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The Common Sense Philosophy of G. E. Moore

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THE COMMON SENSE PHILOSOPHY
OF
G. E. MOORE

by

Mark A. Phillips

A Thesis Submitted to the Faculty of the Graduate School of
Loyola University in Partial Fulfillment of
the Requirements for the Degree of
Master of Philosophy

June
1970
PREFACE

The primary purpose of this thesis is to clarify the notion of common sense in the philosophy of G. E. Moore. As such, it will serve as no more than a propaedeutic for evaluating whether a common sense philosophy is viable. The scope of discussion is admittedly myopic: there is no presentation of earlier common sense philosophies, nor criticisms of such philosophies. The only excuse for this omission is that it is impossible thoroughly to discuss even the twentieth-century material in a short work. For this reason, this paper can serve as little more than a "preliminary propaedeutic."

To Fr. Maziarz I extend a sincere thank you for allowing philosophy to be enjoyable and dull.
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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Towards the end of the nineteenth century, idealism was the philosophy of the day. To a great extent, it was G. E. Moore who brought about the downfall of idealism, and gave early twentieth-century thought its thrust towards realism. Yet it is important to notice that the philosophical community was ripe for this transition. The following remarks are designed to indicate some of the philosophers who contributed to this climate.

A. From Scotland to America

One of the origins of twentieth-century realism lay in the Scottish common sense philosophy of Thomas Reid (1710-1796).

In addition to the abbreviations used in the bibliography, the following abbreviations are used in the footnotes.

Works by Moore:

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<td>CB</td>
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<tr>
<td>SMPP</td>
<td><em>Some Main Problems of Philosophy</em></td>
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Other Works:

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<td>EM</td>
<td><em>The Epistemology of G. E. Moore</em>, by E. D. Klemke</td>
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1"The main tendency of nineteenth-century thought was towards the conclusion that both 'things' and facts about things are dependent for their existence and their nature upon the operations of a mind." John Passmore, *A Hundred Years of Philosophy* (Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1966), p. 174.
and Sir William Hamilton (1788-1856).\(^2\) This naive form of realism was, like Kant's critical philosophy, a reaction to the scepticism of Hume. While Scottish common sense philosophy had some effect upon English philosophers, including Moore,\(^3\) it had even more of an impact in America, where it was introduced by John Witherspoon (1723-1794) and James McCosh (1811-1894).\(^4\) However, its impact in America was tempered by German idealism, which was imported shortly afterwards. And the realism that was kept alive—by philosophers like Francis Ellingwood Abbot (1837-1903) and Charles Sanders Pierce (1839-1914)—was subjected to yet another current of thought: continental philosophy.

B. Continental Assistance

Two continental philosophers were instrumental in the rise of realism in America and England.

Franz Brentano (1838-1917) called attention to the intentional character of knowledge: the distinctive characteristic of mental phenomena is that they point towards an object. But this first step towards realism was brought up short by the question

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of how objects are related to mental acts. Prior to 1900, Brentano held that the object of knowledge is identical with the content which one has before his mind. But this position gave rise to the problem of fictional things: a centaur may be a content of a mental act, but it is not an independent object.\(^5\) It was Meinong who found a solution to this problem.

Alexius von Meinong (1853-1920) accepted the intentional character of knowledge, but deemed it incredible to consider a physical object as being identical with, or a constituent or, a mental act. To resolve this problem, he adopted Twardowski's distinction of (i) the mental act, (ii) its content, and (iii) its objects. This enabled him to say that fictional things are the objects of thought, but not the content of thought (since the content exists).\(^6\) It was Meinong's contribution to the problem of the intentional or referential character of knowing fictional things which was first adopted by American realists.

C. American Realism

When Josiah Royce (1855-1916) stated his opposition to realism, his former pupils, R. B. Perry (1876-1957) and W. P. Montague (1873-1953), were quick to provide a defense. The essence of Royce's attack on realism was this: if the objects of


\(^6\)Passmore, op. cit., pp. 180-1, 556 n. 10; Chisholm, op. cit., pp. 6-12.
knowledge are completely independent of our knowing them, then there is no relation possible, not even the knowing relation. The essence of the reply to Royce was that relatedness and independence are compatible characteristics of knowledge and its object. Somewhat later, it was argued that they are compatible because, as James and Russell had shown, relations are external.

From this it follows, presuming that knowledge is a relation, that the known is not constituted by its relation to the knower, or the knower by its relation to the known, or either knower or known by the fact that it is a constituent in the knowledge relation.

The exchange between Royce and his pupils brought out the central issue in American realism: the relation between the object and that through which the object is known. There was general agreement that knowledge of independent objects is possible. The intentionality of perception and knowledge is prima facie evidence for this. Then too, our knowledge is both reliable and seemingly not a consequence of our purpose, which suggests that it is an effect of independent objects. Thirdly, both our experience and our language "presuppose" the independence of the objects of knowledge, and it seemed difficult, if not impossible, to regard these as nonsense. However, it was difficult to


Passmore, op. cit., p. 261.

explain this common sense relation: how are knowledge and its objects related? It was in answering this question that two "schools" developed in America: the new realists and the critical realists.10

1. New Realism was characterized by monism: there is no distinction between the object and that through which it is known. Knowledge is a direct apprehension of its object. Thus, in an attempt to describe experience without reference to consciousness, Perry spoke of ideas as "things in a certain relation." However, this lack of distinction between a subjective and objective knowing made it very difficult for the new realists to adequately account for error without compromising the independence of the object. And realists such as W. P. Montague (1873-1953) who did make this distinction found it difficult to avoid a representative or dualistic account of knowledge.11

2. Critical Realism was characterized by dualism: there is a distinction between the object and that through which it is known. That is, the critical realists assert "that there are three distinct ingredients in perception--the perceiving act, something given . . . and the object perceived."12

With idealist against new realists, critical realists have properly claimed that (1) knowledge involves at one state or another an active experiencing that cannot


12 Passmore, op. cit., p. 283.
be assimilated to objects. With new realists against idealists, critical realists have rightly claimed that knowledge involves objects that are independent of being known. And with both against representative realists, critical realists have recognized that knowledge is apprehension not merely of one's own cognitive experiences but of the objects themselves intended in such experiences.13

The problem in this case was to explain how knowledge can be both mediated and direct. How are independent objects (and not merely sense data) known? To avoid a sceptical solution, the critical realists held that what is given is a datum which points beyond itself to an object. But there was considerable controversy over the nature of what is given. George Santayana (1863-1952), for example, held that the given is a set of universals or essences. R. W. Sellars (1880-19 ), on the other hand, believed that the given is a set of particulars which reveal the structure of the object.

D. English Realism

The realism which sprang up in England arose from various sources. For example, the realism developed by John Cook Wilson (1874-1915) grew out of his interest in logic. Others—like Samuel Alexander (1859-1938), Alfred North Whitehead (1861-1947), Bertrand Russell (1872-1970) and C. D. Broad (1887-19 )—were primarily concerned with the problems of science. Finally, there were those like T. P. Nunn (1870-1944) and G. E. Moore (1873-1958), whose realism was bound up with the notion of common sense.

13Hill, op. cit., p. 155.
CHAPTER II

MOORE ON COMMON SENSE

George Edward Moore (1873-1958) began his schooling at Dulwich College in London. When he was eighteen, he went to Trinity College, Cambridge to pursue his interest in classical studies. Moore had almost completed his second year of studies (in 1894) before he decided to study philosophy.¹ Moore's philosophical curiosity was piqued by the things philosophers like J. E. M. McTaggart had said about the world, for their philosophical assertions seemed to contradict common sense.² F. H. Bradley was unequivocal on this subject; he "argued that everything common sense believes is mere appearance."³ Under this kind of influence, Moore's confidence in common sense waned. His first publication showed that he had made an about-face.⁴


²Ibid., p. 14. Broad once asked, "In what place is the mirror-image of a pin?" Russell thought that the answer is: "In your head." Moore observed: "Whether you are interested in the question whether Russell is right as to this or not is ... a good test of whether you will be interested in philosophy or not." "The Justification of Analysis," Analysis, 1 (1934), p. 29.


⁴"In What Sense, If Any, Do Past and Future Time Exist?" Mind, n.s., 6 (1897), pp. 235-40.
He argued that time does not exist, and he did so using Bradley's methods and premises, in particular the dogmas of internal relations and concrete universals and the principle that identifies reality with the absence of contradiction. When his conclusions, like the one that time does not exist, proved to outrage common sense, Moore was prepared to say that common sense is simply wrong, and he did so more than once.5

After graduation in 1896, Moore began working on a paper in order to compete for a fellowship at Trinity.6 It was during this period that Moore severed his philosophical ties to idealism. He describes the period from 1897-8 as "the beginning of a breakaway from belief in Bradley's philosophy, of which, up till about then, both Russell and I had, following McTaggart, been enthusiastic admirers."7 What is significant in this break is that common sense became more than a mere starting point in Moore's philosophy. It became the foundation of his philosophy.

This chapter will indicate how Moore defended the truth of common sense, and then attempt to discover some identifying characteristics of common sense.

A. Moore's Defense of Common Sense: An Exposition

This section contains merely a summary of two passages in which Moore presents a defense of common sense.


6Moore submitted his paper in 1898 and won a six-year "Prize" Fellowship. His paper was published the following year under the title: "The Nature of Judgment."

7Moore, op. cit., p. 22.
1. "A Defence of Common Sense" (1925). This article begins with (1) a list of common sense truisms which Moore knows, with certainty, to be true.

There exists at present a living human body, which is my body. This body was born at a certain time in the past, and has existed continuously ever since, though not without undergoing changes ... Among the things which have, in this sense, formed part of its environment (i.e., have been either in contact with it, or at some distance from it, however great) there have, at every moment since its birth, been large numbers of other living human bodies, each of which has, like it, (a) at some time been born, (b) continued to exist from some time after birth ... Finally (to come to a different class of propositions), I am a human being, and I have, at different times since my body was born, had many different experiences, of each of many different kinds: e.g., I have often perceived both my own body and other things ... 8

Next, Moore adds (2) a single truism: many human beings have frequently known "a proposition corresponding to each of the propositions in (1)." 9 Finally, he enumerates (3) some implications of his list of truisms: (i) material things are real; (ii) space is real; (iii) time is real; and (iv) at least one self is real. 10 If, for example, "I have often had dreams, and have had many different feelings at different times," it follows that time is real.

Moore's thesis is that (2) and (3) are true. He begins his defense by noting:

There are some philosophers, who, while denying that (in the senses in question) either material things or Space

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8 "Defence," PP, p. 33.
9 Ibid., p. 34.
are real, have been willing to admit that Selves and Time are real, in the sense required. Other philosophers, on the other hand, have used the expression 'Time is not real,' to express . . . something which is incompatible with the truth of any of the propositions in (1).\textsuperscript{11}

While such expressions as "Material things are not real" may be ambiguous, their ordinary usage is certainly incompatible with (2). As such, they are certainly false. Moore offers four arguments to substantiate his claim. First of all, a denial of (2) or any of the implications stated in (3) is incompatible with the very existence of any philosopher. The philosopher's own spatial, temporal existence prohibits him from denying the reality of space, time and selves. That is, philosophers are human beings; and this is to say that they have had experiences corresponding to Moore's list of truisms. Secondly, "no philosopher has ever been able to hold such views consistently."\textsuperscript{12} He would, for example, allude to a "we" who do not know such and such.

All philosophers have belonged to the class of human beings which exists only if (2) be true: that is to say, to the class of human beings who have frequently known propositions corresponding to each of the propositions in (1).\textsuperscript{13}

Thirdly, some philosophers contend that the list of truisms proposed by Moore are not "wholly true, because every such proposition entails both of two incompatible propositions."\textsuperscript{14} Moore

\textsuperscript{11}Ibid., p. 39.
\textsuperscript{12}Ibid., p. 40.
\textsuperscript{13}Ibid., p. 41.
\textsuperscript{14}Ibid. This objection and Moore's reply are too laconic to be clear. For Moore's possible meaning, cf. his Lectures, pp. 20 ff.
replies, "All of the propositions in (1) are true; no true proposition entails both of two incompatible propositions; therefore, none of the propositions in (1) entails both of two incompatible propositions." Finally, the truth of the propositions in (3) is clear from the fact that all of the propositions in (1) are true. This is, Moore claims, his best argument.

Other philosophers have objected to Moore's insistence that he is certain. The objection is that no one knows for certain propositions about the existence of material things or selves. Moore replies that this objection is self-contradictory. When he says "No human being has ever known of the existence of other human beings," he is saying: "There have been many other human beings beside myself, and none of them (including myself) has ever known of the existence of other human beings."

2. "Proof of an External World" (1939). In this article, Moore attempts to offer a conclusive proof of the existence of "things outside of us."

(a) With an eye on Kant's discussion of this problem, Moore spends a good deal of time clarifying the notion of "things outside of us." His analysis results in identifying "things outside of us" with "things to be met with in space." (Thus he excludes things which are external to our mind and presented in space, but which are not met in space--such as after-images.

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15 Ibid.
16 Ibid., p. 42.
17 Ibid., pp. 42-3.
double images, bodily pains and dreams.)\textsuperscript{18} He concludes this part by saying:

I want now to emphasize that I am so using 'things to be met with in space' that, in the case of each of these kinds of 'things,' if from the proposition that there are 'things' of that kind it follows that there are things to be met with in space: e.g., from the proposition that there are plants or that plants exist it follows that there are things to be met with in space.\textsuperscript{19}

(b) Moore then proceeds to show that anything which is to be met with in space must be external to my mind. Consider the differences between what is \textit{external} to my mind and what is \textit{in} my mind. One difference is that what is external to my mind (e.g., my body) is to be met with in space, whereas what is in my mind (e.g., bodily pain) is not to be met with in space. But there is a second, and more important difference.

Whereas there is a contradiction in supposing a pain which I feel or an after-image which I see to exist at a time when I am having no experience, there is no contradiction in supposing my body to exist at a time when I am having no experience.\textsuperscript{20}

\textsuperscript{18}"Proof," \textit{PP}, pp. 131-6. Regarding this section, Levi observes: "Moore's purpose in this analysis is not merely to show that 'things presented in space' fall outside the conception of 'things external to our minds,' but also to underline the doctrine of a realistic epistemology that 'there is no contradiction in supposing that there have been and are to be met with in space things which never have been, are not now, and never will be perceived.'" \textit{Philosophy and the Modern World} (Bloomington: Indiana Univ. Press, 1959), p. 455.

\textsuperscript{19}Ibid., p. 137. The reason this follows is that there could not be a plant which was not to be met with in space.\textsuperscript{(p.138)}

\textsuperscript{20}Ibid., p. 143. Cf. also: \textit{CB}, p. 106. Klemke states Moore's point very clearly. "For any object \(X\): a) \(X\) is in my mind, if from a proposition that \(X\) exists at time \(t_1\), there logically follows a proposition that I was having an experience at \(t_1\). b) \(X\) is external to my mind, if from a proposition that \(X\) exists at \(t_1\), there does not logically follow a proposition that
Thus, what is to be met with in space does not imply that I am experiencing it, which is to say, it is external to my mind.

Combining his first and second analyses, Moore offers his proof.

There are ever so many kinds of 'things', such that, in the case of each of these kinds, from the proposition that there is at least one thing of that kind there follows the proposition \[1\] that there is at least one thing to be met with in space . . . \[and, 2\] that there is at least one thing external to our minds: e.g., from 'There is at least one star' there follows not only 'There is at least one thing to be met with in space' but also 'There is at least one external thing'.

Thus Moore contends that by holding up his two hands, he has proven the existence of external things. He considers this a proof

I was having an experience at tl." "G. E. Moore's Proof of an External World," SPM, p. 279.

\[21\] Ibid., pp. 143-4. Moore's "Proof" is also summarized by Klemke. In the second part of his article, Klemke proposes the following explicit formulation of Moore's argument.

"Let us adopt the following as abbreviations to be used in the full proof:

- EW: external world
- OU: outside of us
- E: external
- EM: external to our minds
- EE: empirically external
- MS: to be met with in space
- H: hand
- HE, t: has an experience, at time t

Then Moore's proof of an external world is:

1) \[\begin{align*}
&\text{OU}_x = \text{Ex} = \text{EX}_x = \text{MS}_x = \text{EM}_x \\
&\text{OU}_x = \text{Ex} = \text{EX}_x = \text{MS}_x = \text{EM}_x
\end{align*}\]
2) \[(x, y, t) \rightarrow (x, y, t) (\text{HE}_y, t) \rightarrow \text{EM}_x \]
3) \[(x, i, y, t) \rightarrow (x, i, y, t) (\text{HE}_y, t) \rightarrow \text{EM}_x \]
4) \[(x, i, y, t) \rightarrow (x, i, y, t) \text{EM}_x \]
5) \[(x, i, y, t) \rightarrow (x, i, y, t) \text{EM}_x \]
6) \[(x, i, y, t) \rightarrow (x, i, y, t) \text{EM}_x \]
7) \[(x, i, y, t) \rightarrow (x, i, y, t) \text{EM}_x \]
8) \[(x, i, y, t) \rightarrow (x, i, y, t) \text{EM}_x \]
9) \[(x, i, y, t) \rightarrow (x, i, y, t) \text{EM}_x \]

because it fulfills the necessary conditions for having a proof: (1) the conclusion is different from the premiss, (2) the premiss is certain, and (3) the conclusion follows from the premiss. To one who objects that he has not proved the premiss, Moore replies that he did not intend to do so, nor is it possible to do so. "How am I to prove now that 'Here's one hand, and here's another'? I do not believe I can do it." But this situation does not alter the fact that "I can know things, which I cannot prove." 

B. Moore's Notion of Common Sense: An Interpretation

In order to appreciate Moore's philosophical starting point, and his reasons for regarding it as foundational, it is necessary to answer two preliminary questions: (1) when is a statement to be considered a statement of common sense? and (2) when is a statement of common sense true?

The main problem in attempting to answer these questions is that Moore did not explicitly deal with them. So the only way of finding an answer is to carefully observe Moore's use of common sense, and then state what is implicit in his use. This has been done by Alan R. White. White contends that there is definitely one, and possibly two criteria by which to determine whe-

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22 Ibid., p. 149.
23 Ibid., p. 150.
ther a statement is actually a statement of common sense: universal acceptance and, possibly, compulsive acceptance. White also contends that there are several additional criteria by which to determine whether a statement of common sense is true: inconsistency, a particular type of inconsistency, and self-evidence. He leaves unanswered the question as to which of these criteria is necessary or sufficient to determine the truth of a common sense belief.

In this section, I will present White's analysis, and then attempt to show why it needs to be reformulated. My purpose will be to determine what are the criteria of common sense and its truth.

1. Criteria for Common Sense Statements. According to White, the first characteristic of all common sense statements is that of universal acceptance. This means that only statements which are "commonly or generally or universally or constantly assumed to be true" can be considered statements of common sense. For example, it is generally accepted as true that the earth had existed for many years before we were born. The second criterion suggested by White is that of compulsive acceptance. For example, we cannot help believing in the existence.

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25 M:CE, p. 11. Klemke agrees with White on this and the following criterion, EM, p. 21.
26 M:CE, p. 11.
27 "Defence" PP, p. 33.
of external objects. 29

It is not clear whether or not this second criterion is necessary in order to have a common sense statement. 30 It is tempting to treat the two criteria as being interdependent, since compulsive acceptance implies a universal acceptance. That is, one is apt to think that a given common sense belief is universally accepted as true because we cannot help believing it. But is this how Moore uses these criteria? According to Moore, to say that a given belief is universally accepted actually means "commonly or generally" accepted. 31 So strict universality is not a criterion of common sense beliefs. And this implies that at least some common sense beliefs might not be compulsively accepted. Now the fact that some common sense beliefs have changed from one era to another, 32 and that there is often only general acceptance of these beliefs might be taken as evidence that some common sense beliefs are not compulsively accepted. Yet the fact that some beliefs have changed does not prove that they were not compulsively accepted as true.

It would seem, then, to be a fair description of Moore's usage to say that the one necessary criterion of common sense statements is that they are "commonly accepted as true"; and the


32 Cf. _SMPP_, pp. 3, 7, 8-9, 13.
sufficient criterion is that they be "compulsively accepted as true."

Does Moore use any other criteria not mentioned by White? One possibility would be that all common sense beliefs are expressed in ordinary language. However, this does not seem to be a distinct or additional criterion, for the notion "commonly accepted" seems to imply the notion "expressed in ordinary language." A second possible criterion would be psychological certainty, for "we believe that we do really know" common sense beliefs. But again, this seems to be contained in the notion "commonly accepted as true."

2. Criteria of Truth. Although we believe that we know a given common sense belief, we make a distinction "between things which are now absolutely known; things which were formerly believed, but believed wrongly; and things which we do not yet know." While common acceptance and compulsive acceptance are reasons for considering a given common sense belief to be true, neither criterion is sufficient to determine its truth. What other criteria does Moore use to determine whether a given common sense belief is true? White suggests that there are several criteria.

33 E.g., "Defence," PP, pp. 35-6. This assertion seems true of Moore's practice, though it may not be true of what he says about his practice, ibid., p. 37.

34 SMPP, p. 12.

(a) The first criterion White suggests in inconsistency- upon-denial: a given common sense belief is true when it is, somehow, inconsistent to deny it.36 There are five or six variations of this criterion. One type of inconsistency is that of presupposing the very common sense belief which one is attempting to disprove. For example,

Any philosopher who asserts positively that other men, equally with himself, are incapable of knowing any external facts, is, in that very assertion, contradicting himself, since he implies that he does know a great many facts about the knowledge of other men.37

Another type of inconsistency is that of basing an argument (which denies a common sense statement) on premisses that are less certainly true than the common sense statement to be disproved. Consider the following case.

Russell's view that I do not know for certain that this is a pencil or that you are conscious rests, if I am right, on no less than four distinct assumptions: (1) That I don't know these things immediately; (2) That I don't follow logically from any thing or things that I do know immediately; (3) That, if (1) and (2) are true, my belief in or knowledge of them must be 'based on an analogical or inductive argument'; and (4) That what is so

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White's second type of inconsistency is "where an alleged disproof of a common sense belief does not presuppose its truth but the truth of the type of belief, namely a common sense belief, which is being denied."(HCE, pp. 12-3) This type of inconsistency seems so similar to the one just presented that its differentiation is unnecessary.
based cannot be certain knowledge . . . Is it, in fact, as certain that all these four assumptions are true, as that I do know that this is a pencil and that you are conscious? I cannot help answering: It seems to me more certain that I do know that this is a pencil and that you are conscious, than that any single one of these four assumptions is true, let alone all four. 38

A third example is the inconsistency of denying the implications of common sense beliefs, i.e., of things we know to be true.

E.g., the proposition that my body has existed for many years past, and has, at every moment during that time been either in contact with or not far from the earth, is a proposition which implies both the reality of material things . . . and also the reality of space. 39

Fourthly, it is inconsistent to deny a common sense belief and thereby contradict other beliefs which we hold to be true. This seems to be part of the naturalistic fallacy: it is inconsistent to maintain an identity between 'good' and something else (x), and also maintain that it makes sense to ask, "Is x good?" Finally, it is inconsistent, even self-contradictory, to maintain that we know certain things "to be features in the Common Sense view, and that yet they are not true; since to say that we know this, is to say that they are true." 40 This is the special kind

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40Ibid., p. 44. Moore also says of some truisms that "if they are features in the Common Sense view of the world (whether we know this or not), it follows that they are true." (p. 45, italicized). Malcolm interprets Moore as saying that the proposition "There is a Common Sense view of the world" entails such things as "Time is real" and "Space is real." Therefore, if there is a common sense view of the world, then the entailed propositions are true. "Critical Notice of G. E. Moore: A Critical Exposition," Mind, 69 (1960), pp. 93-4.
of inconsistency referred to by White. But as White himself notes, this is probably only a particular variation of the first type of inconsistency mentioned above; and so it can be omitted as a distinct criterion of truth.\(^{41}\) To summarize: a common sense belief is true when its denial is inconsistent with accepting (i) its truth, (ii) a less certain truth, (iii) other things one holds to be true; or when (iv) one denies the implications of common sense beliefs.

Two comments are in order. First, we need to distinguish a logical inconsistency from what might be called existential inconsistency. Thus, Moore maintained that it is inconsistent to deny a common sense belief because this involves the logical inconsistency of self-contradiction, or of denying the conclusion of a valid syllogism; or because the denial involves the existential inconsistency of accepting what is less certain, or of accepting what is incompatible with other beliefs we hold to be true. Secondly, both types of inconsistency seem to be related to the criterion of compulsive acceptance. Speaking about Hume, for example, Moore says:

> He points out, with regard to all such excessively sceptical opinions that we cannot continue to believe them for long together—that, at least, we cannot, for long together, avoid believing things flatly inconsistent with them. \(^{42}\)

It would seem, then, that the compulsive character of many common

\(^{41}\text{M:CE, p. 14. White believes that this argument is similar to an appeal to the paradigm case. (pp. 36-7).}\)

\(^{42}\text{Moore, "Hume's Philosophy," PS, p. 157. Emphasis mine.}\)
sense beliefs is merely the consequence of the inconsistency which results when these beliefs are denied. If this is so, then inconsistency-upon-denial would be a clearer formulation of the criterion which is sufficient for having a common sense statement. However, when considering the truth of a common sense belief, the criterion of inconsistency is not sufficient. Like the first two criteria, inconsistency-upon-denial may be a reason for holding a belief to be true, but it does not prove it to be true. Nor is there any evidence in Moore's writings to indicate that inconsistency-upon-denial is a necessary condition for the truth of a common sense statement.

(b) We are left, then, with only one criterion of the truth of common sense beliefs: self-evidence. The kind of thing Moore has in mind when he speaks of something as self-evident is our belief that there are "enormous numbers of material objects; and there are also a very great number of mental acts or acts of Consciousness." Similarly, it is self-evident that personal affection is intrinsically good. Now while Moore maintains that self-evidence is the sole criterion of the truth of a common sense belief, he does not believe that it constitutes a proof of that belief. "If, therefore, anybody asserts ... that it is evident to him that one and the same action can be both right and

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43 White agrees that this is true for at least the first four types of inconsistency enumerated above (M:CE, p. 14).

44 SMPP, p. 4.

45 PE, p. 188.
wrong, I do not see how it can be proved that he is wrong.\textsuperscript{46} In
other words, self-evident truths cannot be proved; they can only
be shown to be true. There are no criteria for self-evidence.\textsuperscript{47}
For example, there is no evidence that can prove what kinds of
things ought to exist for their own sakes.\textsuperscript{48} Thus, for Moore,
self-evidence is the sufficient criterion of the truth of common
sense beliefs.

However, Moore did speak about proving some common sense
beliefs. He tried to prove, for example, that there is an exter-
nal world.\textsuperscript{49} But there is no real incompatibility between his
notions of proof and self-evidence. If someone denies a common
sense belief, if he does not see its self-evidence, then all
Moore could do was attempt to show that it is somehow inconsis-
ten to deny the common sense belief. He recognized that all his
"proofs" rested upon an unprovable or self-evident premiss. His
"proofs" were an attempt to make one see the self-evident charac-
ter of a belief.\textsuperscript{50} They were not aimed at establishing the truth

\textsuperscript{46}Ethics, p. 86. Cf. also "The Refutation of Idealism," where Moore says: if an idealist asserts that "esse is percipi"
is self-evident, then Moore can only say that "it does not appear to me to be so." (PS, p. 11).

\textsuperscript{47}PE, pp. 75, 145, 160; Ethics, p. 86; SMPP, p. 191.

\textsuperscript{48}PE, pp. viii, x.

\textsuperscript{49}"Proof," PP, p. 149; SMPP, p. 120; "Reply," PGEM, pp.

\textsuperscript{50}"The Nature and Reality of Objects of Perception," PS,
pp. 46, 55-6; "Hume's Philosophy," PS, pp. 148-50, 159-60; "Proof,"
PP, pp. 148-50; "Defence," PP, pp. 37, 44; SMPP, pp. 191, 237;
Ethics, p. 86. But cf. also: Murphy, "Moore's Defence of Common
Sense," PGEM, p. 304.
of common sense beliefs, but at rejecting the denial of these beliefs. Moore made no claim to logical certainty; he was only relatively certain. This is to say, Moore was psychologically certain simply because he found no good reason not to be. 51

CHAPTER III

COMMON SENSE AND ORDINARY LANGUAGE: AN EVALUATION

After first reading Moore's works, it is tempting to simply ask: are his arguments valid? The difficulty is that one cannot answer this question without knowing the "status" of Moore's arguments. The debate over this issue centers around the relationship between common sense and philosophy. The relationship is obviously one of conflict. Philosophers have denied both the truth of common sense beliefs, and our knowledge of them.¹ But are these real conflicts?

Some philosophers consider the conflict between common sense and philosophy only an apparent one because the conflict is taken to be merely linguistic. This is the view we will consider in this chapter. In effect, then, we will be asking whether an appeal to common sense is equivalent to an appeal to ordinary language. And if there is merely one appeal, is this appeal such that it can be interpreted as being either an appeal to common sense or as an appeal to ordinary language; or, is an appeal to common sense really a disguised appeal to ordinary language?

¹Moore also mentioned that some philosophers add to common sense beliefs—they say, for example, "There is a God." However, these additions were not particularly disturbing to Moore, since common sense holds no view regarding these additions, and so was not being contradicted. (SMPP, pp. 2, 16-8; cf. also pp. 301-2).
And if there are two distinct appeals, is one more "basic" than the other?

Since the linguistic interpretation revolves around a discussion of ordinary language, we will begin by describing how Moore utilized ordinary language.

A. Moore's References to Ordinary Language

Moore referred to ordinary language for two general reasons: to clarify what he and others meant, and to ascertain whether what was meant is true or not.

1. Reflection on Usage: Meaning. Often, Moore's references to ordinary language were merely reflections upon ordinary usage, in order to call attention to how we actually use certain expressions. His purpose was simply to be clear about the meaning of an expression. Yet his reflections upon ordinary usage were more than practical measures taken in order to be understood.² His efforts at achieving clarity were aimed at avoiding the source of philosophical difficulties, which is attempting "to answer questions without first discovering precisely what questions it is which you desire to answer."³

In attempting to clarify philosophical statements, Moore used a special technique, called the translation into the concrete. This is the technique of spelling out in ordinary language...


³PE, p. vii.
the implications of a philosophical concept or proposition. How Moore utilized this will be illustrated in the following section.

Despite Moore's emphasis on clarity, it is worth keeping the following observation in mind.

Moore generally chooses to employ language in a straightforward way... This is largely based on a consideration of clarity... But it is characteristic of Moore to treat the ordinary meaning of expressions as unproblematic. He holds that there obviously is an ordinary use (or several), that we all know perfectly well what it is (or they are), and that it would be foolish not to follow it (or them). No great issues are seen to hinge upon the ordinary use of language. Moore's faith in ordinary language might almost be described as precritical. It fore-shadows none of the coming "wars" over the status, the character, the legitimacy of the appeal to ordinary language.

This serves to remind us that Moore did not give an extended treatment of the questions raised in this chapter.

2. Appeal to Usage: Truth. At times, Moore not only reflected upon ordinary language, but actually appealed to it. In these situations, he was not only interested in the meaning of an assertion, but more especially in its truth. His appeals to ordinary language served two purposes. The first was a constructive appeal to what people commonly say, as indicative of what they believe. In this way, ordinary language is something like a guide to what is commonly, and perhaps compulsively, accepted—a

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5Broyles, op. cit., p. 234. Cf., e.g., "Defence," PP, p. 36.
guide to common sense beliefs. For example:

We constantly speak as if there were cases in which a given thing was true on one occasion and false on another; and I think it cannot be denied that, when we so speak, we are often expressing in a perfectly proper and legitimate manner something which is undoubtedly true.7

Appeals to ordinary language not only reveal common sense beliefs; they also reveal weaknesses in some philosophical positions, and thus serve a destructive purpose. Once Moore had clarified a particular philosophical assertion by translating it into the concrete, he was often able to show that it was self-contradictory.8 And if someone were to object that Moore's translation was not what the assertion really meant, then Moore had at least shown that the statement was not really paradoxical, and therefore was not really as important as it seemed beforehand.9 And finally, Moore's technique enabled him to show that a given philosophical assertion actually does conflict with common sense, in which case it was vulnerable to Moore's appeal to common sense.


9 "Defence," PP, p. 39; SMPP, p. 204.
Consider, for example, how Moore dealt with Hume's scepticism. Moore granted that: "If Hume's principles are true, nobody can ever know of the existence of any material objects." Moore then translates this assertion into a concrete one, and proceeds to refute it.

If Hume's principles are true, then, I have admitted, I do not know now that this pencil—the material object—exists. If, therefore, I am to prove that I do know that this pencil exists, I must prove, somehow, that Hume's principles, one or both of them, are not true. In what sort of way, by what sort of argument, can I prove this?

It seems to me that, in fact, there really is no stronger and better argument than the following. I do know that this pencil exists; but I could not know this, if Hume's principles were true; therefore, Hume's principles, one or both of them, are false.

This example serves to illustrate that Moore's ultimate appeal was to common sense, not to ordinary language. However, it also illustrates the peculiar situation in which Moore seems to be caught when he appeals to common sense. His reply seems to be obviously true. Yet he cannot convince his opponent, for his argument begs the question.

One solution to this predicament is to reinterpret just what is the question under discussion. For if there is only a linguistic disagreement, then Moore does not beg the question. We will now consider this interpretation of the conflict between common sense and philosophy.

10SMPP, p. 119.

11SMPP, p. 119-20.
B. The Reductive Thesis

According to the reductive thesis, the disagreement between common sense and philosophy is not factual; it is linguistic. When Moore thought he was refuting a factual absurdity, he was simply pointing out a logical absurdity. Thus, Moore's so-called appeals to common sense are really disguised appeals to ordinary language. Here is a brief formulation of the reductive thesis by Norman Malcolm.

When a philosopher maintains that we do not know material object propositions to be true (Hume) or that we do not see material things (Prichard), he must be holding that the notions of knowing a material object proposition to be true and of seeing a material thing are really self-contradictory. He certainly cannot be maintaining that it is a matter of experience that people do not know or see such things. He must be trying to state what he thinks is an a priori truth. He must be claiming, perhaps without fully realizing it, that ordinary sentences like "I know that that thing sticking up in the garden is a shovel," "I see your glasses under the bed," are self-contradictory. To understand that this claim is mistaken it is sufficient to realize that those sentences do have a correct use in ordinary discourse, which they could not have if they were self-contradictory. The important function of Moore's rebuttal was simply to remind us of this fact . . . He was not begging the question against Hume or Prichard because his very point was that it is really not open to question that such sentences have a correct use. On my view then, Moore's so-called defence of common sense, in so far as it is an interesting and tenable philosophical position, has nothing to do either with common sense, properly speaking, nor common belief, but is merely the assertion, in regard to various sentences, that those sentences have a correct use in ordinary language.12

We will now consider a lengthier statement of the reductive thesis by Alice Ambrose, followed by Moore's response, and

some comments.

1. **Example: External Objects.** Moore was quite certain that there is an external world. And after analyzing what this meant, he thought it was quite easy to prove his point. However, according to the reductive thesis: (a) Moore's proof of an external world does not establish the truth of an empirical proposition; (b) Moore's technique could not establish the truth of an empirical proposition of this sort; and (c) once the problem is clearly formulated, it is evident that Moore was defending ordinary language, and not common sense. These are the main points made by Alice Ambrose in her critique of Moore.\(^{13}\)

(a) Ambrose begins by observing:

Prof. Moore considers the proposition, "There are external objects," to be an empirical one. It follows from a proposition which is established by empirical evidence, viz., the evidence of the senses. One has merely to show two hands and one has established that there are external objects.\(^{14}\)

As Moore himself recognized, the sceptic would not be satisfied with this proof.

If the existence of external objects is in question, then calling attention to a visual experience no different in important respects from many past experiences which the sceptic has precluded from constituting proof will not convince him.\(^{15}\)

That is, what the sceptic requires is a proof of the premiss, "Here is a hand." This is why Moore's argument does not convince


\(^{14}\)Ibid., p. 398.

\(^{15}\)Ibid., p. 405.
the sceptic of the empirical proposition "There are external objects."

(b) Moreover, Moore cannot prove this proposition. To "point out" something is to distinguish it from other things. But one cannot point out anything which is not an external object. Therefore, it is impossible to prove that "There are external objects" by pointing out an external object. Nor is the proposition "There is an external object" entailed by a proposition such as "There is a dime." That is, the proposition regarding external objects cannot be established even indirectly.

Holding "A dime is an external object" expresses a necessary proposition does not entail holding that anything which is a dime satisfies all the criteria for applying the phrase "external object." For this phrase is not used to apply to any kind of thing. One will therefore not have established the existence of any thing of the kind "external object" in producing a dime.\(^\text{16}\)

Aside from this, there is a second reason why Moore cannot prove his point. For there is a catch in the sceptic's claim that no one can know that external objects exist. The catch is that "no possible amount of further evidence would alter the sceptic's claim about the limitations of our knowledge."\(^\text{17}\) This shows that the sceptic's claim is unfalsifiable, and hence, is not an empirical proposition at all.

(c) This indicates that the problem needs to be reformulated.

\(^\text{16}\)Ibid., p. 408.
\(^\text{17}\)Ibid., p. 399.
When the sceptic says no one can know that external objects exist, he cannot describe what prevents him from knowing, what obstacle stands in his way. Nor can he describe what kind of thing he would need to know in order for evidence for the existence of external objects to be complete. He cannot because he wants to say that there are no describable circumstances in which anyone could be said to know that external objects exist. This comes to saying that "no one knows external objects exist" cannot be falsified, that is, that it is not an empirical assertion about our ability to know. Thus, "the sceptic is arguing for the logical impossibility of knowledge and not for any empirical fact." Yet this seems unreasonable, for it implies that such statements as "I know there is a dollar in my purse" are logically impossible. The sceptic's argument is not about empirical matters, and is in such marked opposition to the way we ordinarily speak that he must actually be "making a disguised proposal." That is, he is proposing that such statements as "No one knows the existence of hands" should be accepted as necessarily true. Thus, what appeared to

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18 Ibid., p. 402.
19 Ibid.
20 Lazerowitz offers two additional arguments for this interpretation. Moore summarized these, and replied as follows. "He [Lazerowitz] says that if they did mean anything more by them than this, we should have to suppose that they held sincerely views which they knew to be false; and that this is impossible... To this, I should reply that he is right in saying that we should have to suppose that they held sincerely views which they knew to be false; but that there is no reason whatever to suppose that this is impossible—nor does he even try to give any. And he points out (b) that philosophers in these cases, 'counter facts with arguments;' that they cannot, by (a), both know the facts and regard their arguments as correct arguments against them; that therefore they plainly want us to look at the arguments rather than the facts; and, therefore, their arguments are merely meant to back a verbal recommendation. The last 'therefore' seems to me to be a simply enormous non-sequitur!" (Reply," PGEM, p. 675).
be a real conflict about factual matters is actually a conflict over how we should speak.

Now if the sceptic is not really questioning an empirical proposition when he says "No one knows the existence of external things," then what was Moore really doing when he replied to the sceptic?

Moore's statement that "'There is a hand' entails 'There is an external object'" calls attention to criteria for applying "external object words" . . . He calls attention to criteria for the use of such words as "hand," "dime," and the like, and in doing this shows that in English it makes sense to say "I know there is a dime in the box." That is, Moore's argument (although it does not establish the truth of an empirical proposition about the existence of a kind of thing, external objects) has as a consequence that it is logically possible to know there are coins in a box. We recall that the sceptic argued as if it were logically impossible.21

Thus, Moore was actually resisting a linguistic recommendation and "insisting on retaining conventions already established in the language about the usage of the words 'know' and 'believe'."22 Moore was simply pointing to ordinary usage to show "that the sceptic's linguistic recommendation is objectionable."23


(a) First of all, Moore believed that one can prove that external objects exist. To say that such a proof is impossible because one cannot "point to" anything which is not an external

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21 Ibid., pp. 409-10.
22 Ibid., p. 415.
23 Ibid., p. 411.
object is not a valid argument, unless "point to" means only "point with the finger at."

One can point out to a person an object which is not an external object . . . You can say to him: "Look at a bright light for a little while; then close your eyes; the round blue patch you will then see is not an external object." . . . And it seems to me that the contrast with objects of this sort enters into the meaning of "external object." 24

(b) Next, Moore believed that "There are external objects" is an empirical proposition. Ambrose argues that this is not an empirical proposition because "no possible amount of further evidence would alter the sceptic's claim." Moore replied:

This argument is a good reason for saying that his reason for denying external objects is not an empirical one . . . But he is, of course, wrong in thinking that "There are external objects" is self-contradictory, and, if so, "There are external objects" may really be an empirical statement. It seems to me that my statement, that there are, certainly is empirical. Why should it not be the case that from his false non-empirical statement that "There are external objects" is self-contradictory, the philosopher invalidly infers the empirical statement "There are no external objects?" This seems to me to be what has actually happened. 25

(c) From these two replies, it would seem that Moore was attempting to defend a common sense position. Ambrose objects: since our language is used in such a way that "I know that there is a dollar in my purse" describes what could be the case, the sceptic is not asserting the non-empirical proposition that such

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24 "Reply," PGEM, p. 671.

assertions are self-contradictory; therefore, he is making a linguistic recommendation. Moore replied: "though he knows that such language is often used, yet he is not aware that it ever describes what could be the case."26

(d) Finally, Moore expressed his dissatisfaction with the reductive thesis as an interpretation of his arguments. "I could not have supposed that the fact that I had a hand proved anything as to how the expression 'external objects' ought to be used."27 If he was merely making a recommendation that we should not use certain expressions in a way which deviates from ordinary usage—"If this is all I was doing, I was certainly making a huge mistake, for I certainly did not think it was all. And I do not think so now."28 An appeal to ordinary language was not satisfactory for Moore's purpose.

A man may be using a sentence perfectly correctly, even when what he means by it is false, either because he is lying or because he is making a mistake; and, similarly, a man may be using a sentence in such a way that what he means by it is true, even when he is not using it correctly, as, for instance, when he uses the wrong word for what he means, by a slip or because he has made a mistake as to what the correct usage is. Thus making a sentence correctly—in the sense explained—and using it in such a way that what you mean by it is true, are two things which are completely logically independent of one another: either may occur without the other.29

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27"Reply," PGEM, p. 674.
29Ibid., p. 548. Cf. also: PE, pp. 6, 12.
Moore's reply gives a fairly clear indication of his reaction to the reductive thesis. It would seem that Moore considers the conflict between common sense and philosophy a real one, and not simply a verbal conflict. In other words, (i) an appeal to common sense is (or could be) adequate to refute a philosophical assertion, whereas an appeal to ordinary language is not adequate; therefore (ii) an appeal to common sense is not equivalent to an appeal to ordinary language, which is to say, an appeal to common sense is not a disguised, linguistic recommendation.  

3. Comments. This section contains some remarks on three topics: an alternative to the reductive thesis, Moore's reply to Ambrose, and the reductive thesis.

(a) Some commentators have held that what Moore did could be interpreted as defending either common sense or ordinary language. Ambrose, for example, says: "Either interpretation is plausibly supported by placing different constructions on the technique Moore made use of, namely, analysis." This is surprising, for Ambrose devotes so much attention to the ordinary language interpretation, without in any way indicating how a common sense interpretation could make sense. James Broyles also believes that "the appeals are in essence the same." However,

30Cf. EM, pp. 31-9.

31Alice Ambrose, "Three Aspects of Moore's Philosophy," Essays in Analysis, p. 205. Later, Ambrose adds: "It seems to me that Moore's refutations ... are much more convincing when taken as arguments whose import is linguistic than when taken as defending a factual truth." (p. 213). For examples of this in operation, cf. Lazerowitz, "Moore and Philosophical Analysis," SPM, pp. 229, 231.

32Broyles, op. cit., p. 237.
he only indicates how "these are not independent techniques"—which is an entirely different issue. Since no substantial argument has been offered in behalf of the identity of these appeals, we can rest with the summary statement of Moore’s position: an appeal to common sense is not equivalent to an appeal to ordinary language.

(b) Now we can turn to Moore’s reply to Ambrose. It seems that three of his arguments are adequate for refuting Ambrose’s position; or, at least they are adequate if he is correct in maintaining that "There are external objects" is an empirical proposition. Moore believed that this proposition could be understood as either an empirical or non-empirical assertion.33 It can be treated as an empirical proposition insofar as it is supported by evidence of our senses. For example, a sceptic might argue that since some sensory experiences are similar in important respects to dream-images, it follows that all sensory experiences one is now having may be mere dream-images.34 Moore would reply that such a premiss implies that the sceptic knows that dreams have occurred. And so the sceptic is inconsistent. The sceptic might grant that we cannot always be wrong; he can still maintain that we are unable to identify those cases in which we are correct, in which we do know. In reply, Moore resorts to


34 "Certainty," *PP*, p. 248. This is one kind of argument for scepticism.
If he does not know that he is not dreaming, can he possibly know that he is not only dreaming that dreams have occurred? Can he possibly know therefore that dreams have occurred? I do not think that he can.35

Elsewhere, Moore points out that the issue is an empirical one because there is evidence which can falsify his claim to know, for example, that he is seeing a table. "That I am seeing one," he says, "needs no proof to me. If someone were to come & fail to see one, that would be a reason for me to doubt."36

For Moore, then, the real conflict between common sense and philosophy (at least in this case) has to do with the evidence for each. The lack of proof for self-evident statements may be unsatisfactory as far as the sceptic is concerned. But for Moore, such unprovable truths are necessary for all reasoning. Even the sceptic claims to know things by means of arguments. But all arguments are based on reasons which support it; all reasoning (mediate inference) depends upon judgments (immediate inference). Therefore, if we know anything by means of arguments, there must be something which is self-evident—otherwise there would be an infinite regress in our reasoning.37

However, it is important to realize that Moore knew his arguments begged the question, insofar as the question is non-empirical. He says, for example: "Now I cannot see my way to deny

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36CB, p. 117.
that it is logically possible that all the sensory experiences I am having now should be mere dream-images." The surprising result is that Moore appears to agree with the sceptic, at least insofar as they are talking about a non-empirical proposition.

The following seems applicable to Moore, as well as Reid.

Sir James Mackintosh remarks that he observed to Dr. Brown in 1812 that Reid and Hume 'differed more in words than in opinion.' Brown answered: 'Yes, Reid bawled out, We must believe an outward world; but added in a whisper, We can give no reason for our belief. Hume cries out, We can give no reason for such a notion; and whispers, I own we cannot get rid of it.'

Why, then, did Moore seem so perturbed by scepticism? Simply because he believed that there are times when it is absurd to believe that what is logically possible (viz., an error) is actually the case. He was anxious to point out that because it is logically possible for \( x \) to be something else does not in itself imply that I do not know \( x \). The logical possibility that I may be dreaming is no evidence that I am dreaming. Moore's example, however, is not adequate. For a sceptic would likely grant that.

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38 "Certainty," PP, p. 250. This is a second kind of argument for scepticism: logical possibility.

39 Notice how Moore, like Hume, defines 'know for certain' so that to say "I know for certain that \( p \)" implies \( p \). ("Certainty," PP, p. 238.)


one can be directly aware of his states of mind, and so can know these things. The problem that the sceptic emphasizes is that we are not directly aware of material objects. In a way, the sceptic is simply a disenchanted direct or new realist. But Moore does not adhere to direct realism either, which implies that he believed that indirect knowledge (or, a representative theory of perception) does not prohibit one from knowing empirical facts.

(c) We can turn now from Moore's view to that of the linguist. Perhaps it would be helpful to state the reductive thesis in more linguistic terminology, such as the following.

[Some philosophers claim] that certain ordinary ways of talking had always to issue in false statements, no matter how the facts of the particular case might vary . . . that a considerable body of ordinary language is incorrect language, in the sense that it can never be used in the normal circumstances of its use to make true assertions.43

Thus, the reductive thesis, when stated linguistically, is simply a reminder that ordinary language cannot be incorrect language.

However, several problems arise with this interpretation of philosophical assertions. First of all, the linguistic interpretation goes beyond pointing out that various philosophical statements are non-empirical. Notice, for example, how Ambrose continues this kind of interpretation.

It is hard to suppose the sceptic is arguing that such [non-empirical] propositions are necessarily true when it is plain that as language is ordinarily used they are not.44

Consider the statement . . . "The sceptic argues as if 'no one knows that hands exist' expresses a necessary proposition." This is to argue as if "knowing hands exist" had no application . . . The sceptic knows that "knowing hands exist" has use, and that "no one knows there are hands in the world" is used to express something which can be either true or false. He is holding that they should not be so used, only he does not say so explicitly.  

The mistake that Ambrose makes is to ignore the fact that "knowing hands exist" does not have an ordinary use, when 'knowing' has the implication of "necessarily true." In other words, the sceptic is perfectly correct in claiming that "knowing hands exist" can have no application in ordinary language, because in ordinary language, 'knowing' does not imply "necessarily true."

The philosopher, in other words, would distinguish 'correct use' in the sense of 'use in accordance with the rules of ordinary language' from 'correct use' in the sense of 'use to make true statements', and would claim that a sentence could have a correct use in the first of these two senses without having a correct use in the second. Moore indicates that he thinks the philosopher is justified both in distinguishing these two senses and in claiming what he does about their relationship. Malcolm, on the other hand, [like other linguists] denies that this distinction can be made, or at any rate denies that a sentence can be correct in the first sense without being correct in the second.  

Therefore, it does not follow that the sceptic is necessarily saying how we should speak or use the word 'know'—though he might wish to do this. As Moore was regarded as mistakenly thinking that a sceptic was speaking about matters of fact, so the linguist mistakenly thinks that the sceptic is speaking in

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ordinary language, or has to. The linguist overlooks that ordinary language is used in various contexts, in various spheres or levels of discourse.

The linguist is bound to reply: ordinary language cannot be incorrect language. But this is no valid objection against the sceptic's position. As I stated it above, I gave the impression that the philosopher is not speaking in ordinary language. This is only partly true. For the sceptic could very easily use ordinary language to state his position. He might say: "In ordinary language, we say that we 'know' external objects or empirical facts. But we also say, in ordinary language, that it is impossible to prove that a particular case of knowing is necessarily true. (The very accusation that Moore had begged the question is evidence of this). Therefore, in ordinary language we use 'know' without regard for logical possibility." It is important to notice that this argument is also directed against Moore's position. For Moore's argument is stated in ordinary language: we know empirical statements in the ordinary sense of 'know.' However, if—as the sceptic claims—the ordinary sense of 'know' does not include the notion of certainty, then Moore's argument is completely ineffective against scepticism.47

A second difficulty with the linguistic interpretation is that the appeal to ordinary language seems to be based on the

principle of verification, according to which all cognitively meaningful propositions are either analytic or empirical, and those which are empirical have cognitive meaning only if they admit of some evidence for or against them. But the assumption of this analytic-synthetic dichotomy is at least debatable. And it is important to keep this in mind, for it is by means of this rigid classification that metaphysical assertions are ruled out as possibly having cognitive meaning. Because of this dichotomy, we have been restricted to considering the conflict between common sense and philosophy as either empirical or linguistic. The possibility of a third alternative, or a real, metaphysical conflict has been ruled out.

The issue might be put this way: "Is the significance of the language of common sense exhausted when it has been used with reference to what can fall under the sense and (the speaker's) introspection, or does it go beyond this to what these cannot

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48 Perhaps it would be more accurate to say that the appeal to ordinary language is based on "methodological verificationism," or "methodological nominalism," which does not commit one to the truth of the principle of verification. On a difficulty with this position, cf. Ewing, op. cit., p. 68.

49 As Moore said, to maintain that metaphysical statements have no meaning requires identifying these statements by the kind of meaning they have, which is the meaning of asserting something unverifiable. (Cited by Alice Ambrose, Essays in Analysis, p. 207). On the principle of verification, cf. Carl G. Hempel, "Problems and Changes in the Empiricist Criterion of Meaning," Rev. Intern. Philos., (1950), pp. 41-63.

50 Lazerowitz contends that even if there are synthetic a priori judgments, this type of knowledge does not help solve the problem. ("Moore and Philosophical Analysis," SPM, p. 243).
reach?" Or we might ask: do common sense beliefs contain a trans-empirical content?

CHAPTER IV
COMMON SENSE AND ANALYSIS

So far, we have considered a few aspects of Moore's notion of common sense, and the relation between common sense and ordinary language. The notion of common sense remains problematic, and the relation between common sense and ordinary language has not even been adequately stated, much less resolved. Thus, it has been impossible to proceed to the more important question: was Moore successful in his attempts to defend common sense? Perhaps by considering this issue more directly, it will be easier to clarify Moore's notion of common sense—which is the main concern of this paper.

When the question of the validity of Moore's arguments is raised, a common reply is that they are valid on the level of common sense, but irrelevant on the philosophical level. As Klemke says:

In one sense, we understand what it is for tables and chairs to exist, and, in that sense, we know that there are such objects . . . However, in another sense, and in a different context, might one not plausibly hold that it is sometimes appropriate to question various common-sense assertions, since we know, among other things, that common sense is often wrong (Moore admits the latter)? . . . I might suggest, for example, that I am now sensing a red datum which is wholly presented to me is absolutely certain. But I might wonder whether, in this same sense, it is absolutely certain that there is a red book on that table over there. Might I not find that the book is
orange, or that the object is a box and not a book, or that there is, in fact, no object over there at all?1

In effect, Klemke accuses Moore of overlooking that, on the philosophical level, one is attempting an analysis of common sense statements,2 which gives rise to technical terms. In other words, Moore is accused of ignoring the fact that words like 'know' and 'exist' are used in a special sense on the philosophical level. Therefore, his arguments miss their metaphysical and epistemological targets.3

Thus, we have not yet finished considering the relevance of ordinary language. Now we take it up again in a somewhat different context, that of analysis. Roughly speaking, whereas the last chapter centered around the truth of common sense propositions, the present chapter picks up this problem in terms of meaning.

Moore's position is this.

It is possible to understand [common sense] statements about [such things as] observed material objects and other selves, in their ordinary or popular meaning, and to know their truth for certain, without knowing what their correct analysis is.4

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2Ibid., p. 30. See also Murphy, "Moore's 'Defence of Common Sense'", PGEM, pp. 303, 308-9.

3Moore denied this charge and maintained that he was (at least operatively) aware of this distinction. ("Reply", PGEM, pp. 668-70. Cf., e.g., "Objects of Perception", PS, p. 60; "Proof", PP, pp. 141-2).

4Murphy, op. cit., p. 310. See Moore's "Defence", PP, pp. 36-7. Is this part of the reason why Moore spoke of common sense "beliefs", and not "knowledge"?
Now there is no real conflict between Moore's position and that of the epistemologist, as long as the latter does not extend the technical meaning of 'know', for example, so as to include its ordinary or common sense meaning. However, when a technical, philosophical term is used so as to include its common sense meaning, and when this results in a conflict between a philosophical assertion and common sense—then Moore's defense of common sense is at least relevant, if not conclusive.\(^5\) As Ayer said: "the philosopher has no right to despise the beliefs of common sense . . . What he is entitled to despise is [only] the unreflecting analysis of those beliefs."\(^6\)

The crux of the issue seems to be the meaning of 'to know'. For Moore, to know something does not imply knowing its analysis. For other philosophers, it does.\(^7\) However, there are still others who agree with Moore's position, but reject his statement of the issue. It is this latter disagreement that we will consider in what follows.

Parenthetically, it is worth noting that Moore's notion of analysis implies that while common sense is the starting point of philosophy, it is not the limit of philosophy. For "the first and most important problem of philosophy is: To give a general

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\(^5\) Murphy, for one, believes that in this situation, Moore's arguments are conclusive. (op. cit., pp. 312-3).


\(^7\) Barnes, op. cit., p. 32.
description of the whole Universe." 8

For Moore, as for others, understanding Common-sense statements and knowing them to be true is not enough. A common-sense philosopher is not one who remains at the level of Common Sense. His quest is for knowledge which penetrates further into the nature of things than unaided Common Sense is able to. 9

A. What Is Analysis?

When Moore said that he knew a particular common sense statement to be true and yet did not know its analysis, he was distinguishing two different types of meaning that an expression may have: its ordinary meaning, and a technical kind of meaning. Analysis is a somewhat technical term for a specific kind of meaning. In an effort to clarify this notion, we will first distinguish analysis from other kinds of meaning, and then consider what it is that is analyzed, and finally, how it is analyzed.

1. Kinds of Meaning. An expression or statement may have several different types of meaning. 10 First of all, the meaning of an expression may be its sense in ordinary language. A vivid example is found in Moore’s lectures.

Who is there who does not know what is meant by saying that some men are alive and others dead, sufficiently

8SMPP, p. 2.


10Klemke notes that Moore also used 'meaning' in the sense of (i) 'importance'—as in, "That was a meaningless gesture"—and in the sense of (ii) emotive meaning. But these two uses have little meaning for philosophy. (EM, pp. 53–4).
well to be able to say with certainty in ever so many cases that some men are alive and others are dead? But yet, if you try to define the meaning of the word 'life' quite generally—to give an account of the difference between life and death, which will apply to all cases in which we say that one thing is alive and another dead, you will certainly find it extraordinarily difficult. The very same person who may know quite well that one particular man is alive and another dead, may yet be quite unable to say exactly what properties there are which are common to a living man and to all other living things—a living plant, a living cell, a living bacillus, and which at the same time do not belong to a dead man or to anything not living. Well, in the same way, it seems to me we do usually understand quite well the meaning of these much more fundamental expressions 'real', 'exists', 'is', 'is a fact', 'is true' ... even though we do not know their meaning, in the sense of being able to define [i.e., give an analysis of] them.11

Secondly, the meaning of an expression may be its use. "Often, we are not only able to understand an expression ... but we are also able to use the expression intelligently or in accord with common usage."12 And when someone consistently uses an expression correctly, we could say that he knows the meaning of that expression. Thirdly, the meaning of an expression might be its verbal definition. Thus, one could speak of the meaning of 'horse' as being "a hoofed quadruped of the genus Equus".13

Fourthly, the meaning of an expression could be its referent, i.e., the object or concept to which an expression refers.14 For

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11Moore, SMPP, pp. 205-6.

12Klemke, EM, p. 56. This distinction between "sense in ordinary language" and "use" is made by Klemke. It is very doubtful, however, whether Moore made this distinction. (Cf. "Necessity", Mind, pp. 289-90; PE, p. 6; SMPP, pp. 205-6, 216-7; "Defence", PP, pp. 197-8; "Reply", PGR, p. 548) Whether or not this distinction is made does not seem important here.

13Moore, PE, p. 8.

14While Moore recognized that 'meaning' might, at times,
example, the meaning of 'good' is the object or idea which the word stands for.15

2. The "Analysandum". For all four of the kinds of meanings mentioned, what is to be analyzed (the analysandum) is an expression or statement. This is not the case in analysis. Rather, what is to be analyzed is a concept or object. As Moore said in his "Reply":

I never intended to use the word ['analysis'] in such a way that the analysandum would be a verbal expression. When I have talked of analysing anything, what I have talked of analysing has always been an idea or concept or proposition, and not a verbal expression.16

Unfortunately, Moore did not always speak so unequivocally and clearly. Thus he did, at times, speak of analyzing words or expressions.17 But this seems to have been simply a misleading way of be equivalent to 'use', he usually spoke of meaning in terms of naming. It is possible that the distinction between the two was unclear to him. (See his "Reply", where (p. 583) he equates the "different senses in which the word 'good' is used" and the "different characteristics of which it is a name"). Sometimes Moore thought that what was named or referred to was an object, while at other times the referent was taken to be a concept. For a discussion of Moore's naming theory of meaning, see White, M:CE, pp. 39-50, and Klemke, EM, pp. 57-62.

15PE, p. 6.

16"Reply", PGEM, p. 66. Nelson believes that there is an earlier and later view in Moore's writings on analysis. Nelson also notes: "Although he [Moore] was unclear about what the relation is between concepts, the entities objectively making up the universe, and verbal expressions, he appears to have thought that concepts are not only distinct from and (at least from their side) independent of their verbal expressions but also distinct from the entities objectively making up the universe." ("George Edward Moore", The Encyclopedia of Philosophy. Vol. 5. Ed. by Paul Edwards. New York: Macmillan and Free Press, 1967, p. 375).

17See White's discussion of the analysandum (M:CE, pp. 50-3) for numerous references.
describing what he was about. Despite the various terms Moore employed, there is an essential coherence in his descriptions of analysis.

Since . . . when he [Moore] talks of a proposition or concept he is talking in a misleading way about the meaning of expressions of various kinds, it follows that to propose a proposition or concept for the role of analysandum is to say that it is the meanings of expressions that we have to analyse. Further, we saw that on his naming theory there is no important difference between talking of an analysis of the entity ABC and an analysis of the meaning of the expression 'ABC'. We may conclude, therefore, that these other genuine candidates for the role of analysandum, namely, entities and concepts—expressions only slip into the ring when the judge is not looking—are all one and the same candidate, namely, the meaning of an expression, in disguise.

This brings out the main relation between analysis and ordinary understanding or use, namely, analysis presupposes an understanding of the ordinary meaning of an expression or concept: analysis is about the ordinary meaning of a concept.

"Philosophy only analyses words of which we already know the meaning, in the sense that we can use the word right, although we could not perhaps say what it means." As this was expressed

18 Klemke's confused discussion of Moore's use of analysis overlooks Moore's remark: "There is, of course, a sense in which verbal expressions can be 'analysed.'" But this is a non-technical sense of analysis. "Reply", PGEM, p. 661.

19 White, MICE, pp. 52-3. Moore's position could also be put this way: the analysandum is common sense, for the common sense view is not a collection of propositions. (CB, p. 280).


later by others: there is a distinction between knowing how to use an expression or concept, and knowing the conditions under which the expression can be used correctly—and the latter depends upon the former.

So far, then, we have observed two things which help clarify why Moore believed that "knowing X" does not imply "knowing the analysis of X": (i) "knowing the analysis of X" is "knowing the technical meaning of X"; and (ii) this is "knowing the technical meaning of an idea of concept or proposition or meaning".

Now we can consider how the meaning in question is analyzed, and the criteria of an analysis.

3. Kinds of Analyses. According to White's interpretation of Moore, there are three ways in which the analysis of the ordinary meaning of a concept may be carried out. The analysis may be by division, by analytic distinction, or by inspection.22

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22 Klemke suggests that the various kinds of analysis can be classified as follows. (EM, p. 68)

"1. Refutational analysis:
   (a) Showing contradictions;
   (b) Translation into the concrete;
2. Distinctional analysis;
3. Decompositional analysis:
   (a) Definitional;
   (b) Divisional;
4. Reductional analysis."

However, this classification seems to be very misleading. For example, "refutational analysis" is not a description of analysis in its technical sense. What Klemke refers to as refutational analysis is actually an appeal to ordinary language. Refutational analysis is not so much a kind of analysis as it is the purpose or result of distinctional analysis. Klemke himself seems to have doubts about the appropriateness of his account. (Cf. pp. 62 and 72). Moreover, Moore warned against just this
(a) **Analysis by Division.** 23 One way of analyzing the meaning of a concept is by dividing a complex concept into its component parts. An example of analysis by division is given in "The Refutation of Idealism", where Moore analyzes the notion of sensation into two elements: consciousness and the object of consciousness. 24 Similarly, a belief can be analyzed into two constituents: the act of belief and the object of belief. 25

This type of analysis is not particularly problematic. But it is worth noting a few characteristics of an analysis by division. First of all, there is no doubt that the **analysandum** is a concept or entity. This is not clearly the case in other types of analyses. Secondly, the **analysandum** is not synonymous with the **analysans**, as seems to be the case in the next kind of analysis considered. Furthermore, this type of analysis is only applicable in dealing with complex concepts. Yellow and good, for example, "are notions of that simple kind, out of which definitions [or, analyses] are composed and with which the power of sort of confusion. (Cf. "Reply", PGEM, pp. 661, 664-5). See also p. 36 above, and n. 27 below.

23 On this type of analysis, cf. White, M:GE, pp. 73-4, 201-8. White makes this interesting observation. "Most philosophers who took this division view [of analysis] searched for some ultimate set of elements from which the other parts and wholes are to be built. Moore also hints that analysis must, if pushed far enough, get down to the simplest elements . . . But he did explicitly deny, somewhat in contrast to others, that the whole is nothing more than the sum of its constituents." (p. 73).

24 **PS**, p. 17.

25 Moore, SMPP, p. 303. Cf. also **PE**, p. 189 for an analysis of "esthetic appreciation".
further defining [or, division] ceases." 26 Finally, this type of analysis results in new information.

(b) Analysis by Analytic Distinction. 27 A second type of analysis is referred to by White as "analytic distinction". The paradigm of this kind of analysis is: "The concept 'being a brother' is identical with the concept 'being a male sibling'." 28 This example provides the chief characteristics of an analytic distinction: (i) it is applicable to both simple and complex ideas; (ii) the analysandum and the analysans are synonymous; 29 (iii) the analysans does not seem to be informative, rather it simply clarifies the analysandum; and therefore (iv) the analysandum and the analysans seem to be verbal expressions. The last three characteristics give rise to a problem: the paradox of

26 PE, p. 8.

27 Cf. White, M:CE, pp. 74-83. White also talks about Moore's use of "discriminative distinction", which is very similar (if not identical) to Klemke's discussion of "distinctional analysis". (Cf. n. 20 above). Unlike Klemke, however, White does not consider discriminative distinction a type of analysis. "Despite what he says, I think that Moore did not wish to identify discriminative distinction with, or make it a part of, analysis and that he only appears to do so because of the ambiguity of the word 'distinction'." (M:CE, p. 78). White follows this statement with four reasons (p. 78), and reiterates one of them a little later (p. 81).

28 "Reply", PDEM, p. 664. White carelessly cites this as an example of analysis by division. (M:CE, pp. 73-4) As Morris Lazerowitz says: this is not "the model for all analysis done in philosophy." ("Moore and Philosophical Analysis", SPF, p. 228).

29 "In essence the [naturalistic] fallacy is simply that of identifying or equating any two notions which in fact are distinct, or of supposing two words to be synonymous which are not." (M:CE, p. 124).
The paradox of analysis can be stated in this way. Every analysis is a statement which not only expresses an identity between the **analysandum** and the **analysans**, but which is also informative. However, (1) if an analysis is a statement of identity, although this problem can be found in the writings of Hegel and Frege, recent discussion was initiated by C. H. Langford's formulation of it in "The Notion of Analysis in Moore's Philosophy", PFGM, p. 323. Unfortunately, Langford formulated the problem in terms of "verbal expressions", which is misleading. It is not surprising, then, that Moore rejected both views of analysis which Langford presented in his essay.

In his "Reply", Moore gave the following conditions for a correct analysis:

1. "both **analysandum** and **analysans** must be concepts or propositions [i.e., meanings], not mere verbal expressions." (p. 664)
2. "both **analysandum** and **analysans** . . . must in some sense, be the same concept." (p. 666)
3. "the expression used for the **analysandum** must be a different expression from that used for the **analysans**." (p. 666)
4. "the expression used for the **analysans** must explicitly mention concepts which are not explicitly mentioned by the expression used for the **analysandum**." (p. 666)
5. "the method of combination should be explicitly mentioned by the expression used for the **analysans**." (p. 663)
6. "nobody can know that the **analysandum** applies to an object without knowing that the **analysans** applies to it." (p. 663)
7. "nobody can verify that the **analysandum** applies without verifying that the **analysans** applies." (p. 663)
8. "any expression which expresses the **analysandum** must be synonymous with any expression which expresses the **analysans**." (p. 663)

The ordering given here follows Klemke's. White refers to six conditions, because he combines (1) and (2) into a single condition; and he omits (8) because this is equivalent to conditions (2) and (3).
then it is a tautology, and uninformative—and therefore is not an analysis; and (ii) if an analysis is not a statement of identity, then it is not an analysis. This paradox is significant because it raises doubt as to the justification of Moore’s distinction between knowing a common sense statement to be true and knowing the correct analysis of that statement.

The central problem in the paradox of analysis lies in Moore’s list of criteria for a correct analysis. To be specific, Moore maintains that analysis has to do with concepts, and not verbal expressions. However, given the criteria of being synonymous and informative, the two terms of an analysis cannot be a concept; they must be verbal expressions. This criticism is based on nominalism or verificationism. Given this stance, philosophy is merely a "conversion analysis".

In philosophy an analysis is used to make a linguistic alteration, it is used to justify a manoeuvre with terminology. It is a linguistic conversion which in every instance creates the semantic illusion that a theory about phenomena is being stated.32

When we turn to the third type of analysis, we find that this problem can be restated in terms of Moore’s notion of meaning.

(c) Analysis by Inspection. Moore’s basic view of what is involved in an analysis is that of observing what it is that we know, or think, or have before our minds. Rather than being a distinct method of analysis, inspection is rather "the way to

test a proposed analysis." As was just mentioned, the central problem is Moore's contention that analysis deals with concepts or meanings. Lazerowitz puts it this way.

The picture of themselves that philosophical analysts create is that of people who examine the meanings of terms, or the concepts denoted by them, more carefully and with greater skill and penetration than is done by others. And furthermore, they make it look as if they are examining objects of a special, perhaps rarified, kind. They make it look as if they are examining objects which accompany terms and are given with them by psychological contiguity ... The written word "elephant," for example, is present to sight; its meaning, the concept elephant, is present to the mind. And a philosopher who practices analysis with the last of the above objectives in mind gives every appearance of believing that by carefully scrutinizing the concept elephant he will learn zoological facts about actual elephants.

White expresses the same point by saying:

The picture, taken over from his concept theory of meaning, which Moore has of a person bent on analysing a notion is that of him concentrating on, peering intently at, something behind and naked of words, which he holds before the mind's eye.

In other words, Moore's "language suggests that something more than linguistic fact is thrown into clear light, that hidden facts about things are revealed." Lazerowitz offers this alternative.

The picture of the penetrating gazer into concepts changes if we replace the expression "meaning of a term," ... by the expression "literal use of a term." ... It removes

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33 M:CE, p. 67; cf. also p. 112.
34 Lazerowitz, op. cit., p. 238.
36 Lazerowitz, op. cit., p. 240.
the false notion that the meanings of words contain hidden facts about things which analysis can bring to light. 

The preceding discussion has indicated that Moore's distinction between knowing something and knowing its analysis rests upon a naming theory of meaning. And because of this, Moore conceived of philosophy as not only clarifying, but also discovering things about the universe. Others have accepted Moore's distinction, but base it on a use theory of meaning. And because of this, they conceive of philosophy as merely clarifying our language. Perhaps the only possibility left for Moore is analysis by division. For this method of analysis allows him to retain his theory of meaning, to discover things about the universe, and avoid the main objection of ordinary language philosophers, namely, the paradox of analysis.

B. Common Sense and Philosophy

The basic issue to which we have addressed ourselves can be expressed as follows: what, precisely, is the relationship between common sense and philosophy? The notion of common sense remains unclear so long as this question is unanswered. In chapter 3, we considered whether or not the conflict which characterizes this relationship is simply an apparent, linguistic conflict. It would seem that there can be a real conflict only if the philosophical statements which contradict common sense have an empirical content.

Ibid., p. 239.
In the present chapter, the problem has been shifted from the realm of truth to that of meaning. With the distinction between "knowing X" and "knowing the analysis of X", Moore maintained that what is problematic is not the truth of common sense beliefs, but their analysis or meaning. Philosophical statements are simply attempts to explicate and go beyond the ordinary meaning of common sense beliefs. In this context, it seems that there can be a real conflict between common sense and philosophy only if common sense beliefs have a metaphysical content. This is the crucial issue. The matter might be stated in several ways. We can ask whether or not common sense has a philosophical content, i.e., whether common sense is philosophically neutral, or philosophically committed. For example, does the common sense belief in material objects imply that a philosophical analysis of this belief must result in a substantive or realist analysis— as Moore thought? Or, we might inquire whether or not the ordinary language in which common sense is expressed commits one to a particular philosophical position.

It is evident, then, that we have not arrived at a precise statement of Moore's notion of common sense, nor of the relation between common sense and philosophy. We have, however, stated the problem in a number of different ways, as Moore himself might have done. We, like Moore, have, in effect, remained adrift on the sea of analysis.
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- **M:ER** = G. E. Moore: Essays in Retrospect ed. by Lazerowitz and Ambrose
- **PGEM** = The Philosophy of G. E. Moore ed. by Paul A. Schilpp
- **PP** = Philosophical Papers by G. E. Moore
- **PS** = Philosophical Studies by G. E. Moore
- **SPM** = Studies in the Philosophy of G. E. Moore ed. by E. D. Klemke

*Cf.* indicates other works which are directly related to a given entry. For example, the "Cf." after Malcolm's article "Defending Common Sense" refers to Black's discussion of Malcolm's article.

*Re.* indicates that an entry is directly concerned with another article. For example, the "Re." after Black's article "On Speaking with the Vulgar" indicates this is a discussion of Malcolm's article.

*v.* indicates where additional information—especially regarding a reprint—can be located.

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The thesis submitted by Mark A. Phillips has been read and approved by members of the Department of Philosophy.

The final copies have been examined by the director of the thesis, and the signature which appears below verifies the fact that any necessary changes have been incorporated, and that the thesis is now given final approval with reference to content and form.

The thesis is therefore accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts.

June 2, 1970
(date)

Edward A. Mezey
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