George Edward Moore was an early 20th Century philosopher who made important contributions to both epistemology and philosophical ethics. He taught at Cambridge University. Note that the paper we’re reading is transcribed from a lecture Moore gave. The proof he gives makes a lot more sense if you bear that in mind. And when he talks about proving the existence of an “external” world, he means the one external to our minds and our mental representations of it.

The proof is meant to be a response to Cartesian skepticism, though Moore doesn’t say it outright. He’s explicitly responding to the famous claim that philosophy hasn’t done its job if it cannot give a clear proof of the existence of the external world, which was made originally by Immanuel Kant, the great 18th Century German philosopher. But Kant was motivated to make that claim by his feeling that Descartes failed in his attempt prove it. So by responding to Kant in this way, Moore is trying to show that Cartesian skepticism can be beaten.

The paper itself is quite long, but we’re reading just the particularly important parts, namely the beginning and the end. Only the pages designated by the syllabus are in the PDF—the rest have been cut out. Unfortunately, the book this is copied from adopts the annoying practice of printing page numbers only on the odd pages, which means that navigating the PDF can be a little confusing. Page 2 of the file is p. 440 of the source book, though it doesn’t show it on the page. Then the file skips straight ahead to the end of the article, starting at p. 449, where you should start reading again from the paragraph break toward the bottom of the first column.

Notes:

- p. 439: *The Critique of Pure Reason* is the first of Kant’s three (!) masterworks, and is by itself one the most important books ever written in philosophy. It is sometimes called the “First Critique”. It was originally published in 1781, with a second edition in 1787 that contained additional arguments and substantial revisions. These are usually called the “A” and “B” editions, and are now read together. That’s what all the weird numbers and letters are about.

- p. 439: Norman Kemp Smith was a Scottish philosopher whose 1929 translation of Kant’s first Critique remains the standard English edition of the book.

- p. 439: When Moore says that Kant is “now writing” the preface to the second edition, he must mean that Kant’s claim that he has a proof occurs there. Kant had been dead over a hundred years by the time Moore wrote this lecture, so it was an odd thing for Moore to say.

- p. 439-40: By “outer intuition” Kant means what we now might call “sense experience.” Notice that this use of the word “intuition” is slightly different
from the use philosophers put it to today, which is something more like “gut feeling.”

- p. 440: The abbreviation K.d.r.V. is from the German title of the book, *Kritik der reinen Vernunft*. “A 373” refers to the A-edition, page 373 of the original manuscript. (History of philosophy gets really complicated!)

- p. 440: Kant used the terms “transcendental” and “empirical” to describe the difference between objects as they appear to us (empirical objects) and those objects as they are independently of our perception (transcendental objects). Like Kant, Moore is interested in a proof of objects in the transcendental sense.

- p. 449: The Latin phrase “ipso facto” means “by that fact alone.” Some of you will naturally read “ipso facto” as a noun rather than an adverbial. But don’t let your ear confuse you—to prove “ipso facto” is not to prove some particular thing, it’s a way of proving something.

- p. 449: “Premisses” is a pedantic alternate spelling of “premises”. Apparently some people think we can’t tell the difference between a place and a part of an argument. I think that’s silly. And incidentally, to adduce a premise is to state it in an argument.

- p. 450: The abbreviation Q.E.D. is often used by logicians and mathematicians to signal that a proof is completed. You might remember it from geometry class. It comes from the Latin *quod erat demonstrandum*, which means “that which was to be demonstrated.”

- p. 451: Those who want a proof of what Moore asserts when he says “I did hold two hands above this desk just now” are asking that he be able to prove not only the conclusion that he set out to prove, namely that external things exist, but the premise as well. Does that strike you as required for proving the conclusion?

**Questions to think about:**

1. What do you think is required for a good proof, independently of what Moore says?

2. Do you think Moore’s proof meets your requirements?

3. Do you think that there are at least two external objects has to be true in order for *here is a hand, and here is another* to be true?

**Extras:**

*Begging the question* Dinosaur Comics, again!