Moore, “Proof of an External World”

1. What is meant by ‘external world’?

External things
Things external to us
Things external to our mind
- Things to be met with in space
- Not the same as ‘physical object’, ‘material object’, ‘bodies’ (e.g. shadows)
- Not the same as ‘things presented in space’

2. The Proof Strategy

1. Prove that there are things such as tables, plants, animals, stars, houses, etc.
2. From the existence of such things, it follows that there are things to be met with in space, i.e., that there is an external world.
3. We do not need to give a separate proof that the implication above.

3. The Proof

Moore’s formulation:

Premises:
Here is one hand. <gesture>
Here is another hand. <gesture>

Conclusion:
Therefore, external things exist.

In other words:

Premises:
Here is one hand. <gesture>
Here is another hand. <gesture>  
[A hand is an external thing.] – definition

Conclusion:
Therefore, external things exist.

4. Why is this a proof? What is required for proof?

According to Moore, three things are required for a proof:
1) the premises are different from the conclusion (non-circular)
2) the premises are things I know to be true (soundness)
3) the conclusion really does follow from the premises (validity)

To consider:

Why are these the requirements for proof?
Are they fulfilled?
If so, are these enough for a proof?

Requirements for Proof
1) the premises are different from the conclusion

Why require this?
Consider:

Premise: Helena has a twin sister.

Conclusion: Helena has a twin sister.

What is wrong with this argument?

3) the conclusion really does follow from the premises.

Premises:
Here is one hand. <gesture>
Here is another hand. <gesture>
[A hand is an external thing.] – definition

Conclusion:
Therefore, external things exist.

2) the premises are things I know.
Suppose the premises are true. That is, Moore does in fact have hands.
We are now concerned with whether he knows he has hands. The premises’ being true does not imply he knows them. And it’s only if he knows them that he can know the conclusion that follows.
Moore says: you can’t require me to prove this for my proof of the external word to be a proof. Whether I can prove the premise is irrelevant for my knowing them.