALITY, ASS 1
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ANNOTATED BIB.

G. E. Moore, 'Certainty', in Willis Doney (ed.), *Descartes: a collection of critical essays* (London and Melbourne: Macmillan, 1968).

In his paper certainty, Moore defends the idea of a person when he says they are certain of something, they are *absolutely* certain of that thing. Moore is often depicted as a defender of common-sense as opposing to scepticism. It is important to note, nonetheless, that while Moore does not endorse scepticism, he does not disregard it.

Moore provides seven assertions/statements as a base for (or to build) his argument.

- 1.He's present in a room rather than outside
- 2.He's standing up rather than sitting or lying down
- 3.He's clothed rather than naked
- 4.He's speaking in a loud voice rather than singing, whispering or keeping silent
- 5.He's holding some sheets of paper with writing on them
- 6.There are many other people in the room he is in
- 7.There's a window in one wall and a door in another (pointing). (p. 27)

The first six statements are concerned with him and the last is not. He states that the certainty of the assertion "I am standing up" is not dogmatism, but rather a logical observation of the senses. The seven assertions have complementary aspects. First, he claims the propositions can be false, but not necessarily self-contradictory. If a proposition is false, that does not mean that its opposite is true. If "I am standing up" is false, that does not mean "I am sitting down" is true as I may be lying down. He defines contingent as "propositions which is not self-contradictory and of which the contradictory is not self-contradictory" and all seven propositions are contingent, in other words, not

self-contradictory. What Moore disputes is that the seven propositions are true when others say they are not (p. 28-32). His second claim follows the first: “it is possible p ”, cannot be false if the asserter knows p is true (p. 32). He argues that possible may indicate truth or falsity. However, when saying “I am standing” then it is certain (p. 33). He argues when philosophers say “not self-contradictory” it means logically possible. This is based on the language philosophers use (p. 34). Third, those seven assertions are *absolutely* certain. If a person knows from a specific time that p is true, then that person knows with absolute certainty p is true. If the difference between absolutely certain and certain in language arises, Moore replies that they are the same. If “I am absolutely certain I am standing up”, the opposite is not “I am certain I am standing up”, therefore, they are same in language according to Moore (p. 37). He adds, propositions whose contradictories are self-contradictory are called sometimes “necessary truths” because they are priori propositions. An example is “I am certain that a triangle has three sides”; triangles necessarily have three sides (p. 38). He says there are four ways to say ‘certain’ in a sentence: I feel certain that, I am certain that, I know for certain that and It is certain that (p. 39). All four of them may have different meanings relatively, but when using all of them, “there is no difference of importance” (p. 40).

He later argues that the seven propositions imply that an external world exists, even though his “standing up” does not prove it. He begins his conclusion by saying those propositions are derived from his senses, and if he was not certain of those propositions, he would not say them (p. 45). He then claims they are good test scenarios to prove an external world (p. 46). Here the sceptic philosopher might ask, how can he know he is dreaming even if there is a slight chance he is not? Moore counters this by asking ‘how

could the sceptic prove otherwise?’ (p. 47) He answers, if ‘you are standing up’, for that to be true, you need to know and think you are standing up. Even if you are not standing up in reality, thinking and knowing as senses are still required, as being deceived requires awareness of being deceived. He concludes, It is quite certain I can use the evidence of my senses that “I am standing up” or “have an experience which is very like having the evidence of me standing up” (p. 50). He says, Russell would agree with him (p. 48).

Developing Descartes dream skepticism, Moore accepts the premise that you might be dreaming while feeling awake. He argues, for a philosopher to use it as a premise implies (but not necessarily expresses) that the philosopher dreamt at one point, and that he can recognize the difference. He ends his argument by a challenge: if a person can remember their memories while knowing they are dreaming, then the sceptic is right to be skeptical. He says, he has yet to meet such person (p. 50-53). It should be noted that ‘Certainty’ is a lecture and should be read as a lecture’ rather than a structural writing. It is advised for the reader to be familiar with Descartes *Meditations* before venturing on Moore’s lecture. Additionally, Unger in his paper defends ‘skepticism’ by showing that certainty is entirely absolute in language but not in awareness (Unger, 1971, p. 216). The writer feels that most people would understand the common-sense criteria Moore argues for, since most people would use language in such manner, even Unger admits that people do so (Unger, *ibid*, p. 214).

Plato. (2013). On matrimony and philosophy. *The Republic* (pp. 145-184). Maple Press. Noida: India.

Plato provides a fictional dialect between Socrates, Glaucon and Adeimantus about matrimony and philosophy of knowledge. Throughout the book the conversation between the three shifts across various topics. Starting with “matter of women and children” (**p. 145**) and ending with epistemology of knowledge and opinion (**p. 178-182**). The first topic discussed was family life, women and children. In here, Plato argues that the nature of women and men are different but their pursuits do not necessarily have to be.

According to Plato, men by nature are the guardians (high position in the state) of women and children (**p. 147**) due to men being physically stronger (**p. 147**). He argues that bald and hairy men are different in nature, but not necessarily in pursuits. Therefore, women are different from men’s nature, but they do not necessarily have different pursuits in which they can pursue education and arts. He concludes that in the matters of state, there are no differences between men or women. In contrast, women can be guardians but, in their nature, weaker than men (**p. 152-153**).

The second topic discussed is regarding law and state affairs. Since it is argued that women and men can be guardians, the state must legislate and control marriage and not allow licentiousness (**p. 156-158**). This argument follows the discussion of separating strong offspring and weaker ones by having the state legislate that guardian couples marry one another rather than them choosing who to marry. Plato argues that the prime time for males is thirty, while females are twenty and until fifty, this range allows strong parents to marry within the range but cannot marry weaker ones, only after they pass the range(**p. 159-160**). Plato continues by espousing the guardians to be of a higher status in

society and that they should only be paid for their livelihood but not allowed to own anything as this would create a rift between the guardians of society. Unity of a family should be the unity of a state, the misery of one person is misery of the state (**p. 164**). The third topic is on matters of war. Plato argues children need to be prepared and see war but be protected from it (**p. 168**). He distinguishes three statuses: the runaway gets degraded to an artisan status, the prisoner is considered lawful to the enemy and the hero is distinguished and should be highly respected by their fellowship (**p. 169**). Moreover, Plato also distinguishes between war and discord. Countries with the same customs when fighting are considered in discord, but when it comes to different customs, they become in war. He gives an example of Hellenes states: when fighting they are in discord but when fighting barbarians, they are in war and can unite (**p. 170-172**). Plato indicates the reason for such discussion is to understand absolute justice by discussing injustices and what people should aspire is to resemble that justice even though it might not exist (**p. 174**).

The third topic Plato shifts to is part of his epistemology of knowledge and opinion. Faculties such as sight and hearing cannot make a quantifying conception of knowledge and opinions. Knowledge requires consciousness and awareness of being. The subject matter of knowledge then is considered being and usually it is thought not being is the subject of opinion. To have an opinion, is to have thought about something, if not-being is not existence then it cannot be an opinion. Here Plato concludes opinions are not true or false, neither knowledge or ignorance but rather an intermediary where it is darker than knowledge and lighter than ignorance (**p. 181-182**).

Plato's notion on women can be considered relatively modern and it can be seen manifesting in our current times. Degradation of marriage and allowing women and men to be guardians while (nurses rear the children) is considered a radical idea to his time and to our current times (**Taylor, 2012-08-02, p. 79**). His advocacy of the state controlling matrimony and breeding under the ideal of his state might in theory be persuasive but in the opinion of the writer who finds it stringent and rigorous that can only happen in a secluded society or from the beginning of time. If his sociological theories are implemented in a practical manner, the main concern would be in dehumanizing individuals in society where women can be shunned, and improper family structures of children without their biological parents are abundant. In the last part of the book, Plato associates non-being to ignorance and knowledge and truth to a philosopher where he designates the latter to be the superior.

This book forms a major part of Plato's idea of family and government structures to his theory of an ideal state. The last part of the book focuses on his epistemology which creates the foundation of his analogy of the divided line and his theory of forms.

However, when reading this book, being aware of his analogy of the cave and the sun/goodness would help the reader in understanding his epistemology. Even though Plato speaks of an ideal state with its perfect absolute justice, which can be inhumane for human desires, Plato himself believes it cannot be fully applicable but rather we ought to try to emulate the absolute to the best of our ends.

Unger, P. (1971). A defense of skepticism. *The Philosophical Review*, 80(2), 198-219.

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Peter Unger tries to provide a defence for skepticism. According to Unger, the reason why philosophers do not take skepticism seriously is due to the unrecognizability of certain things; these certain things are an implication of language (p. 199). In this paper, Unger tries to explain in the face of philosophical milieu, skepticism is still a valid attitude towards epistemology and philosophical language. Even though Unger specifies that for a person to have knowledge, certainty is required. Nonetheless, his purpose is to show “every human being knows, at best, hardly anything to be so.” (p. 198).

The paper is divided into five main sections. The first section touches on the worries of scepticism and why it is usually denied. The second section focuses on defining his terms. The third section aims to define certainty. The fourth section concentrates on doubtful application of some absolute terms. The last section centres on knowledge and certainty.

In the first section Unger explains that there are two concerns when it comes to scepticism. The first concern is that people can lack knowledge yet believe they do possess it. If those beliefs are known to be consistently false, then the terms or language we use is the cause (p. 200). The second concern follows on the first; if the language is at the core of knowledge then the terms used will need be isolated and cannot be used in common communication (p. 202).

Introducing his argument, in the second section, Unger defines absolute and relative terms. Absolute terms are words/terms used with no degree of measurement that can be considered absolute to the term, an example is the term “flat” means “something is

absolutely flat”. However, terms such as “bumpy” or “curve” are measurable: “The table is *very* bumpy.” When saying something is bumpy, we cannot know this with exactness. Unlike flatness, we have an idea of a flat surface and from there we can see how close it is to being flat. Hence, “bumpy” is a relative term (p. 202-203). Consecutively, Unger introduces basic absolute terms which are utilized to define other terms (p. 203). An example is “line”, which cannot be said of as “very line” or imagined other than a line. Unger takes “Cube” as a derived absolute term which are terms defined by other terms (p. 206), because it cannot be used as “very cubic” or “flat cube”, it is simply a literal cube, but cubes do have flat sides. At the end of the section Unger classifies few terms as relative and absolute.

After defining his terms, in the third section Unger tackles the term “certain”. Classifying it as an absolute term, when a person is being certain, that person cannot be doubtful of the knowledge. “It is certain that *p*” is (in other words) “It is not at all doubtful that *p*” (p. 208). Furthermore, Unger believes the terms to have value that varies when modifiers are added to them . For example, the ‘really’ in “I am *really* certain of something” lessens the force of the term certain, while ‘100%’ in “I am *100%* certain of the thing” increases the value of the term (p. 209-210).

In the fourth section Unger experiments with absolute terms in the real world. He takes the term “flat” and when used with an object nothing can be flat as it is. The term cannot be used on surfaces, because in the real world looking through a microscope we find ridges on the surface. Therefore, when a person uses the term “the surface is flat” then they have knowledge that the surface is absolutely flat. Similarly, the term “certain”

when used in “I am certain”, that specific person is absolutely certain. When a person is certain automobiles exist, then that person is absolutely certain they exist **(p. 211-213)**. In the last section Unger agrees with Moore that knowledge requires certainty. Then he questions why people shift from being absolutely certain when speaking. His answer follows the observation of people speaking “loosely, charitably and casually” **(p. 214)**. When asked of a historical question, a person can answer correctly but might be hesitant. This loose speaking without certainty is the problem of the term failing. Unger suggests focusing the words in expressing the concept directly and precisely **(p. 214-216)**. He concludes by saying “there is hardly anything, if anything at all, which the person knows to be so.”**(p. 216)**.

Unger’s paper forms a valid argument for certainty. Though theoretically people nowadays do not speak precisely, his advice to be precise is impractical with the age of information flooding the knowledge depository. My critique follows with Dretske. He criticizes Unger and argues that justification is enough knowledge. He disputes that “flat” cannot be “bumpy” but bumpiness depends on the surface being explained. In contrast, a person might say “a warehouse is empty” where empty is absolute. However, a warehouse does have lightbulbs or molecules inside. Therefore, to define a warehouse empty the lightbulbs and molecules are irrelevant **(Dretske, 1981, p. 366)**. In reading his paper, having a background on Moore’s ‘certainty’ provides a coherent idea of modern scepticism. In conclusion, Unger provides a defining option for knowledge and showed us that at the end, nobody knows everything as they might think they do. Nonetheless, his methodology falls short for practical reasons.

Descartes, R. (1641), *Meditations on First Philosophy*, in the version presented at www.earlymoderntexts.com

Meditations 1-3 by Rene Descartes

The *Meditations* is a collection of six essays each on his metaphysics and epistemology. Each of the six essays spans on a six day meditation. In the beginning he sets the scope of his scepticism as to why he starts doubting all that is not certain. As he finds out that his beliefs can be false, he starts doubting all of them. Knowing that many of his beliefs can be false, he does not tackle all of them but rather focuses on the basic principles (**p. 1**). His scepticism begins with the senses as they can deceive him, additionally, he differentiates between dreams and reality (**p. 1-2**). He sets the scene for meditation two and three by imagining that his life is all dream-like and that there is a God that is deceiving him and that his body is all false. He then sets the scene for meditation 4-6 by imagining if God did not exist then humans are built on fate and causation. Lastly, if people cannot swallow the idea of a deceiving God, instead replace it with a malicious demon (**p. 2**).

Descartes begins the second meditation with a review of his first meditation. He starts with the malicious demon that deceives him throughout his life and then he provides a certain answer to one thing: that the demon cannot deceive him about existence. This is where the famous quote “I think, therefore I am” or “I think, I exist” comes in. To explain “I” he begins by focusing on the beliefs that come to him instinctively and the first one is that he has a *body*, the next belief was that he has sense-perception and thinking. The demon is perhaps deceiving Descartes to have a *body*, therefore, having a body is open to

doubt (**p. 1 & p. 4-5**). He discerns that things he learned are not by senses but rather by thinking which derived that thinking cannot be separated from his existence. He reaches “I think, therefore I am”, as long as he thinks, he exists (**p. 5**). After knowing he exists, he lists qualities he has: doubts, understanding, affirming, denying, demanding more knowledge, refusing to be deceived, imagining, and being aware of senses. Whether in dreams or in reality, they still occur (**p. 5-6**). The self exists while dreaming and in reality.

Later he argues that faculty of imagination is part of reality. Taking a body of wax which has a shape, smell, etc..., when placed next to a fire, it melts, odor dies and shape changes but it is still the same wax. If we take what does not belong to the wax, he derives to its flexibility and changeability. Therefore, Descartes concludes we know it to be the same wax due to our rational faculty (**p. 6-7**). Therefore, in this conclusion Descartes shows a separation of the mind(imagination/thinking) and the body(wax).

In the third meditation, Descartes argues for the existence of God. He starts by classifying two types of thoughts. First are images, such as man. Second is emotions which he termed as judgments. Those ideas do not necessarily come from outside, they can come from some faculty that he has yet to comprehend (**p. 10-11**). He later differentiates knowledge from thinking and senses. We see a sun and we are able to astronomically think of a sun (**p. 11**). If God did not exist, then humans came from cause and effect which derives into two conclusions, something cannot arise from nothing and something perfect cannot derive from something less perfect. He asserts a cause of something may not have the exact quality, but it can have a higher quality. The cause of hotness does not

necessarily have to be hot, but it has a higher form of hotness, heat. Ideas cannot be regressed infinitely, rather there must be a first cause, just like hotness. According to Descartes the first cause must be an archetype that has all intrinsic ideas (**p. 12**).

Descartes uses the ontological definition of God, infinite, powerful etc... Since he knows his "I" is not infinite, his cause comes from a first cause which is infinite since he is finite (**p. 13-14**). From this point onwards he looks at counterarguments against his reasoning yet reaches to the same conclusion (**p. 14-17**).

Even though the argument might hold fast, there is a missing reasoning between meditation 2-3. He trusts his reasoning to prove God after defining himself in meditation 2 and then uses the ontological God to define trustworthiness of clear ideas which were given to him by God. In other words, it is a circular argument. Nonetheless, Descartes skepticism brought into metaphysics a new page to philosophy which affects us to our present day. Many philosophers came to refute Descartes's epistemology, nonetheless it is noted he pioneered modern philosophy. It should be advised for the readers to have an idea of Aristotelian thinking before reading the *meditations* because it was the common prevalent thinking or the dominant mindset in Descartes time. The mind/thinking substance according to Descartes is the soul, therefore, it should not confuse the readers as they read the essays.

Descartes, R. (1641), *Meditations on First Philosophy*, in the version presented at www.earlymoderntexts.com

Meditations 4-6

Descartes begins *Meditation 4* by summarizing the last three *Meditations*. The main subject of the first, is opening the road to scepticism. The second, on what is known to exist and that is 'I', himself. The third focused on the existence of God (**p. 18**). The fourth meditation focuses on bringing validity to knowing something or not (**p. 18**). The faculty of judgement was given to him by God, and since God cannot deceive him (**argued in meditation 3**), then error cannot come from God. Descartes asks, why is he imperfect, yet God is perfect? He says he is between nothingness and God. The faculty of judgement is limited because it involves nothingness. Error, according to Descartes occurs due to privation. The fact that he lacks knowledge or he cannot fly, does not mean he is negated rather it is a lack for something yet to have. That is why God is perfect and Descartes is in between (**p. 18**).

Descartes asks: is doing mistakes better than not? He presents three thoughts that came to him. First, it is not surprising for God to act in such way since Descartes is finite, God is infinite. Second, we should not look from a single perspective basis, but rather as a whole. He provides an example of a universe where we see imperfection in one part, but the whole is perfect. Third, the only evidence of imperfection is error. These errors occur because of knowledge (intellect) and freedom (will). The intellect only presents ideas while the will is without limits. If God makes the will with limits, it would not be freedom (**p. 19**). The source of error comes from the will being wider than the intellect. A person can choose their beliefs without understanding them out of their will. For truth

and falsity to be known, truth needs to be clear and precise, if it was not, then suspending judgement is better. The reason people error/wrong is the lack of truth/knowledge when utilizing their will with intellect (**p. 20-21**).

The fifth meditation focuses on material objects and on the ideas behind the material. He starts by seeing which of those ideas are distinct and confused. For imagining a (material) thing to exist it has to have length, breadth and depth. A thing cannot be called nothing or derive from nothing. Those ideas of things even if they did not come outside of him, he did not invent them. A triangle has three sides ontologically, if it is said that it has four, it is false. Therefore, if triangles came not from senses, it is always three sided (**p. 23**). In contrast, Descartes argues God without existence is false, they are ontologically inseparable. Though it can be argued that God and existence are not necessary, Descartes counters this by arguing if it is not necessary, they are inseparable (**p. 24**). Truth about triangles having 180 degrees may not come immediately upon the person, but it ought to be given time. Similarly, God and existence cannot be separable, given time, people will think so (**p. 25**).

In the last meditation, Descartes focuses on distinction of mind (himself) and body (material) and examining whether bodies exist. He starts by arguing that imagination is in the faculty of knowledge which is in the body and the body has to exist (**p. 27**).

Imagination is different from knowledge; if a triangle is imagined, it is not only thought but also three sides are mentally drawn. However, knowledge is more important than imagination because it involves existence. Imagination does not (**p. 27**). He reviews his three steps. First, he perceives that his body feels pain and emotions that cannot be separated from his mind. Second, his senses can deceive him. Third, if he can think of

something, then he can distinct from something to another. Therefore, mind and body are distinct even though they are close. The body can be divided but not the mind. Even though imagination can receive with non-sensory it relies on the mind, not the body. Will (freedom), sensory and understanding (intellect) are all properties of the mind (**p. 28-32**).

According to Brown and Deborah, the scepticism Descartes put forward is radically different from the ancient scepticism due to the questioning of the content of ideas (**Brown & Normore, 2019-11-14, p. 6-8**). Descartes's argument of the thinking substance being "I" has been objected by many, famously, Locke who argued against Descartes dismissal of senses (**Locke, 1690, p. 3-4**) and Hume in his bundle theory (**Hume, 1739, p.131**). A critique to Descartes's ideas of substance is not observed quickly, but with rationality it would come to mind (just like the triangle and God explained previously). But then again, how does the substance occur? Where does it come from? What is its quality? Descartes has yet to answer the substance question (**Bolton, 1983, p. 91**). The writer suggests to be familiar with the Aristotelian metaphysics (First philosophy according to Descartes) before continuing reading the *Meditations*. In general, the critique of the *Meditations* is against the notion that senses are the sole provider of knowledge.

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