Moore, “Four Forms of Skepticism”

1. Russell’s skepticism about type 1 ‘things’

According to Russell, I cannot know with certainty that \textit{I am having a white percept}.

His main argument (as reconstructed by Moore):

1. The meaning of the word ‘I’ depends on memory and expectation. (claim)
2. In claiming to know that I am now having a white percept, I am claiming to know something about the past and about the future. (from 1)
3. I cannot know with certainty anything about the past or the future. (claim)
C. Therefore, I cannot know with certainty that I am now having a white percept. (from 2,3)

Moore doesn’t agree with (1), but he lets Russell have it for the sake of argument. Moore, instead, focuses on Russell’s argument for (3).

2. Russell’s skepticism about type 2 ‘things’

What is his argument for (3)? According to Moore, it goes like this:

1’. It is possible that when I seem to remember that \( p \), \( p \) never happened.
C.’ Therefore, I cannot know with certainty that my present experience/’remembering’ that \( p \) is about something that never happened.

According to Moore, what is wrong with this argument? Well, consider the following similar argument (and assume that you are Moore):

i. It is possible for a human being to be of the female sex.
C. Therefore, I may be of the female sex.

Wait a second, that doesn’t seem right. What’s going on? On one reading of (i), the conclusion does follow. On another, it does not.

According to Moore, (i) might mean: \textit{Every} human being \textit{may} be of the female sex. Then the conclusion does follow. But (i) doesn’t mean this. Rather, it means: \textit{Some} human beings are of the female sex. In this case, the conclusion does not follow.

The second reading, according to Moore, is the right one. And the right one for Russell’s argument. According to Moore, (1’) reads: \textit{Some} experiences/’rememberings’ are about things that never happened. From this, it does not follow that my present experience is of that kind.

3. Russell’s skepticism about type 3 & 4 ‘things’

According to Moore, Russell’s view that I do not know for certainty that, e.g., \textit{this is a pencil} or that \textit{you are conscious} rests on four assumptions:

(a) that I do not know these things immediately;
(b) that they do not follow logically from any thing or things that I do know immediately;
(c) that if (a) and (b) are true, my belief in or knowledge of them must be based on an analogical or inductive argument;
(d) that what is based on an analogical or inductive argument cannot be certain knowledge.
Moore’s response: Am I more certain of these four assumptions than I am of the claim that, e.g., *this is a pencil* or that *you are conscious*? Doesn’t seem to be the case.