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THE PUZZLE OF MOORE'S *PROOF OF AN EXTERNAL WORLD*

*Abstract*

In this paper I present a puzzle about Moore's Proof: how can the current resurgence of interest in the Proof co-exist with the obvious reaction of irritation and dismay readers are bound to have at first encounter with it? Wouldn't it be wiser simply to discard that reaction, or else to stop worrying about the Proof?

After defending the puzzle from two opposite ways of deflating it, I turn to presenting and assessing two influential interpretations of the Proof—that is, Wright's and Pryor's. I claim that in the dispute, Pryor's party is certainly wrong, but, in my view, this doesn't show that Wright's is right yet. For there is room for a third – intermediate – position, of Wittgensteinian descent, which I present and discuss in some detail.

Turning to the original puzzle, I then provide a simple explanation of the Proof's failure which easily explains our reaction in first hearing it. Moreover, such an explanation has another pay-off. Namely, it allows bringing into focus two kinds of sceptical challenge. With such a result in hand, I then provide a solution to our initial puzzle. The solution consists in claiming that our reaction to the Proof and the resurgence of interest in it can peacefully co-exist once it is acknowledged that they are perfectly appropriate responses to these two different kinds of sceptical concern.