1968

Common sense and ordinary language.

Ronald Isaac Rothbart

University of Massachusetts Amherst

Follow this and additional works at: https://scholarworks.umass.edu/theses


This thesis is brought to you for free and open access by ScholarWorks@UMass Amherst. It has been accepted for inclusion in Masters Theses 1911 - February 2014 by an authorized administrator of ScholarWorks@UMass Amherst. For more information, please contact scholarworks@library.umass.edu.
COMMON SENSE AND ORDINARY LANGUAGE

An examination of Moore's defense of common sense and of the interpretations of this defense as an appeal to ordinary language

Ronald Isaac Rothbart

Thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts

University of Massachusetts, Amherst

May, 1963
## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction. .................................................. 1

Part I. Moore on Philosophy, Common Sense and Ordinary Language .................................. 4

Chapter I. Moore's Conception of Philosophy.
   A. Common Sense ............................................. 5
   B. Conflict Between Philosophy and Common Sense .................................................. 8

Chapter II. Common Sense and Ordinary Language ..................................................... 16

Chapter III. Defending Common Sense.
   A. The Linguistic Preliminaries ......................... 22
   B. Inconsistencies ............................................ 26
   C. Knowing and Proving ...................................... 29

Part II. Some Interpretations of Moore's Defense of Common Sense;
The Nature of Philosophical Statements ...................................................... 37

Chapter IV. Moore's Paradox ................................. 38

Chapter V. Are Philosophical Statements Empirical?
   A. Evidence and Verification ............................... 43
   B. Categories .................................................. 49

Chapter VI. Are Philosophical Statements Necessary Statements? .................................. 60

Chapter VII. Are Philosophical Statements Really About Language?
   A. Verbal in Import .......................................... 64
   B. Do Philosophical Statements Inform Us About Ordinary Language? ....................... 69

Chapter VIII. Are Philosophical Statements Really Linguistic Proposals? ......................... 75

Chapter IX. Philosophical Criteria ............................ 85
INTRODUCTION

G. E. Moore claimed that by gesturing with his hand and saying, "Here is a hand," he could prove that external objects exist. Against the claims of traditional philosophers, who so often seem to contradict common sense, Moore held that the common sense view of the world is, in its fundamental features, true; that the beliefs of common sense are, for the most part, beliefs which we all know to be true. Many of Moore's critics feel that traditional philosophical positions cannot be so abruptly countered; and some believe that philosophical statements, or arguments, are not what they seem to be, Moore's included. Philosophical views which go against common sense have been interpreted as assertions that certain ordinary expressions do not make sense, or as proposals that certain expressions should not be used, or should not be used in the ways they are ordinarily used. Moore has been understood to be pointing out situations in which these expressions do have a use and make sense so as to refute the traditional philosopher or to advise against his proposal.

I will attempt to show that these interpretations, both of traditional philosophy and of Moore's philosophy, are mistaken. I will also formulate a metaphilosophical thesis, with the purpose of clarifying the relationship between Moore's philosophy and traditional philosophies.

This paper contains two main sections. In the first part, I will examine Moore's views on philosophy and on ordinary language, and his defense of common sense. I will show 1) that Moore believes that very often philosophers contradict or go beyond common sense, or do both; 2) that Moore's appeals to ordinary language are preliminary to his defense of
common sense and that the one must be clearly distinguished from the other; 
3) that Moore defends common sense by noting inconsistencies in the denial 
of the common sense view and by claiming that the beliefs of common sense 
are certainly true and more certain than philosophical principles; 4) that 
Moore's defense does not necessarily involve the claim that common sense 
beliefs are known without need of evidence (which he sometimes held) and 
is compatible with the view that we do need and do have evidence for 
them (which he sometimes held). In essence, Moore's philosophy is a demo-
stration that we can make common sense our touchstone without committing 
any philosophical errors.

In the second part of this paper, I will examine the views of 
Moore's critics. Some critics argue that Moore's proof of an external 
world and the sceptical position it was intended to refute are not, as 
they seem to be, empirical. They believe that philosophical statements 
are not empirical because no empirical evidence is, or can be, given for 
or against them. I will note that philosophers do often appeal to em-
pirical evidence and will examine the nature of this appeal. One cri-
tic argues that philosophical statements are not empirical because philo-
sophical categories are not general names; any statement of the form "x 
is a _____" in which "_____" is a category, has its truth and sig-
ificance range the same. This peculiarity, it is said, shows that cer-
tain statements involving categories are not empirical. I will argue 
that this is not a peculiarity of all philosophical categories, and in 
particular not of those which Moore's defense of common sense involves. 
Some traditional philosophers have believed that their conclusions are 
necessary statements, not empirical. This view, as one of Moore's cri-
tics has shown, involves the traditional philosopher in an inconsisteny.
Some critics argue that philosophical statements, Moore's included, are verbal in import or that they inform us about ordinary language. I will show that the first view is mistaken and the second implausible. The related view, that any statement which violates ordinary language is false, is also mistaken. Some critics attempt to show that philosophical statements are really linguistic proposals. I will try to clarify this view and argue that it, too, is implausible. The related view that, if philosophers are making linguistic proposals, their proposals are useless, is also mistaken.

Finally, I will propose a metaphilosophical theory which clarifies the relationship between Moore's philosophy and traditional philosophy. My view is that philosophers often use special criteria by which to judge whether certain items belong to certain categories. Moore has shown that good philosophy can be done with the ordinary criteria.
PART I

MOORE ON PHILOSOPHY, COMMON SENSE AND ORDINARY LANGUAGE
A. Common Sense.

Russell had invited me to tea in his rooms to meet McTaggart; and McTaggart, in the course of conversation had been led to express his well-known view that Time is unreal. This must have seemed to me then (as it still does) a perfectly monstrous proposition, and I did my best to argue against it...And I think this example is also typical of what (if I am not mistaken) has always been with me, the main stimulus to philosophize.¹

This is Moore speaking, in his autobiography. Presumably, McTaggart's view struck Moore, then in his second year at Cambridge, as "perfectly monstrous" because it seemed to go against common sense. This is not an unusual response to a philosophical thesis. Often people are dismayed by philosophers' theses, and usually because they seem to go against common sense, and are, in this sense, paradoxical. They seem to go against what everybody, or almost everybody, believes.

Throughout his career, Moore continued to believe that, often, philosophers' theories did go against common sense; that a large portion of philosophical literature constituted a long and continuous attack on

common sense. Moore’s career as a philosopher is, in large part, a defense of common sense. And his belief that philosophy and common sense are so often in conflict forms the backbone of his philosophical style.

Moore recognized that the intuition that philosophical theories go against common sense needs precise formulation. First, what does it mean to say that a certain item is a feature of the common sense view of the world? Moore answers,

Something like this: That it is a thing which every or very nearly every sane adult, who has the use of all his senses,...believes or knows...Does one need to add: And of which, for many centuries, it would have been true to say this?¹

Let us call this, with A. R. White, the criterion of universal acceptance.² This criterion is the only one which needs to be satisfied in order for a statement to be a common sense statement. The question which Moore asks above indicates that what is included in the common sense view of the world changes from time to time. Elsewhere, Moore asserts, explicitly, that the views of common sense change as we progress in knowledge. At one time, people believed that the heavenly bodies were small compared to the earth, and at comparatively short distances from the earth. But now these primitive views are rejected. "We should say that we know they were wrong; we have discovered that they were wrong; and the discovery is part of our progress in knowledge." Yet while there


are these examples of change in the common sense view, there are beliefs of common sense which, as far as we know, have not changed, e.g., that there are a great number of material objects in the Universe. If the fact that a belief is part of the common sense view does not prove that the belief is a true one. Further human experience and science often show beliefs of common sense to be false.

Common sense does not have a view on everything; nor does the common-sense view of the world amount to a complete theory about the whole universe. Moore says, I do not know that common sense can be said to have any views about the whole universe; none of its views, perhaps, amount to this. Common sense does not have a view about whether or not there is a God or an after life. While an enormous number of people believe that there is a God, many people do not; it is not a belief which now commands universal acceptance.

There are certain characteristics which many beliefs of common sense share, though these characteristics are not criteria for a belief's being part of the common sense view of the world. Moore has drawn attention to the fact that many of these beliefs are habitually accepted, the fact that certain kinds of inconsistencies flow from denying various common sense beliefs, and the fact that many beliefs of common sense seem obviously to be true. Another peculiarity of a number of items of the


2A. R. White, op. cit., p. 12.

3Some Main Problems of Philosophy, p. 14. After their first citation, Moore's works will be cited by title.


common sense view is that what one of us believes when he believes a particular item of the common sense view is not identical with what another of us believes when he believes the same item. This is because these items are beliefs about oneself. When S believes, "My body exists," he does not believe what R believes when R believes, "My body exists." Thus, the common sense view is not merely a collection of propositions.¹

The common sense view of the world, then, consists of what each of us believes in common with very nearly everyone else. This view of the world is not simply a collection of propositions. Nor is it a complete theory about the whole universe. Nor, according to Moore, is this view necessarily completely correct. It has changed from time to time, as we have progressed in knowledge. Yet, Moore maintains, the common sense view of the world is, in its fundamental features, certainly true.

B. Conflict Between Philosophy and Common Sense.

According to Moore, the important kinds of questions with which philosophy deals are:

(1) Questions about the meaning of words, phrases and forms of expression: Analysis;

(2) Questions about Reality as a whole;

(3) A number of questions about human knowledge;

(4) Still more questions about what it's reasonable for us to believe and in what degree.²

I will not discuss, in this paper, Moore's conception of analysis. It is not clear from his writings what, if any, relation he thought to hold

¹Commonplace Book, p. 280.

between common sense beliefs and philosophical analysis. But I think it is reasonable to assume that he believed that common sense does not have a view about whether any particular analysis is correct or not.

Moore uses the expressions, "Reality as a whole" and "the Universe as a whole," interchangeably. Moore's examples of statements about the universe as a whole are statements about what is in the universe or occurs in it. Moore believes that it is fair to include as questions about the universe as a whole, questions of the third, and perhaps the fourth, kind, questions about what we know with certainty to be in the universe, and questions about what it is reasonable to believe is in the universe. Thus, Moore thought that the most important and interesting thing which philosophers do is:

To give a general description of the whole of the Universe, mentioning all the most important kinds of things which we know to be in it, considering how far it is likely that there are in it important kinds of things which we do not absolutely know to be in it, and also considering the most important ways in which these various kinds of things are related to one another.

For Moore, philosophy seems to be a special sort of inventory of the universe, special because it is concerned with the most important kinds of things which are in the universe and because philosophers discuss their questions "by a particular method." While the sciences do not "raise these

---

1Ibid., p. 175.
2Ibid., pp. 181-2.
3Some Main Problems of Philosophy, p. 13.
abstract questions themselves," they do raise and settle questions from which answers to the philosophical questions follow. What distinguishes philosophy from science is its abstractness, and, primarily, its method.¹

What interested Moore most about philosophy was the fact that it so often went against common sense and science.

What is most amazing and most interesting about the views of many philosophers, is the way in which they go beyond or positively contradict the views of Common Sense...

You will best realize what these philosophical descriptions of the Universe really mean by realizing how very different they are from the views of Common Sense.²

The fact that philosophy so often seems to go against common sense is not a fact which Moore discovered, and perhaps for most people this fact is the most interesting fact about philosophy. What is special about Moore is that the initial shock and the initial feeling that philosophers must be wrong never wore off; nor did his conviction that philosophers were indeed contradicting common sense.

Among the beliefs of common sense, according to Moore, are the beliefs that there are in the universe both material objects and mental acts, that mental acts are attached to some bodies but not to others, that mental acts are dependent upon changes which occur in our bodies, that matter is independent of our consciousness of it, that all material objects

¹Lectures on Philosophy, p. 178.
and mental acts are in time, and that we know all of these things.\(^1\)

These beliefs meet the criterion of universal acceptance; they are
items in the common sense view of the world. But these and the other
items in the common sense view of the world do not constitute a general
description of the whole of the universe. Common sense does not say
that these are the only kinds of things in the universe, or that we know
to be in it; nor, even, that there may be other kinds. Common sense, by
itself, is not a philosophical theory. In order to convert the common
sense beliefs into a general description of the whole universe, "we
should have to add one or other of two things...either: Everything in
the Universe...is either a material object in space, or an act of con-
sciousness...Or else we might say: Everything which we know to be in
the Universe does belong to one or other of these two classes; though
there may be in the Universe other things which we do not know to be in
it."\(^2\) Moore believes that the first view\(^3\) is plausible, "at least as
plausible as many that have been proposed by philosophers," that the
second view is still more plausible,\(^4\) and that the second view, modified
so that it mentions the unsubstantial kinds of things, is the correct view.\(^5\)

But many philosophers have held that any such view as
this is very incorrect indeed. And different philosophers have
held it to be incorrect in three different ways. They have

---

\(^1\)Some Main Problems of Philosophy, pp. 15-25.

\(^2\)Ibid., p. 27.

\(^3\)With the proviso that acts of consciousness may belong to beings
on other planets as well as on the earth.

\(^4\)Ibid., p. 28.

\(^5\)Ibid., p. 29.
either held that there certainly are in the Universe some
most important kinds of things—substantial kinds of things—
in addition to those which Common Sense asserts to be in it.
Or else they have positively contradicted Common Sense: have
asserted that some of the things which Common Sense supposes
to be in it, are not in it, or else, that, if they are, we
do not know it. Or else they have done both; both added and
contradicted. 1

Three examples of additions to common sense are the views that there is a
God, that there is an after-life, and that there is something in the uni-
verse besides material objects and acts of consciousness, but we do not
know what it is. Many people do believe that there is a God and that there
is an after-life, but many people believe that we do not know whether or not
there is a God or an after-life, so that it is fairest to say that common
sense has no view on these points. 2 Other views which go beyond common
sense are the views that there are an infinite number of attributes besides
extension and thought, that this is the best of all possible worlds, and per-
haps that every change has a cause. 3 The two main varieties of views which
do not add to but do contradict common sense are, first, the variety which
asserts that we do not know that there are material objects, and second,
the variety which denies that we can know of the existence of any minds be-
sides our own. 4 Also, if a philosopher merely denied that there are

1 Some Main Problems of Philosophy, pp. 29-30.
2 Ibid., pp. 30-31.
3 Lectures on Philosophy, pp. 174, 180.
4 Some Main Problems of Philosophy, p. 32.
material objects without adding that, e.g., there is a God, he also would be contradicting without adding to common sense. Finally, the third way in which philosophers' views have gone against common sense, that of both adding to and contradicting common sense, includes a number of types. Berkley both added that there is a God and denied that there are material objects. Berkley claimed that he did not deny that there are material objects, but he also held that what he called material objects exist only when we see them and are not all in the same space. "I think, then, it may fairly be said that Berkley denies the existence of any material objects, in the sense in which Common Sense asserts their existence."

Other views deny the existence of material objects and assert the existence of an immense number of minds, in addition to those of men and animals, claiming also that these minds are not in space. And still other philosophers have denied that material objects, our own acts of consciousness, time, and space do really exist; rather they are appearances of something else, a collection of different minds, one mind, or something which is in some sense mental or spiritual, but not one or many minds.

Moore's picture of traditional philosophy is of a discipline which through special methods has consistently and literally denied the existence of—or denied knowledge of the existence of—kinds or classes of things which are almost universally believed to exist, and has often asserted the existence of certain things which are not universally believed to exist or are very rarely believed to exist. For Moore, the

---

1Some Main Problems of Philosophy, p. 32.

2Ibid., p. 35.

3Ibid., pp. 35-37.
most striking thing about traditional philosophy is the fact that it goes beyond and/or contradicts common sense. Historically, there has been a continuing conflict of claims between philosophy and common sense.

And the same is true for philosophy and the special sciences. Philosophers who have discussed what philosophy is have often attempted to give a definition which will ensure that no question discussed by philosophy will be identical with any discussed by the sciences. But Moore claims that while the sciences do not raise abstract questions, such as, "Is Matter Real?," they do "raise and settle questions from which one particular answer to them follows;" thus, "it seems to me obviously rather a subterfuge to say that in raising them it is raising questions which the sciences don't raise." Though a philosopher does not talk about the stars, if he comes to the conclusion that there are no material objects, he is contradicting the astronomers; he is contradicting the scientific conclusion that there were once on the earth "large numbers of enormous reptiles, ichthyosauri and such like." Science is closely related to common sense. The sciences "give us detailed knowledge about particular objects of the kinds which I have been trying to define," namely those kinds of things which common sense says are in the universe. "Most of the special sciences confine themselves to some particular group among objects of these...kinds; and we believe that they have been very successful in giving us a great deal of real knowledge about objects of these kinds." Each of the natural sciences gives us detailed knowledge

---

1Lectures on Philosophy, p. 178.
2Ibid., p. 177.
3Some Main Problems of Philosophy, p. 25.
about certain kinds of material objects. History and biography give us knowledge about the actions of different men or collections of men and their acts of consciousness. Psychology is concerned with the mental acts which we perform.

In the case of all these sciences, there are, we believe, an immense number of things which are now definitely known to be facts; a great many which were formerly believed, but are now definitely known to be errors; and a great many which we do not know and perhaps never shall know. In all our ordinary talk, in all newspapers and in all ordinary books (by which I mean books other than philosophical books) we constantly assume that there is this distinction between what we know, what we wrongly believe, and what we are still in ignorance about...All this is, I think, certainly nowadays part of the belief of Common Sense about the Universe.¹

Moore's position is that it is part of the common sense view that certain kinds of objects exist, and that science gives us detailed knowledge about these kinds of objects, material things and mental acts. That these sorts of things exist is a consequence of scientific conclusions. What is amazing and most interesting for Moore is the fact that traditional philosophies very often contradict and/or go beyond both common sense and the sciences.

¹Some Main Problems of Philosophy, p. 25.
CHAPTER II
COMMON SENSE AND ORDINARY LANGUAGE

Moore's numerous remarks about language are scattered throughout his writings. Here I do not attempt to give a full account of Moore's views on language, but only to mention a few of his views which are especially relevant to the second part of this paper.

First, I wish to repeat a point noted by A. R. White in his book on Moore. White claims that Norman Malcolm and others have confused Moore's appeals to common sense with his appeals to ordinary language. While emphasizing, on the one hand, that the philosophical statements which Moore attempts to refute go against common sense, Malcolm claims, on the other hand, that the essence of Moore's technique consists in his pointing out that these statements "go against ordinary language."¹ In another article, Malcolm attempts to show that there is something wrong with Moore's defense of common sense by trying to show that he is really defending a queer use of language. Malcolm says, "Moore's assertions do not belong to 'common sense,' i.e., to ordinary language, at all."² White says,

Moore's recourse to ordinary language...is mainly intended to discover what a philosopher's view comes to when put into...ordinary language, and to indicate what in fact are the beliefs of common sense by referring to what we all ordinarily say. Having established what is the philosophical view and what the common sense view and the two conflict, he

can then use the appeal to the latter to refute the former.¹

Moore's translations into the concrete are not intended to show that philosophical views go against ordinary usage, but rather that they go against common sense. Moore uses the fact that they go against common sense to show that they are false. For Moore, the correctness of language and the truth-value of a statement must be distinguished. "Thus using a sentence correctly—in the sense explained (in accordance with the best English usage)—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..."²

Still, Moore often did castigate philosophers for using words in absurd or improper ways. Moore often notes that philosophers have used "material object" or "real" in such a way that denying that material objects exist or are real does not involve denying the existence of blackboards and loaves of bread. Some have defined "material object" as an object which is independent of perception. Moore says, "I think myself that such usage is absurd and unjustifiable. It seems to me a separate question whether material things are real, and whether they're independent of perception." Other philosophers seem to say that "That is a blackboard" entails "That's not a colony of monads." Moore says, "I say my sense is the right one, and the others are wrong and improper senses; but even if they're right, they're certainly different."³ Moore does not say that the usage is absurd shows the proposition

¹A. R. White, op. cit., p. 7.
²G. E. Moore, "Reply to His Critics," Schilpp, op. cit.
³Lectures on Philosophy, pp. 16-17.
to be false. He is most concerned to emphasize that he is not using "material object" and "real" in the ways that some other philosophers have used them. The wisdom of this concern will become apparent in the second part of this paper where I note that some philosophers have found it difficult to believe that Moore is doing what he seems to be doing. When Moore asserts, "Here is a hand; therefore there are material objects," we might be tempted to believe that Moore is being less than candid, if we have not been forewarned that Moore's use of words conforms to ordinary usage and certain philosophical uses do not.

Sometimes Moore dismisses a philosophical view as a mere abuse of language. Discussing freewill, he says that some philosophers seem to hold that "our will can properly be said to be free even if we never can, in any sense at all do anything else, except what, in the end, we actually do do. But this view, if it is held, seems to me to be plainly a mere abuse of language." Note that Moore is not dismissing either the view that we have freewill or the view that we do not have freewill, but a view about under what conditions we can properly be said to have freewill. Perhaps Moore could have made more use of this argument than he actually does. For example, he could have similarly argued that some philosophers seem to hold that we can properly be said to know something only if we can prove it; but this view is a "mere abuse of language." Yet often Moore does not argue in the "linguistic mode." Rather he claims that he can know something which he cannot prove. Or, he clarifies what he is claiming, e.g., that we know that

---

there are material objects, partly by distinguishing his assertion from the
assertion of another philosopher, say Berkley, who he believes is using
words in an improper manner. Clearly, Moore did not believe that all para-
doxical philosophical claims could be countered with an abuse-of-language
argument. For, as shall be seen below, he believed that some philosophers
had made paradoxical assertions such as "Material objects do not exist" and
"We do not know that material objects exist," using these expressions in the
"proper" way. And it is these assertions which Moore attempts to refute in
his defense of common sense.

Moore believed that in general philosophical expressions are am-
biguous and ordinary expressions are not. When he uses a philosophical ex-
pression, he is very concerned about clarifying how he is using it and dis-
tinguishing his use from others. He is rarely concerned with clarifying an
ordinary expression and distinguishes understanding such an expression from
giving its analysis. An ordinary term may be, in a sense, vague. Was the
body of the "missing link" a human body? At what point does an embryo be-
come a human body? At what point does a corpse cease to be a human body?
The difficulty of answering such questions shows that "human body" is, in a
sense, ambiguous.¹ But in most cases, we do understand what is meant by
"human body." "There isn't any ambiguity about the term 'human body,' in
the sense in which there is about 'material thing' or 'physical object.'" The
special ambiguity of "material object" arises from the fact that phi-
losophers have used the term in different senses; they have not done this

¹Moore uses the expression "in a sense, ambiguous." Strictly,
the issue in question is one of vagueness. Ordinary expressions are some-
times vague, philosophical expressions often ambiguous.
with "human body." Moore believes that he can define "material thing" in the way that he is using it, by saying that if there are human bodies, chairs, etc., then there certainly are material bodies. He believes "that there certainly is one proper use of...'material thing'...which is such that a person who says 'there are human bodies, but there are no material things' is contradicting himself, just as would be a person who said...'There are greyhounds, but there are no dogs.'" Moore's definition is not arbitrary; he does not believe he is making "human bodies are material things" an expression for a necessary proposition, but that there is one proper use of "material body" according to which this statement is a necessary statement. If this is the case, then it follows that if there are human bodies or hands, etc., then there are material objects. If "human body," "hand," "chair," etc., are, in a sense, not ambiguous, then, it seems to Moore, his definition of "material thing" is "really clear with the sort of clearness that is wanted in philosophy."

For Moore, if a philosophical assertion is ambiguous, we should attempt to discover what is really being said and then see whether or not it is reasonable to believe what is really being said. We can dismiss a philosophical claim as a mere abuse of language only if it, as the assertion about freewill, completely hangs on an improper use of language. In his defense of common sense, Moore is first concerned with clarifying what he means to claim by "Material objects do exist." Then, he concerns himself with denying that there are good reasons to believe that, e.g., every

---

1Lectures on Philosophy, pp. 17-18.
3Ibid., p. 18.
physical fact is logically dependent upon some mental fact. The latter proposition is one which some philosophers have probably meant to assert by "Material objects do not exist." For Moore, their assertions cannot be refuted by pointing out their ambiguity, nor can they be refuted with an abuse-of-language argument. What they really meant must be dealt with as well as what they said (i.e., how they expressed themselves). If a philosopher uses "material object" in a way such that "Human bodies are material objects" is not a necessary statement, he cannot be refuted by a claim that he is misusing language (although he is). Rather, for Moore, a refutation involves ascertaining what a philosopher's position really is and considering whether or not it is a reasonable view. White sums up Moore's method:

Inconsistencies with ordinary use mark a philosophical doctrine as incorrectly expressed, misleading, and maybe absurd; inconsistencies with the beliefs of common sense mark it as false...Finally, if a philosopher's views, when clearly understood, are found consistent with the beliefs of common sense, they are to be accepted as true.2

1 Philosophical Papers, pp. 39, 45.

2 A. R. White, op. cit., p. 34.
CHAPTER III
DEFENDING COMMON SENSE

A. The Linguistic Preliminaries. In the preceding sections I have stated that Moore believed that philosophical positions often contradict or go beyond common sense; that philosophical statements are often ambiguous; that ordinary expressions are, in a sense, not ambiguous; and that whether or not a proposition is true is independent of whether or not it is correctly expressed. These beliefs form the framework for Moore's defense of common sense. He first claims that he knows for certain a number of common sense statements (not all) and that these statements are not ambiguous. He then notes that some philosophers have held doctrines which contradict these common sense statements. He emphasizes the fact that the philosophical statements are ambiguous and is very concerned to make clear that he means to refute these statements as they are most properly understood, i.e., as contradicting common sense. Finally, he turns from linguistic matters to considerations which are intended to at least incline one to believe that the philosophical statements are false and the common sense statements true. Let us examine Moore's defense.

Moore begins with a long list of propositions, all of which, he says, "I know 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; it was, for instance, much smaller when it was born, and for some time afterwards, than it is now...¹

So the list begins. And it goes on and on and on. Next, Moore claims that "very many (I do not say all)" human beings have known propositions corresponding to those in his list; i.e., not only does Moore know that there now exists his body, but he also knows that, say, Russell, Ramsey, and Wittgenstein each knows respectively that his body now exists, that the earth has existed for many years, and so on. "Each of us" knows all these "truisms."¹

Moore acknowledges that some philosophers have used the expressions in his list to express propositions which they are not ordinarily understood to express, perhaps to express related propositions which these philosophers take to be true. "I wish, therefore, to make it quite plain that I was not using the expression I used (in my list) in any such subtle sense."² Although Moore does not give any examples, we may presume that any philosopher who uses "My body exists" to express a proposition about appearances or monads is using this expression in just such a "subtle sense." Moore acknowledges that some philosophers "are capable of disputing" his assumption that there is a meaning which is "the ordinary or popular meaning" of the statements in his list.

They seem to think that the question "Do you believe that the earth has existed for many years past?" is not a plain question such as should be met either by a plain "Yes" or "No," or by a plain "I can't make up my mind," but is the sort of question which can be properly met by: "It all depends on what you mean by 'the earth' and 'exists' and 'years.'

¹"Defence of Common Sense," Philosophical Papers, p. 34.
²Ibid., p. 36.
If you mean so and so, and so and so, and so and so, then I do; but if you mean so and so, and so and so, and so and so, or so and so, and so and so, or so and so, and so and so, and so and so, then I don't, or at least I think it is extremely doubtful." It seems to me that such a view is as profoundly mistaken as any view can be.¹

Moore does not mean to assert that all expressions have only one meaning or that there are no cases in which we should have trouble applying an ordinary expression. As noted above, "human body" is, in a certain sense, ambiguous. Moore's point is that the statement, "My body exists," is not ambiguous, perhaps not even in the sense that the term "body" is. (Although we can imagine the case of Dracula: if there were a vampire, "the living dead," unreflected by mirrors, etc., could he truthfully say, "There exists at present a living human body, which is my body"? Or, if Christ was a God-Man could he say it? before the crucifixion? after it? What if the "missing link" could speak? Could he say it?) Moore believes that each expression in his list "is the very type of an unambiguous expression, the meaning of which we all understand."² As far as I know, Moore never attempts any more precise formulation of the sense in which ordinary expressions are not ambiguous; we all understand them. If a philosopher disputes this, Moore believes that he must be confusing the question whether we understand the meaning of such an expression with the question whether we can give a correct analysis of its meaning.³ Moore's comments do not suggest that

¹"Defence of Common Sense," Philosophical Papers, pp. 36-37.
²Ibid., p. 37.
³Ibid.
philosophers who have used ordinary expressions in "subtle" senses have, 

do so facto, uttered falsehoods. Rather, Moore's comments suggest merely 

that their practice may be illegitimate and the result of confusion.

In contrast to the unambiguous statements in Moore's list, there 

is a group of expressions popular among philosophers which are "really am-

biguous," namely, "Material things are not real," "Space is not real," 

"Time is not real," and "The Self is not real." Moore acknowledges that 

some philosophers may have used these expressions to express views which 

are not incompatible with Moore's truisms and his cover-statement that each 

of us knows the truisms.

With such philosophers, if there are any, I am not, 

of course, at present concerned. But it seems to me that 

the most natural and proper usage of each of these expres-

sions is a usage in which it does express a view incompatible 

with (the cover-statement that each of us knows the truisms); 

and in the case of each of them, some philosophers have, I 

think, really used the expression in question to express such 

e view. All such philosophers have, therefore, been holding a 

view incompatible with (mine).

Thus far, Moore has been concerned primarily with making his position clear. 

The points which he makes after enunciating his truisms are linguistic, hav-

ing to do with the ambiguity or lack of ambiguity of expressions and the 

logical relations between the propositions he takes to be expressed by 

certain expressions. He wishes to make very clear that in the way that he 

is using the expressions, "My body exists" and "Material things are not real"
are incompatible, that he knows the former to be true and that at least some philosophers have asserted the latter. In all of this, we have nothing except Moore's testimony which should incline us to either of the two incompatible views. The linguistic remarks are preliminary. We have a similar state of affairs in Moore's "Proof of the External World," in which a long preliminary section is also devoted to clarifying what is at issue.¹

B. Inconsistencies. Moore proceeds to note certain inconsistencies which arise when the beliefs of common sense are denied. First, if, in fact, any philosopher has denied the statements in Moore's list (by claiming, e.g., that material objects are not real), it follows (simply from the fact that he has denied them) that he must be mistaken. "For when I speak of 'philosophers' I mean of course (as we all do) exclusively philosophers who have been human beings with human bodies that have lived upon the earth..."² If, as Moore believes, what some philosophers have meant by, say, "Material objects are not real," is incompatible with what each of us believes when he believes, "My body exists," then what the philosopher denies, in effect, is that he (his body) exists. Put to say that a philosopher has denied it is to imply that the philosopher (cum body) has existed. To say that a philosopher has denied the common-sense beliefs is, ipso facto, to contradict the philosopher.

Secondly, philosophers have often expressed views inconsistent with their philosophical views. They have betrayed this inconsistency by alluding to the existence of other philosophers and the human race, often by use of the

¹Philosophical Papers, pp. 126-144.
²Ibid., p. 38.
pronoun, "we." Moore does not find this surprising because he believes that philosophers, like everyone else, know the common sense propositions to be true.

The strange thing is that philosophers should have been able to hold sincerely, as part of their philosophical creed, propositions inconsistent with what they themselves knew to be true; and yet, so far as I can make out, this has really frequently happened.¹

What Moore thinks is strange but true, Lazerowitz called a paradox and could not accept.² It involves the consequence (assuming that knowledge entails belief) that philosophers have held contradictory beliefs. A philosopher faced with this accusation might attempt to defend himself; most likely his defense would concern his use of language, either philosophical, or ordinary, or both. Moore would have to maintain his position that at least some philosophers have indeed held common sense beliefs inconsistent with their philosophical beliefs; that the inconsistency is not merely apparent and due to the expressions used.

Finally, philosophers who deny, not that the statements that Moore claims to know are true, but that we know them to be true, e.g. philosophers who deny that we know that there are material things and/or other selves, are involved in a similar inconsistency by merely stating their thesis. This thesis is about "us," or human knowledge, and therefore implies the existence of human beings. Moore believes that these philosophers hold that there

¹Philosophical Papers, pp. 40-41.
²See Part II, Chapter IV of this paper.
certainly are human beings (that they know there are) and at the same time that no human being knows that there are other human beings. Here the philosopher in stating his thesis is not only contradicting other things which he holds; the thesis is self-contradictory. These philosophers may admit that they believe the statements in Moore's list, speaking of such beliefs as the beliefs of common sense, but deny that they know them. Yet, to say that there are beliefs of common sense is to say that many humans hold certain beliefs and this also implies that there are many humans.¹

The fact that the first two types of inconsistency exist does not have as a consequence that the philosophical view in question is not true. The third type of inconsistency involves self-contradiction in the thesis itself, with the consequence that the thesis is not true. Moore does not say why he is noting these inconsistencies; he merely says they are "specially deserving of notice."² White suggests that Moore believes that the existence of these inconsistencies (in part) makes it reasonable to hold that common sense statements are true.³ We have seen that Moore does say that no philosopher has been able to contradict common sense consistently. But, perhaps, this merely suggests that common sense beliefs are compulsively accepted, that one cannot help believing them. Does this make the belief reasonable? Moore, after noting the inconsistencies, asks, "But do I really know all the propositions (in my list) to be true? Isn't it possible that I merely believe them?" Moore does not suggest that the existence of the inconsistencies makes his belief reasonable. He says, "In answer to this

¹Philosophical Papers, pp. 42-43.
²Ibid., p. 39.
³White, op. cit., pp. 11-15.
question, I think I have nothing better to say than that it seems to me that I do know them, with certainty."¹

C. Knowing and Proving. Actually Moore does have something better to say, or at least he has points to make which may put his acceptance of common sense in better light, make it more satisfactory to a philosopher. Sentences like the above in which Moore merely insists that he knows the common sense statements to be true, may give the impression that he makes this claim for no reason at all, that it is an irrational assumption, or that his words disguise his method.

White suggests that Moore's reasons for believing common sense statements are not of the evidential sort.² White's entire account is unclear because he does not distinguish having evidence, needing evidence, and giving evidence. White says that Moore accepts the common sense beliefs because they are "ultimate." White's conception of ultimacy is either both or only the second of the following notions: (1) known immediately, i.e., without inference, (2) cannot be proved.³ White seems⁴ to believe that because common sense statements are not provable, we cannot have evidence for them, and that Moore's concern is to show that "our claims on behalf of common sense are more reasonable than any other."⁵ White never says anything which is clearly false; but his account is poor because of what he does not say. Admittedly, interpreting

¹Philosophical Papers, p. 43.
²White, op. cit., pp. 18-19.
³Ibid., pp. 15-17.
⁴I am uncertain about this.
⁵White, op. cit., p. 19.
Moore here is difficult because he changed his mind about the status of our knowledge of the common sense statements.

In 1910 Moore believed that our knowledge of some common sense statements is immediate knowledge. Knowing immediately is knowing without inference, knowing a proposition without having to know any other proposition from which it follows. "But it is important to insist that even when you do know a proposition immediately, you may also at the same time know some proposition from which it follows." Thus, Moore believes that a proposition may be known both immediately and meditately. Moore, here, is unclear about whether our knowledge of these common sense statements is only immediate or also mediate. He says they are "only known immediately," but his further comments indicate that they are also known meditately, and the "only" in "only known immediately" may be pejorative.

In 1925 ("Defence of Common Sense") Moore acknowledges that some common sense propositions are not known "directly: that is to say, I only know them because, in the past, I have known to be true other propositions which were evidence for them." An example of the sort of proposition he has in mind is the one that the earth has existed for many years before Moore was born. Moore makes the epistemic point that though he does not know exactly what the evidence is, this is no good reason for doubting that he knows the

1Such as "This is a pencil."

2Moore says "without knowing;" but this is probably carelessness—otherwise he would be contradicting his own view that a proposition can be known both meditately and immediately.

3Some Main Problems of Philosophy, p. 141. For Moore, if S knows p immediately, S need not have drawn an inference in order to know p, but nonetheless he may have inferred p from some other proposition. Moore's epistemic principles will be displayed below.

4Ibid., p. 141.
proposition. "We are all, I think, in this strange position that we do know many things, with regard to which we know further that we must have had evidence for them, and yet we do not know how we know them, i.e., we do not know what the evidence was."\(^1\) Here Moore's comments are directed only toward the more complex sorts of common sense beliefs and not to beliefs such as "My body exists."

But in 1939, Moore goes a step further, suggesting that we do have evidence for the simpler sort of common sense beliefs. If we have evidence, our knowledge is not merely immediate.

How am I to prove now that "Here's one hand, and here's another"? I do not believe I can do it. In order to do it, I should need to prove for one thing, as Descartes pointed out, that I am not now dreaming; I have conclusive evidence that I am awake; but that is a very different thing from being able to prove it. I could not tell you what all my evidence is; and I should require to do this at least, in order to give you proof.\(^2\)

Moore does believe he has evidence for "I am awake," but claims that he is not able to give his evidence. Moore rejects the view that, if he cannot prove "Here is a hand," he cannot know it, and must accept it merely as a matter of faith. "I can know things which I cannot prove."\(^3\)

---

2. Philosophical Papers, p. 143.
3. Ibid.
Finally, in his notebooks of 1941-1942 (and perhaps earlier), Moore expressly rejects the view that he knows such simple statements as "That is a dog" immediately. He admits that he does not infer them, but claims that he knows them because he knows other things; he could not know them without knowing other things. Here Moore contrasts "That is a dog" with "I've got a pain." He says that we have evidence for the former but none for the latter, or, if we do have evidence for the latter, we nonetheless know it independently of our evidence. Moore examines the case of Crusoe spotting a footprint and concluding that a man has been there. Crusoe's knowledge that a man has been there, and perhaps his knowledge that what he sees is a footprint are genuine cases of inference. "But what we have to consider is his knowledge that it is sand which is formed into that pattern; this is what I was saying to Blake was not immediate. That it's a pattern in sand, not a hallucination of a pattern in sand, not an image of a pattern in sand or a dreamt pattern in sand." Moore believes that, when he says "That's a dog," part of what he is saying is that it has another side, is of substantial thickness, and isn't empty. These are all things learnt from past experience. Therefore, his knowledge that that is a dog is not immediate, because I only know it because I have learnt by past experience that things that look like this always have a substantial thickness and an inside. If I only saw, felt, and remembered what I do at this moment, I shouldn't know that it was a dog: this knowledge is due to my having learnt by past experience how things generally behave...My

2 Ibid., p. 175.
grounds are generalizations which I've learnt by past experience; and I don't remember generalizations.¹

Here Moore has taken a full turn from his 1910 position and believes that we cannot know simple common sense statements unless we know other things.

It should be noted that Moore's epistemic principles remain the same. I should like to list those which have been mentioned.

1. S knows p immediately → S can know p without having evidence for p.
2. S knows p immediately ≠ S does not have evidence for p.
3. S knows p merely immediately → S does not have evidence for p.
4. S knows p mediately → S does have evidence for p.
5. S has evidence for p ≠ S can give the evidence for p, or say what his evidence for p is.
6. S can prove p → S can give evidence for p, or say what his evidence for p is.
7. "S cannot prove p" is compatible with "S has evidence for p."

In 1910, Moore believed that he knew "This is a pencil" either merely immediately or also mediately. Perhaps by 1939 and surely by 1942 he believed that he did not know "Here's a hand" or "That's a dog" immediately. And, as far as I can see, everything which is said in his proof of an external world is compatible with the view that we do not know "Here's a hand" immediately. He says he cannot prove it, but implies that he has evidence for it. He does not say that he could not know "Here's a hand" without the evidence; but neither does he claim the contrary. Moore's later view seems to be that he needs evidence for "Here's a hand," that he has the evidence, but that he cannot give

¹Commonplace Book, p. 176.
the evidence because he does not remember it. The evidence is (at least in part) generalizations about "things that look like this" or "how things generally behave." Note that even if Moore could remember these generalizations, he probably could not give a proof which would satisfy some philosophers, because such generalizations would assume the existence of things, i.e., external objects. What would the generalizations be generalizations of, if not statements about things? Moore suggests that he knows that he is sitting down and not standing up because he has learnt a generalization (causal) from past experience. But he asks, "How could I have learnt (this)? Surely, only if I knew on other occasions, when I had this kind of experience, that I was not standing up. And it's impossible I should ever have known this, if before knowing it I had to know on other occasions that I was standing up."¹

It was problems such as this which in 1910 led Moore to claim that common sense statements themselves are immediately known. If one needed evidence in order to know any proposition, then one would need evidence for one's evidential propositions and so on.² He believed some proposition must be known immediately, whether it be of the form "This pencil exists" or "The sense-data which I directly apprehend are a sign that it exists." He used such a sentence as "This pencil exists" in his proofs of the existence of material and external objects because he believed that they (or at least their sense-data alternatives) "are much more certain than any premise which could be used to prove that they are false." They are more certain than Hume's principles, for example. Moore acknowledged that his argument may not be very convincing

¹Commonplace Book, p. 186.
²Some Main Problems of Philosophy, p. 139ff.
but claimed that it was a good argument, the strongest possible.\textsuperscript{1} We may presume that even if Moore changed his mind about which, or whether any, propositions are immediately know, he kept his view that at least many common sense beliefs are more certain than the principles which philosophers use to show they are false.

I think a fair extension of Moore's view, in the "casual mode," is that we can just as well start off with the beliefs of common sense as with any of the solemn philosophical principles which are supposed to be unimpeachable. We can make common sense our touchstone without committing any philosophical errors. And it's the beliefs of common sense which really seem most certain anyway! Moore's linguistic remarks serve as preliminary clarification, much needed clarification considering the uniqueness of Moore's view. His epistemic principles correct mistakes of other philosophers while showing that his own view does not involve him in any philosophical errors. And it should be clear by now that Moore's acceptance of common sense is independent of his beliefs about language. It is true that Moore's epistemic principles have their counterparts in statements about how epistemic words are (or should be) used in ordinary language. And Moore often refers to what we commonly mean by words, often epistemic words. Finally, Moore relegates what some philosophers seem to have meant by their assertions that, e.g., material things are not real, to a subsidiary position in his "Defence of Common Sense," throwing against them only his claim that there is no good reason to believe them. For example, he says, "I hold...that there is no good reason to suppose...that every physical fact is logically dependent on some mental

\textsuperscript{1}Some Main Problems of Philosophy, pp. 142-3.
Is Moore's defense, then, off the mark? Or, is it, in some sense, linguistic? Does his claim that he knows for certain that there are hands depend upon his ordinary and non-philosophical use of "know." Does his claim that Matter, Time, etc., exist, really counter what any philosopher has really intended? These questions will be taken up in part two of this paper, which follows.

1Philosophical Papers, p. 45.
PART II

SOME INTERPRETATIONS OF MOORE'S DEFENSE OF COMMON SENSE;

THE NATURE OF PHILOSOPHICAL STATEMENTS
CHAPTER IV

MOORE'S PARADOX

In the first part of this paper, I have examined Moore's defense of common sense. Linguistic considerations were found to be preliminary and independent of Moore's acceptance of common sense as the touchstone of truth. Moore defends common sense and refutes traditional philosophers by denying philosophical statements which he believes contradict common sense beliefs. If the philosophical statements in question do not contradict common sense, Moore's refutation does not work. A number of Moore's critics believe that the philosophical statements do not contradict common sense. They believe that philosophical statements are not what they seem to be, that if we take them, as Moore does, to contradict common sense, a certain paradox arises.

This paradox, which Morris Lazerowitz calls "Moore's Paradox," is Moore's view that philosophers "have been able to hold sincerely, as part of their philosophical creed, propositions inconsistent with what they themselves knew to be true..." Lazerowitz claims that is "impossible" that philosophers have sincerely held propositions which they knew to be false. Characteristically, Moore answers, simply, that there is no reason to suppose that this is impossible.

Norman Malcolm finds the philosophical statements themselves paradoxical, in that they go against common sense, "a philosophically unsophisticated


2Ibid., p. 380.

3"Reply to His Critics," Paul A. Schilpp, op. cit., p. 675.
person would find them shocking." Moore would agree; but he would add that philosophers also should find them shocking, because, according to Moore, everybody knows the common sense view of the world to be true. While Moore never used the term "paradox" in this connection, his approach, as I have noted, suggests an extensive conflict between philosophy and common sense. According to Moore, at least some philosophers have definitely held views which contradict common sense. Some philosophers have held, "material objects do not exist" in the sense which these words would normally be taken to have. In this sense, the philosophical statement is empirical and incompatible with the statement, "There are pencils."

Faced with Moore's paradox, Moore's critics have concluded that Moore was mistaken in believing that the philosophical statements in question are empirical. By examining philosophical statements in light of their juxtaposition to the beliefs of common sense by Moore, these critics have developed not only interpretations of Moore's method, but also accounts of the nature of philosophical statements in general. Malcolm claims that philosophical statements convey information about ordinary usage, which usage is ipso facto correct. He believes that Moore, in giving correct accounts of ordinary usage, has successfully refuted philosophical statements which go against ordinary language. On the other hand, Morris Lazerowitz, who also believes that philosophical statements are not empirical, argues that they are neither necessary statements nor accounts of ordinary language. He believes that they are, instead, disguised proposals to change language and that Moore's refutations are not refutations, but rather counter-proposals to keep the linguistic

---

status quo. Malcolm argues: philosophical statements are not empirical, they are mistaken accounts of ordinary language, therefore they are false. Lazerovitz argues: philosophical statements are not empirical, they are not necessary statements, they are not accounts of ordinary language; rather, they are linguistic proposals, and, as such, irrefutable (although counter-proposals may be in order). A third position, which Malcolm sometimes takes, is that philosophical statements are linguistic proposals and refutable by means of an argument concerning polar terms. Alice Ambrose suggests another variation on the basis of an investigation of category words. In all cases, the interpretation of Moore corresponds with the account of philosophical statements in general. If traditional philosophers are making linguistic proposals, Moore is making counter-proposals. If traditional philosophical conclusions are verbal in import, so are Moore's.

In the following chapters, I will examine, in further detail, these views of Moore's critics. Ultimately, my aim is to clarify the relationship between Moore's defense of common sense and the philosophical views which seem to go against common sense. To accomplish this aim, an examination of the nature of philosophical statements, along the lines of the one undertaken by Moore's critics, is helpful. I will ask, with the critics, whether philosophical statements are empirical, or necessary statements, linguistically informative, or verbal in import.

In what follows, the phrase, "philosophical statement," will often be used. By "philosophical statements," I do not mean all of the statements which appear in books of philosophy, but only those very striking ones with which philosophers often express their conclusions. Very often these

1 See Norman Malcolm, "Moore and Ordinary Language," Paul A. Schilpp, ed. cit., pp. 345-6, where a fairly extensive list is given.
statements are generalizations such as:

All empirical statements are hypotheses.
All words are vague.
A priori statements are rules of grammar.

Sometimes they say of things of a certain class that they are really of another:

Material objects are really ideas.
Material objects are really events.
Philosophical statements are really linguistic proposals.

Often they assert that things of a certain kind do not exist:

Material objects do not exist.
There are no temporal events.

Or, they deny that something is real:

Time is unreal.
Space is not real.

Sometimes they assert that a certain class of things does exist:

There are propositions.
Numbers exist.

Other statements concern perception or knowledge:

No material thing exists unperceived.
We do not know for certain that there are material objects.

Finally, many involve the concept of appearance or illusion:

Material objects are but appearances.
Time is merely an appearance.
All is illusion.
And there are many others:

The way up and the way down are the same.

Things are identical if they are indiscernible.

Nothing changes.

All is One.

Truth is the correspondence of thought to fact.

All of these are philosophical statements; although it should be noted at the outset that Moore was primarily concerned with those which deny the existence or reality of things of a certain class and those which deny that we know that things of a certain kind exist or are real. My first concern will be with the question whether or not philosophical statements are empirical.
A. Evidence and Verification. One of the considerations which Moore's critics offer to show that philosophical statements are not empirical is the fact, according to them, that philosophers do not offer empirical evidence for their conclusions, or, even stronger, that no empirical evidence can be given. Ambrose points out that philosophical investigations are not empirical, by which she means that philosophers have no laboratories, cannot claim to closer observation than other people, and do not use experiments in their demonstrations.

The philosopher is often pictured as an armchair scientist, who, without benefit of experiment, makes astounding claims about the world. While it is true that the philosopher may remain in his armchair, it simply is not true that he does not appeal to empirical facts. Sometimes the empirical facts are of a fairly sophisticated kind, and in these cases the philosopher depends upon the scientist for his information. A moralist may appeal to anthropological and psychological facts; a political philosopher to historical and sociological facts; an epistemologist to physiological and neurological facts as well as discoveries in physics (e.g., that light...
takes time to travel); and a metaphysician may appeal to scientific facts and theories concerning matter, evolution and the brain. Philosophers also appeal to empirical facts which are common knowledge, e.g., that sometimes people have hallucinations, that people are sometimes misled by perceptual illusions, that dreams sometimes seem real. Finally philosophers often appeal to autobiographical facts.

While it is true that the philosopher does not carry on investigations in the way that the scientist does, he does appeal both to scientific and commonly known empirical facts. Ralph Blake notes that if metaphysical statements are those for which we could have no possible evidence, then even Spinoza’s doctrine of a simple substance is not metaphysical, for he does give evidence, although this evidence may have hardly any weight.\(^1\) Just what part empirical facts play in a philosophical argument, how much weight they have, and so on, are matters of great importance and will be taken up below. But the first point of note is that philosophers do offer empirical evidence.

Why then do philosophical disputes continue through the ages? Some of Moore’s critics claim that these disputes are unresolvable because philosophical statements are unverifiable and that this fact is another reason to conclude that they are not empirical. Lazerowitz seems to believe that the fact that philosophical disputes remain unresolved despite the counter-moves of the type made by Diogenes and Moore is reason enough to believe that philosophical statements are not empirical. Further, he claims that "no known facts count against" philosophical statements, "no imaginable

\(^1\)Ralph M. Blake, "Can Speculative Philosophy Be Defended?" Philosophical Review, LIII (1944), p. 127ff.
or describable facts...Nothing we can picture to ourselves would falsify" the philosopher's view. His proposition is not one which "could imaginably be false, i.e., an empirical proposition." Lazerowitz seems to be making the point that philosophical statements are not falsifiable, and concluding, from this fact, that philosophical statements are not empirical. He seems to believe that, if a proposition is not falsifiable (or verifiable), then it is not empirical. This view is similar to the view of Ayer and others that, if a proposition is not verifiable, then it is meaningless. Chisholm points out, in answer to Lazerowitz, that "no one has yet succeeded in formulating a criterion of verifiability which will allow us to say both that the statements of science and common sense are verifiable and that those of philosophy or metaphysics are not verifiable." If no criterion of verifiability is available, then verifiability cannot be used as a criterion for deciding whether or not a statement is empirical.

Still, Lazerowitz may be making the more limited point that while empirical generalizations such as "All ravens are black" can be falsified by empirical statements such as "Here is a white raven," there is no way of similarly falsifying a philosophical generalization. Lazerowitz may mean that one cannot falsify "There are no material objects," by producing a hand as Moore thinks he can. Lazerowitz must believe that the statement, "There are no material objects," is not to be taken in the sense in which it is incompatible

1 Lazerowitz, "Moore's Paradox," Paul A. Schilpp. op. cit., p. 381-2. See also Alice Ambrose, Essays in Analysis, p. 133.


with "There are hands." It is true that, for the most part, the evidence which a philosopher offers is not in the form of instances of which his generalizations are generalizations. A philosopher does not go from place to place failing to find a material object here and there and then conclude with a generalization of his findings: there are none. In spite of this, if in fact the philosopher means his conclusion to be incompatible with common sense beliefs, then his conclusion can be falsified. But the fact that the philosopher does not proceed in the above manner may be a good reason for suspecting that his conclusion is not falsifiable in the way that Moore thinks it is.

Besides the term "falsify," Lazerowitz also uses the terms "count against" and "settle." Lazerowitz finds it self-contradictory to say that philosophical disputes with regard to matters of fact cannot be settled empirically.¹ "Count against" is a term which could have various specific formulations. We found that falsification is too strong a sense of "count against." Is there some other sense in which empirical facts, other than the sort which Moore presents, would count against philosophical theories? Would the fact that, due to medical advance, men became immortal, count against philosophical theories of an after-life or existential philosophies concerning death? Does the fact that certain philosophers have appealed to false facts, e.g., that people with jaundice see yellow, count against their theories? What if, henceforth, men cease to suffer hallucination or illusion and fail to dream? If, after thorough investigation, the anthropologist concluded that indeed there are certain moral codes present in all cultures, would this count against an ethical theory? It is not easy to answer these questions. Perhaps in most cases these facts could not be said to disprove a

philosophical theory, but they would tend to influence philosophical theorizing.

The problem is one of clarifying the evidential relationship between common sense and scientific statements and their evidence on the one hand, and philosophical statements and their evidence on the other. Perhaps, it is even misleading to speak of "evidence" for and against philosophical theories. The facts which a philosopher cites do not seem to have the same relationship to his conclusion as the facts which a scientist cites have to his conclusion, and we might wish to reserve "evidence" for scientific contexts. But philosophers are notorious for ruling out kinds of knowledge and types of proof which do not conform to a certain ideal. For example, many philosophers have ruled out knowledge for which they could find no deductive or mathematical-like argument. In this century, some philosophers have wished to rule out philosophical statements which could not be verified in the way that scientific statements are verified. We might speculate that the ways people come to philosophical, common sense, scientific and mathematical (or logical) knowledge, that is the kinds of evidence or reasons offered and the methods of argument, are all different from one another. One should not expect an argument for a scientific thesis to be deductive; an argument for a common-sense belief to be deductive or simply and strictly inductive; or an argument for a philosophical thesis to always conform to one of the other established methods of argument. For now, I will leave the question, of just how philosophical arguments work, open and attempt a partial answer in the conclusion of this paper.

The other term, "settle," is also vague, in this context. Lazaro-witz believes that philosophical disputes cannot be settled empirically.
Moore believes that he has refuted the view that there are no external objects. But, in fact, few philosophers feel that the issue is thereby settled. On the scientific side, though, it would be perhaps naive to claim that it is ever settled, once and for all, whether or not a scientific theory is true. New evidence may falsify the theory. One after another, scientific theories have been either rejected or restricted. Faced with certain facts which might be said to count against the phlogiston theory, some scientists who held the theory postulated that phlogiston was a very peculiar fluid in that it had negative volume—before they eventually gave up the theory. Newtonian physics, which was at one time generally accepted, is now said to work only if the quantities in question are of a certain order; strictly speaking, the laws of Newtonian physics, as originally stated, are false. How facts count against higher order scientific theories and in what sense scientific disputes are ever really settled are complicated issues which should be taken up if we are to distinguish clearly philosophical from scientific arguments and conclusions. In philosophy, there is no similar history of theories being rejected and restricted because of new empirical evidence. Empirical facts do not bring about a consensus in philosophical thought, in the way that such facts do bring about consensus in scientific thought. These considerations may incline us to believe that philosophical statements are not empirical, or are unlike other empirical statements. But Moore's position that at least sometimes philosophers have meant their conclusions to be empirical does not fly in the face of these observations about philosophical history.

A further view, which is not so much argued as implicit in the arguments that philosophical statements are not empirical, is the view that
only verifiable or falsifiable, or scientific, or common sense statements are factual. Malcolm says that the phenomenalist agrees with the common man about the facts of the situation ordinarily described as "seeing a tree." Ambrose claims that philosophical statements are not factual because philosophical statements are not empirical. As Chisholm points out, this is a criteriological issue which leads to an impasse. If one philosopher says, for example, that unverifiable statements are not factual and another philosopher disagrees, they are disagreeing about the criterion of factualness. Attention to specific cases will not resolve the disagreement because they will disagree about specific cases also. Kore will be said about criteriological issues in the last chapter of this paper.

B. Criteriology. The arguments considered heretofore revolve around the notions of verification and evidence. Another argument that philosophical statements are not empirical is perhaps suggested by Moore's account of metaphysics as an inventory of the most important kinds of things in the universe. Ambrose argues that the question whether external objects exist is not a question of inventory, not an empirical question, as Moore thinks it is. Her intention is to show "that Moore's proof (of an external world) is not analogous to an ordinary empirical argument." It might seem, she says,


2Alice Ambrose, Essays in Analysis, p. 142.


4See Chapter I.

that "external object" is a general name, the most general of the series, "dime," "coin," "external object." But 1) one cannot "point out an external object" and thereby settle any question about whether there is a thing of that kind, 2) one could not teach or learn "external object" ostensively as one can teach "dime" and "coin" by pointing out the object, calling attention to its features and testing the pupil by having him bring the object in question; therefore, "external object" is not a general name for some kind of thing, designating features distinguishing that kind of thing from some other kind.\(^1\) Moore answers:

Now if "point out" is taken literally to mean "point with the finger at," this may be true. But in a sense, which is, it seems to me, very relevant to our problem, it is not true. One can point out to a person an object which is not an external object by the method...for finding...a "sense-datum."\(^2\)

Or, less controversially, by getting him to have an after-image. An after-image would also be the sort of object which is not spatial and not material. Thus, an argument from ostensive availability will not work to show that the terms of philosophical statements are not general names.

But Ambrose has another argument to this effect. She is arguing that category words are not generic terms, not even the most general of generic terms, as, for example, Wisdom believes: "the most general genus words, i.e., category words, are peculiar and are not related to their species

---

\(^1\)Alice Ambrose, "Moore's 'Proof of an External World,'" Paul A. Schilpp, \textit{op. cit.}, pp. 405-6.

words just like other genus words are related to their species words.\(^1\) In the argument now under consideration, Ambrose makes no reference to the philosophically interesting phrases, "external object," "material object," "space," "time," "self," but is concerned rather with what might be called the more abstract terms, "individual," "property," "relation," "proposition," and "number." She argues that these terms are not generic because certain sentences involving them have their truth range and significance range the same. Ambrose's position is illustrated in the following way. Take a sample subject-predicate sentence which may be said to inform us that a certain object belongs to a certain genus: "x is a rickshaw." When the term substituted for x refers to a rickshaw, the statement is true; when it refers to chairs, airplanes, and other "real objects" the sentence is false. Other substitutions for x, such as "2," "monarchy," "walking," "red," and "later," result in nonsense. Substitutions for x, which refer to delusive rickshaw appearances, make the sentence false.

"x is a rickshaw"

| True for: rickshaws | reality range |
| False for: other real objects | reality- | significance |
| True for: rickshaws | reality- | range |
| False for: delusive rickshaw appearances | appearance | range |

---

"2," "monarchy," "walking," etc. | nonsense |

This is contrasted with sentences involving category words. The sentence, "x is a thing," has its truth and significance ranges the same, if we consider only real things, "real" in the sense in which it is distinguished from "appearance."

Ambrose argues that since, within the reality range of values for x in "x is a thing," there are only values which make the proposition true and none which make it both significant and false, that is, since from choosing within this range we could not fail to establish the truth, "thing" is not a generic word like "rickshaw," and it is at least "doubtful that we should call" the statement, "x is a thing," empirical, as we would call "x is a rickshaw" empirical.

If Ambrose is using "thing" in the sense in which only material objects or external objects may be said to be things, then her argument is directly relevant to Moore's defense of common sense and proof of an external world. But she often seems to be using "thing" in the sense in which it is synonymous with the philosophical senses of "individual," "entity," and "object." In this sense, after-images, sense-data, platonic entities (numbers, propositions, platonic forms), and God might qualify as things. At one point, Ambrose refers to Bradley's claim that it is self-contradictory to say that things, properties and relations exist; if she means "thing" in the second sense discussed, Bradley might answer that he did not say this of things, for he did hold that one thing does exist, namely the Absolute.

---

1Alice Ambrose, *Essays in Analysis*, p. 240.
2Examples are discussed below.
3Ibid., p. 233.
For the moment let us consider "thing" only in the sense in which it is synonymous with "material object" or "external object." Ambrose may believe she is meeting Moore's objection to her first argument (discussed above) by distinguishing between a reality range and a reality-appearance range. She admits that "'thing' functions like a generic name to set off things from appearances."¹ But, for her, "the function of a generic name is...to distinguish between different kinds of things,"² and while she admits that "thing" functions like a generic term in setting off things from appearances, still she seems not to want to admit it as a generic term because it does not "distinguish among kinds of things."³ If Ambrose is using "thing" consistently as synonymous with "material object," what she says, in effect, is that a term is a generic term only if it distinguishes among kinds of material objects. "Material object" itself, as well as "shadow," "mirage," "after-image," "dream image," and "hallucinatory image," are not generic terms; and the sentences, "That is a material object," "That is a shadow," etc. are not empirical. But this is plainly false. "That is a shadow" is certainly not a priori; "That is a material object" is clearly contingent for what is referred to may be a hallucinatory image. Ambrose may find some advantage in reserving "generic term" only for those terms which distinguish between kinds of material objects, but this predilection does not seem to allow her to infer that "x is a thing" (where "thing" sets things off from appearances) is not empirical. On the contrary, what she says is compatible with Moore's view that it is empirical.

¹Alice Ambrose, Essays in Analysis, p. 240.
²Ibid., p. 239.
³Ibid., p. 240.
The other sense of "thing," in which it is synonymous with "individual," "entity," and "object," is one in which it is roughly of the same grade of abstraction as "proposition," "property," "relation," and "number." Ambrose calls all of these "category words." ¹ Moore believes that there are, in the Universe, propositions, but he is not concerned to show that this is an empirical matter. Only the questions of the existence of material objects, space, time, and selves are directly relevant to his defense of common sense. And, only if Ambrose can show that those questions are not empirical, can she maintain that Moore's proof of the external world is not valid or is not what it seems to be. Still, her discussion of the more abstract category words is important for an understanding of the nature of philosophical statements in general, for some philosophical disputes have involved these terms.

Wittgenstein claimed that "object," "complex," "fact," "function," and "number" are "formal concepts" represented by variables and that the propositions expressed by "There are objects," "There are numbers," etc. are nonsensical. ² Ambrose does not agree with Wittgenstein on this last point:

...it is not intended that translatability into the notation of logic is to be taken as a test of the sense or nonsense of a corresponding English expression, but rather that peculiarities which show up in the logical notation highlight peculiarities of English... ³

¹ There may be some question as to whether these are all category words; but this question is not directly relevant here. What is relevant is whether or not they are generic terms.


³ Alice Ambrose, Essays in Analysis, p. 243.
What happens when one tries to translate "There are individuals... into logical notation is an indication of the difference between... category concepts and generic concepts.\(^1\)

"There are individuals" becomes \(\exists \lambda (\lambda = \lambda)\), or in some way, involves this tautology.\(^2\) Similar tautologies can be constructed for "There are qualities," and "There are numbers:" \(\exists f (\exists < f x \lor f y)\) and \(\exists n (n \geq 1)\).\(^3\) The fact that tautologies result from attempts to express these statements in logical notation may lead one to Quine's position that our logical notation may be taken to express or presuppose an ontological commitment. Ambrose finds Quine's position puzzling.

What is puzzling is not merely the divergence of opinion, between him and Wittgenstein, over whether the phrase "existence of individuals" makes sense, but that he makes no attempt to represent an ontological presupposition in logical notation.\(^4\)

Quine probably realizes that he cannot represent an ontological presupposition in logical notation. His view is that one is committed to an ontological position by the kinds of variables one quantifies over; thus, any expression in logical notation expresses an ontological presupposition, presupposed by a decision to use certain variables. The presupposition cannot

---

\(^1\) Alice Ambrose, *Essays in Analysis*, p. 244.

\(^2\) Ibid., p. 245.


\(^4\) Ibid., p. 245.
be represented by a sentence of logical notation because any such sentence would presuppose an ontological commitment.¹ Perhaps the difference between Quine and Ambrose is that this fact does not bother Quine but it does bother Ambrose.

What bothers Ambrose is not so much the non-translatability into logical notation, but the peculiarity in English that this non-translatability is supposed to highlight. This peculiarity is the identity of the truth and significance ranges of "x is a thing" (here "thing" = "entity"), "x is a quality," "x is a number," etc. The claim that this identity holds depends on the claim that there are no values for x which make these sentences false. And, finally, this claim depends on the claim that "Monarchy is a thing," "2 is a thing," "This (house) is a property," "Red is a relation," etc. are nonsensical, not false.

Whenever we cross categories or generic types in sentences of the type under consideration the result is a sentence which rings nonsensical, perhaps more so in direct proportion to the distance, so to speak, of the one category or generic type from the other. Sentences ring most nonsensical when we cross categories and less nonsensical when we cross generic types which are closely related. We might construct a spectrum of nonsense: "This (dog) is a cow," "Rover is a stone," "Rover is an artefact," "Rover is an after-image," "Rover is a number," "Rover is a color," "Rover is a size," "Rover is a capability," "Rover is a distance," "Rover is better than democracy," "Rover is a matriarchy," "Rover is a revolution."² We may be tempted


²Rover, need I say, is a dog.
to say that the sentences on the lower end of the scale are false and not nonsense. "Rover is a cow" is the most likely candidate for a false (significant) sentence. Other candidates are: "This (plant) is an animal," "That (natural stone formation) is an artefact." Examples do not come easily, but the point is that some sentences which may be nonsensical in one situation may not in another. A philosopher may find precedent here for claiming that his assertions that Rover is really an event, or an idea, or a property (of the Absolute), or that numbers are entities, are not nonsensical, at least not in the context of philosophical discussion.

Philosophers seem to think that it is a real question whether or not certain items belong to certain kinds in cases in which we would ordinarily think there is no question at all. Philosophers have disagreed not as to whether or not there are rickshaws, but, as Ambrose notes, as to whether or not: "There are rickshaws" implies "There are things."¹ Philosophers may very well agree with one another about the existence of a certain item, yet disagree as to which type under which to categorize it; they may include the same items on their inventory slip, but list the items under different headings. One philosopher may list all rickshaws under the heading, "appearances," and leave empty the space under the heading, "external objects." One philosopher may include all numbers under the heading, "entities," along with chairs, elephants, and propositions. Another may have a separate heading for numbers. Ambrose says that it is nonsense to say of a particular number that it is a thing, or entity.² But this does not seem obviously true. Compare:

¹Alice Ambrose, Essays in Analysis, p. 235.
²Ibid., p. 256.
2 is a thing.
Rover is a thing.
The Empire State Building is a thing.
My lover is a thing.

*Essays in Analysis* is a thing.

All of these sentences sound rather strange, perhaps because we hardly ever have occasion to use them.

In spite of these considerations, Ambrose's thesis seems generally correct as regards terms to which the reality-appearance distinction does not apply. Sentences of the forms, "x is a proposition," "x is a number," "x is a property," and "x is a relation" do have their truth and significance ranges the same. Substitutions for x, which fail to make these sentences true, would seem, in any situation, to result in nonsense. And this may be good reason to suppose that "proposition," "number," "property," and "relation" are not generic terms and that whether or not propositions, numbers, properties, or relations exist is not an empirical matter. "Color," "size," and perhaps other terms might be added to the list (although, apparently, Ambrose thinks that "color" is a generic term1).

The arguments against the view that philosophical statements are empirical, considered in this chapter, may persuade us that philosophers' methods and arguments are very unlike scientists' and that some philosophical terms are not generic terms. It would seem safe to conclude that at least some philosophical statements are not empirical. But Moore's modest claim that some philosophers have used those statements, which seem to go against common sense,

---

1Alice Ambrose, *Essays in Analysis*, p. 238.
in senses in which they are empirical has not met serious challenge. Am-
brose's attempt to show that categories are not generic terms does seem
to work with regard to some philosophical terms but not with regard to those
terms which are involved in Moore's defense of common sense and proof of an
external world. Yet, Moore's view would be seriously challenged, perhaps,
if the philosophers who asserted the statements which seem to go against
common sense could hold consistently the view that their statements are
necessary statements and not empirical. This possibility will be examined in
the next chapter.
CHAPTER VI
ARE PHILOSOPHICAL STATEMENTS NECESSARY STATEMENTS?

Some philosophers, especially Bradley, have given the impression that their statements are to be taken as statements of logical necessity. Many of Bradley’s arguments are to the effect that certain ordinary propositions are self-contradictory. Thus, when Bradley concludes that time is unreal, Lazerowitz takes this to mean that the concept of time is self-contradictory, or, in the concrete, that it is logically impossible for there to be temporal events.¹ This would be a logically necessary statement.

In the last chapter, I have noted that often philosophers refer to empirical evidence to support their conclusions. It is also true that many philosophers examine concepts and words in arguing for their conclusions. Zeno, Bradley and McTaggart are examples of philosophers who are primarily concerned with the examination of words and concepts. Roughly, logically necessary statements are those whose truth-value depends solely upon the meanings of the concepts or words in the statements. The fact that philosophers very often concern themselves with the meanings of concepts or words in arguing for their conclusions is evidence, although certainly not proof, that their conclusions are logically necessary statements.

If Bradley’s assertion that, e.g., time is unreal, is a logically necessary statement, then, at least sometimes, the philosophical statements which seem to contradict common sense are not empirical. Morris Lazerowitz argues that this and similar statements cannot be necessary statements. He says that

...understanding a sentence of the form "x cannot..." in which "cannot" has the meaning of logical impossibly, is inconsistent with knowing what it would be like for there to be states of affairs described by "x does..."\(^1\)

This principle, as stated, appears false, for it seems to me that we can understand "Red cannot be a color," (and of course we know that red is a color) and we can understand "It is logically impossible that there are centaurs" (and we know what it would be like for there to be centaurs).

Perhaps what Lazerowitz means is that the proposition itself, expressed by "x cannot..." is inconsistent with the proposition that we know what it would be like for there to be states of affairs described by "x does..." That a square cannot be round is incompatible with knowing what it would be like for there to be round squares. Similarly, "It is logically impossible that there are temporal events," is inconsistent with the fact that we do know what it would be like for there to be temporal events. And we do know this. If one counters that we know only what it would be like for there to be apparent temporal events, or appearances of temporal events, one is caught in a similar inconsistency. For, as Lazerowitz points out, "There appears to be \(\phi\)" implies that it is logically possible that there is a \(\phi\).\(^2\) "There appears to be \(\phi\)," and "it is logically necessary that there are no \(\phi\)’s," are incompatible propositions. And Bradley seems to have held both that time is an appearance and that it is logically necessary that time does not exist.

Even if Bradley's statements are meant as logically necessary statements, they can be refuted with empirical statements. If indeed it is an


empirical fact that there are temporal events, then it is false that it is logically necessary that there are no temporal events. If the philosophical statements which contradict common sense are to be taken as expressing alleged necessary truths, this poses no threat to Moore's defense of common sense. If, on the other hand, the question whether or not there are temporal events simply cannot be settled empirically, then Moore's defense of common sense is threatened. But I do not believe that anyone has suggested that this is the case.

Ambrose's argument, that categories are not generic terms, considered in the last chapter, may lead to the view that a number of philosophical statements are necessary statements. She suggests that, at least on one level, Bradley's statements are meant to express necessary truths. And, she believes, if a philosopher, like Moore, justifies his view that there are things with a premise such as "A house is a thing," then this latter statement is a necessary statement. And, she seems to believe that the same would be true of "Red is a quality," and "North of is a relation," if these statements were used to support the views that there are qualities and that there are relations.

If philosophical disputes can be envisaged, at least in part, as disputes about which headings under which to list certain items, as was suggested in the last chapter, and if some of the headings are not generic terms,

---

1 Eventually, she argues that since Bradley's statements do not reflect current usage, they are not necessary statements, but devices for altering language. This argument will be taken up in the following chapters.

2 Alice Ambrose, Essays in Analysis, p. 252.

3 Ibid., p. 255.
then it would seem that some of these disputes are about analytic matters. The philosopher who claims that what seem to be physical objects are really events, ideas or properties (of the Absolute), or that numbers are entities, may be making assertions which are not nonsensical statements but rather necessary statements. Or at least the philosopher would take them to be necessary statements. However, the view that, for example, Bradley believed that it is necessarily true that there are no temporal events, flies in the face of Moore's paradox. How could philosophers believe that statements which contradict their common sense beliefs are necessarily true? Faced with Moore's paradox, some philosophers have argued that statements which may seem to be necessary either have linguistic counterparts or are really linguistic. These views will now be presented.
A. Verbal in Import. The views that philosophical statements are not empirical and that they are or seem to be necessary statements lead to the view that they are verbal in import. This view, in its entirety is somewhat complex. I will first present the view and then criticize it.

Ambrose argues that "in understanding a sentence for a necessary proposition and knowing what it expresses is necessarily true, what one knows is a verbal fact." She elaborates with the following examples.

p: "Material bodies are extended."
q: "There are no white crows."

In knowing p, one knows that "unextended material bodies" has no application. In knowing q, one knows that "white crows" has no application. These are non-verbal facts. Thus far, the situation is the same for both sentences. But,

in knowing that the one sentence expresses something contingently true, one knows the verbal fact that "white crows" has in our language a descriptive use and the non-verbal fact that it applies to nothing; while in knowing that the other expresses something necessarily true, one knows that "unextended material bodies" has no descriptive use and one need know no non-verbal fact to know that what the sentence expresses is true.1

1Alice Ambrose, Essays in Analysis, pp. 153-4.
Ambrose's thesis may be criticized on three levels. First, her thesis depends on her view: a) that a phrase has no application is a non-verbal fact, and b) that a phrase has (or does not have) a descriptive use is a verbal fact. But this is misleading; neither of these sorts of fact has only verbal constituents, such as a grammatical fact, or the fact that two words, or phrases, are synonymous. Let us call a fact which has only verbal constituents a solely verbal fact. The fact that a phrase applies to a (non-verbal) entity has as one of its constituents a non-verbal entity. Let us call a fact which includes both verbal and non-verbal constituents a partially verbal fact. The fact that a phrase does not have application, the sort of fact which "a" above mentions, is not a partially verbal fact because it does not have any non-verbal constituents. Should we call it a solely verbal fact? For our purposes, it would be best to call a fact, whose negative is a partially verbal fact, a negative partially verbal fact. The fact that a phrase has a descriptive use, the sort of fact mentioned in "b," is either

1) the fact that there are no criteria for the application of the phrase, or
2) the fact that there could be entities of the sort to which the phrase refers. Both of these sorts of fact include non-verbal constituents. The first sort makes oblique reference to the people who have or lack criteria for applying the phrase. The second sort of fact includes, as constituents, the entities which it says could exist. Thus, the fact that a phrase has a descriptive use is also a partially verbal fact.

Secondly, Ambrose's use of the phrase "descriptive use" may make her vulnerable to a charge of circularity or disguised triviality. Chisholm points

Here I am presupposing my discussion of "descriptive use," which follows.
out that, while Ambrose's argument depends upon the distinction between "descriptive use" and "application," she has provided no definition or explication of "descriptive use."

If, for example, the term "descriptive use" were defined by making use of necessity or contingency (e.g., "A phrase may be said to have a descriptive use if and only if there could be something to which it would apply"), Miss Ambrose's argument would hardly be conclusive. ¹

If this is what Ambrose means by "descriptive use," then her principle would be that in knowing, for example, that there are no round squares, one knows that it is not the case that there could be round squares, which is trivially true and cannot support the view that necessary statements are verbal in import.

Let us make some attempt to clarify what is meant by "descriptive use." First, the term "descriptive" in "descriptive use" does not make reference to the type of adjectives and nouns involved. It does not imply that they are observation or sensation terms.² A phrase which has a descriptive use is simply a phrase which has the form of a descriptive phrase ("a such and such" or "the such and such"), which phrase "functions descriptively." A phrase functions descriptively if understanding it entails knowing what it would be like for there to be something (or some situation) referred to by the phrase.³

If a phrase functions descriptively it has a descriptive use. Thus, "the present King of France," has a descriptive use since we know what it would be like for there to be a present King of France even though the phrase does not refer.

²Alice Ambrose, Essays in Analysis, p. 250. Ambrose says that "prime between 10 and 15" has a descriptive use.
But "a round square" has no descriptive use since we do not know what it would be like for there to be a round square. A different way of putting this is that there are no criteria for the application of "round squares."

One might object that we do know what it would be like for there to be a round square, or alternatively, that we do have criteria for application of the phrase. A round square would have no corners, four angles, etc.

Let me summarize. There are three views as to what it is for a phrase to have a descriptive use.

1. A phrase has a descriptive use—Understanding the phrase entails knowing what it would be like for there to be something referred to by the phrase. (Lazerowitz's view.)

2. A phrase has a descriptive use—There could be something to which it would apply. (Chisholm's suggestion.)

3. A phrase has a descriptive use—There are criteria for its application.

According to 2,

"Round squares" has no descriptive use—it is not the case that there could be round squares.

Then, Ambrose's principle reads:

To know that there are no round squares is necessarily true = to know that it is not the case that there could be round squares, which is trivially true.

According to 1 and 3, Ambrose's principle reads:

To know that there are no round squares is necessarily true = to know that there are no criteria for the application of "round squares."
But there are criteria (no corners, four angles, etc.). The criteria are self-contradictory, but then this just takes us back into the circle. To say that the criteria are self-contradictory is to say that there could be no round squares.

Finally, Ambrose's principle itself seems not to be true. Her principle would allow:

1. To know that "There are no round squares" expresses a necessary truth= to know that "round squares" has no descriptive use.

Let "that 'There are no round squares' expresses a necessary truth"= $\alpha$ Let "that 'round squares' has no descriptive use"= $\beta$. Then, a consequence of 1 is:

2. $\exists s$ know $\alpha \equiv s$ knows $\beta$

But there is a counter-example to 2.

a. (Assume) $s$ knows $\alpha$

b. $s$ knows $\beta \rightarrow s$ believes $\beta$

c. $\neg (s$ believes $\beta)$ (This is the counter-example. $s$ does not believe either that words have or do not have a descriptive use; $s$ is not a philosopher.)

d. $\neg (s$ believes $\beta) \rightarrow \neg (s$ knows $\beta)$ (from b.)

$\therefore \neg (s$ knows $\beta)$

$\therefore (s$ knows $\alpha) \cdot \neg (s$ knows $\beta)$

Ambrose's principle does not work for someone who has no view as to whether or not any phrase has a descriptive use.

In this section I have criticized Ambrose's view that philosophical statements, at least those which are necessary statements, are verbal in
import. The corresponding view that Moore's refutations are also verbal in import is as strong or as weak as Ambrose's view with regard to philosophical statements in general. I believe I have shown that this view is mistaken.

B. Do Philosophical Statements Inform Us About Ordinary Language?

Malcolm holds a view similar to Ambrose's. While Malcolm does not have a precise argument to this effect, in general he seems to believe that philosophical statements inform us as to the correct use of language. He says:

Russell was saying that it's really a more correct way of speaking to say that you see a part of your brain, than to say that you see a postman.2

The philosopher who says that we never know material thing statements for certain regards that form of speech ("I know for certain") improper...in just the same way that the sentence, "I see something which is totally invisible," is improper.3

The reason "I see something which is totally invisible," is improper is that it is self-contradictory. Malcolm believes that the philosopher is claiming that certain ordinary expressions are self-contradictory. He interprets Moore's refutations to be simply statements to the effect that those expressions are correct language.4

1. Alice Ambrose, Essays in Analysis, p. 255.
3. Ibid., p. 353.
4. Ibid., p. 350.
it are disguised linguistic statements.¹ Malcolm believes that Moore (as Malcolm interprets him) is correct, that an ordinary expression cannot be self-contradictory. By an "ordinary expression," Malcolm means "an expression which is ordinarily used to describe a certain sort of situation."² He believes that "a self-contradictory expression would never be used to describe any sort of situation."³ For Malcolm, the point of a Moore-like refutation, showing that an expression does have an ordinary use, is to prove 1) that the expression is not self-contradictory and 2) that therefore, the only ground for saying it is false must be empirical evidence. But 3) the philosopher offers no empirical evidence. Thus, 4) the expression, as ordinarily used, is true.⁴

I have shown that philosophers do offer empirical evidence. Also, it simply does not follow that if indeed the philosopher is not saying that the ordinary expression is self-contradictory, that his only ground for saying it is false must be empirical evidence. His grounds for saying it is false may be a combination of purported necessary truths and empirical evidence.

Another reason for rejecting Malcolm's position is that it is patently false or at least implausible. If Malcolm's position is that the philosopher is "really trying to tell us how people ordinarily use words," we may

---


² ibid., p. 358.

³ ibid., p. 359.

⁴ ibid., pp. 359-60.
answer, with Chisholm, that "obviously this is not the intention of the statement." Lazerowitz sees Malcolm's sort of interpretation as a special form of Moore's paradox, namely that philosophers have been able to hold sincerely, as part of their philosophical creed, views according to which expressions of various sorts, which they know are used in ordinary discourse to describe real or imaginary states of affairs, have no use or sense.

This would be a paradox because the philosopher knows the expression has a use, yet claims that it does not. Malcolm's interpretation only moves the paradox to another level.

Malcolm has an even stronger position that any philosophical statement which violates ordinary language is false. The philosophical statement is false no matter what arguments may be advanced in favor of it. Malcolm believes that by pointing out that we often utter sentences of the form "I know p for certain," where p is a material-thing statement, Moore has refuted the sceptic. Moore never said or meant any such thing, but the question remains whether this would be a good refutation.

The obvious rejoinder, which Malcolm acknowledges, is that at one time everyone said, e.g., that the earth is flat. Malcolm calls this a

4. Ibid., p. 350.
5. Ibid., p. 351 ff.
mistake as to the empirical facts and distinguishes it from a misuse of language. 1 But the example he gives of a misuse of language is a poor one because not analogous to the philosophical cases in question. His example is that of two men confronting an animal (a fox), agreeing on the characteristics of the animal and agreeing on what kind of animal is usually called a fox. Presumably this means that they agree on what is usually denoted by "fox." But one of the men persists in calling the animal a wolf. 2 Now, this case is disanalogous to the philosophical cases because the intention of "fox" is quite clear; there can be no disagreement. But we can easily imagine a case more closely analogous to the philosophical cases. Take the man who comes to New England and orders a milk shake. He is indignant when he finds that his drink contains no ice cream. "This is no milk shake!" We feel that this man is not being absurd in the way that the man (above) who cries wolf (literally) is being absurd, because there is a reason for disagreement about the intention of "milk shake." 3

Often the philosopher is very much like the traveler, coming from, say, the region of mathematics and visiting the region of science and common sense. He finds that the locals claim to be certain of things for which no mathematical sort of proof is possible. He tells them that they are wrong. Now, if they inform him of the local customs, are they refuting him?


2 Ibid., p. 357.

3 The man perhaps would be being absurd if, upon being informed about local language customs, he persisted. He would be being absurd, or very provincial.
Suppose the epistemologist does use the word "certain" incorrectly, he uses it, not as it is ordinarily used, but, say, to refer to a type of cognition which it would be logically impossible for any man to attain. Clearly, when we have pointed this out, we have not refuted him. In all probability his statement which formerly seemed paradoxical now seems trivial... Indeed we now see what we had not seen before, that what he is saying is true...

Similarly, when the waiter answers the customer's "This is not a milk shake" with an explanation of the local usage it is because he understands that in the way in which the customer was using, "milk shake," what he said was true; the waiter is not refuting the customer.

It should be noted that these considerations should not lead to the conclusion that "This is not a milk shake," and "We are never certain that material-thing statements are true," are necessary statements. Though, we may suspect that the customer and the epistemologist are both working on assumptions which they take to be necessarily true. ("Milk shakes contain ice cream," "If it is logically possible that a statement is false, we are not certain of its truth.")

There as assumptions may themselves be false. And one would have to agree with Malcolm, at least in spirit. For, perhaps, the evidence we should give for a statement's being necessary may be facts about usage.

Still, there is always the possibility that these assumptions are not being made, that indeed there is a disagreement about facts, that, e.g.,

the drink has carbonation in it. The epistemologist may be using "certain" with its customary intension. If so he is not using language incorrectly, but disagreeing with most people about a fact.¹

In this chapter, I have examined two views that philosophical statements are linguistic. I have attempted to show that Ambrose's view is mistaken² and that Malcolm's view is implausible. Malcolm's view is really only an application of Ambrose's view to philosophical statements in general. Ambrose argues that necessary statements are linguistically informative, and Malcolm argues that the statements of Moore and other philosophers are to be included among necessary, linguistically informative statements. But Malcolm's view is highly implausible; it merely moves Moore's paradox to another level.


CHAPTER VIII
ARE PHILOSOPHICAL STATEMENTS REALLY LINGUISTIC PROPOSALS?

Faced with the fact that philosophers like Bradley seem to claim logical necessity for their statements, and the resulting second-level paradox, mentioned above, that philosophers would then be holding the view that expressions which they know to have a use, do not have a use, Morris Lazerowitz concludes that philosophical statements are really linguistic proposals, or verbal recommendations.

Only by preventing "temporal fact" from having a descriptive use, by preventing any phenomenon, actual or imaginable from being called a temporal fact, does "There cannot be any temporal facts" become an expression for a necessary proposition.¹

The philosopher's argument "is meant to back a verbal recommendation."²

Moore's defense of Common Sense is a defense against changing the language of Common Sense; and his refutations are simply counter-proposals, to be understood as recommendations not to follow academic wishes to alter it.³

In fact, Moore's "refutations" are not refutations," and the philosophers' view "have no refutations."⁴ Lazerowitz's view about what

² Ibid., p. 391.
³ Ibid., p. 393.
⁴ Ibid., p. 376.
philosophical statements really are clearly has different consequences than Malcolm's view. Malcolm found the philosophers' statements to be false and Moore's refutations to be good ones. Lazerowitz's view seems consistent with holding that philosophical statements simply do not have a truth-value, and therefore neither are true nor have a refutation.

Ambrose holds the same, or a very similar, view. If Bradley's conclusions are logically necessary, we can treat them "as having only verbal import...as reflecting usage." But since "thing," etc. are not "deprived by current convention of any function," Bradley's arguments must be "devices...for altering present language in a non-workaday way." In a "revised language," his statements of existential denial would express a necessity.

I will attempt here, first, to clarify what is meant by "linguistic proposal." There are various kinds of proposals or recommendations which could be called "linguistic" or "verbal": for example, the proposal that Esperanto be established as a universal language, or the recommendation of certain changes in the spelling or pronunciation of English, or the suggestion that certain rules of grammar be dropped. The sort of proposal which Moore's critics believe is being made by philosophers is the sort which calls for changing (or, on Moore's part, retaining) the meaning or use of a word (or words). Such a proposal could be made with regard to intension, or denotation, or both.

1Alice Ambrose, Essays in Analysis, pp. 252-3.
2Ibid., p. 254.
At some points, what the proposal theorists say suggests that
ey believe that philosophers are proposing changes merely in the denota-
tion of words, changes merely in what the word is to apply to. Ambrose
says, "Bradley...stretch(es) the use of 'appearance' to apply to what-
ever thing-, quality-, and relation-phrases normally apply to...(So is)
redrawing linguistic boundaries." Similarly, Lazerowitz gives the im-
pression that he believes Bradley to be recommending that "temporal fact"
no longer apply to anything or that "now" no longer be used. Malcolm
says that Ayer explicitly suggests that "known for certain" is properly
applied only to a priori statements, and that similarly a philosopher
who says that all words are vague is proposing, implicitly, that we a-
oblish the use of "clear." The impression one receives from these state-
ments is that the philosopher is recommending a change in denotation, in
cases in which usage is established, without any corresponding change in
intension.

This theory, if anyone held it, would be a highly implausible
one. The philosopher's proposal would be like the proposal that "flat"
should apply to the earth. It is unlikely that we should call such a pro-
posal a "linguistic proposal." And, if the philosopher were making such a

1Alice Ambrose, Essays in Analysis, p. 254.
2Morris Lazerowitz, "Moore's Paradox," Paul A. Schilpp, op. cit.,
p. 384.
3Ibid., p. 393.
4Norman Malcolm, "Moore and Ordinary Language," Paul A. Schilpp,
op. cit., p. 354.
5Ibid., p. 364.
proposal, he would look very much like the man, in Malcolm's example, who insists on calling a fox a wolf for no apparent reason. He acknowledges that "fox" means an animal which has characteristics v, w, and x; that "wolf" means an animal which has characteristics x, y, and z; and that the animal in question has characteristics v, w, and x. Yet he insists on calling it a wolf. Could the philosopher be such an unreasonable fellow?

The answer is that he is not and that the proposal theorists know he is not. For despite the quotations above, one can also find statements by Moore's critics which indicate that they believe the philosopher is proposing a change in intention (as well as denotation). Malcolm says, "The reason that the philosopher makes his paradoxical statement...is that he is impressed by and wishes to emphasize a certain similarity...This linguistic device of speaking paradoxically...does of course ignore the dissimilarities...which justify the distinction made in ordinary language."¹ It is as if the man who persists in calling a fox a wolf, does so because he perceives the common characteristic, x; he says, let us refer both to the animals which have characteristics v, w, x and to those which have characteristics x, y, z by the term "wolf." But in doing so he changes the intension of the word "wolf," which now means an animal which either has characteristics v, w, x or x, y, z. And if x is a characteristic unique to the class, wolves-and-foxes, then he is recommending that "wolf" both mean and apply to all animals which have characteristic x.

Or, perhaps it isn't merely this similarity which provokes the man to say what he does, but the fact that he finds it difficult to distinguish wolves from foxes. He can well enough tell the difference between fox or wolf and a horse, but when it comes to foxes and wolves, they all look pretty much the same to him. This is what Ambrose suggests is the case with the philosopher. "It is the fact that there are no criteria distinguishing sharply between veridical experience, illusion, hallucination, and dream experience which the sceptic uses to justify his holding one can never know that hands, say, exist." Here, the philosopher seems to be proposing a change in the intension (as well as denotation) of "know" because there is no sharp distinction between the cases in which it does and does not apply. He may, for example, be proposing that "knowing" should imply the impossibility of being mistaken.

The most plausible view is that the philosopher is recommending a change both in denotation and intension. But note that knowing the intension of a word does not necessarily imply knowing its denotation. We may know the intension of a word and not know whether or not it applies to a particular entity. And a proposal may involve not a change in denotation, but rather the extension of what a word denotes. We may know the intension of "living," or "organic," and also know many facts about a certain microscopic entity, and yet not know whether these predicates apply, whether they denote this entity. A proposal that they should denote this entity would be a third sort of proposal. Moore takes the case of two animals going around each other. Two men claim, respectively,

1. D went around G.

2. G went around D.

1Alice Ambrose, "Moore's 'Proof of an External World,'" Paul A. Schilpp, op. cit., p. 413.
Here usage is not established. The two men agree on the facts of the case and presumably on the intension of "went around." Moore believes that, as it stands, "either usage is allowable, i.e. correct, but not definitely correct." He also believes that the men "are not contradicting one another." But they would be contradicting one another if each man meant that his usage is definitely correct (as if the visitor to New England persisted in saying, "That's not a milk shake," and they would each be making a mistake. "They might be recommending things" only if they meant "that it should in such cases be made definitely correct to say" one or the other.\(^1\) Such a recommendation would call for an extension of denotation to include cases for which there is no established usage. The proposal theorists, however, seem to believe that the philosopher's proposal is made in cases in which usage is established. Otherwise Moore could not be said to refute the philosopher by referring to the established usage of ordinary language.\(^2\)

But whatever sort of proposal the philosopher may be said to be making, the question remains whether the proposal is that men in their ordinary discourse should adopt this change? Lazerowitz says

This...the philosopher undoubtedly does not intend;...

It could be said that he is making an academic proposal, for esoteric adoption only. But again, it seems closer to the facts to describe what he does as making or maintaining an actual though academic reclassification.\(^3\)

---

1 Commenplace Book, pp. 196-201.
2 See Chapter VII, B.
Thus Lazerowitz concludes, "It is an exaggeration to characterize the
(philosophical) theory as a proposal."\(^1\)

Lazerowitz rejects his own proposal theory for straightforward
reasons. The philosopher uses "the language of assertion," he has no in-
terest in changing grammar books, and the reasons he gives for his con-
cclusions are not of the sort usually given for a proposed change.\(^2\)
Lazerowitz rejects the proposal theory because it doesn't quite fit the
facts. The purpose of the proposal theory is "to explain a number of
otherwise puzzling features" of philosophical theory,\(^3\) namely, what Lazer-
owitz calls "Moore's Paradox," and to explain the fact that, according to
Lazerowitz and others, philosophical statements are neither empirical nor
necessary statements. Commenting on the proposal theory, Moore says, "The
last 'therefore' seems to me to be a simply enormous non-sequitor!"\(^4\) The
"therefore" he is talking about is the one of the proposal theorist's con-
cclusion. The conclusion is meant as an explanatory theory, not logically
implied by the facts but, in some way, explaining them. The trouble with
this explanatory theory, as with many others, is that the explanation is
as puzzling and paradoxical as what it is supposed to explain. "Philos-
ophical statements are really linguistic proposals" has a paradoxical
ring very much like "Material objects are really collections of sense-
data."

---

\(^1\) Morris Lazerowitz, *The Structure of Metaphysics*, p. 103.


Before considering other possible explanatory theories, I will examine an argument which purports to show that if philosophical statements or arguments are linguistic proposals (or reclassifications or revisions), they are useless or improper. Malcolm notes that philosophical statements often involve polar terms, i.e. pairs such as "large" and "small," "animate" and "inanimate," "vague" and "clear." According to Malcolm, philosophers often are proposing that we abolish the use of one term of a pair. Thus, the philosopher who says that all words are vague is proposing that we abolish the use of "clear." Malcolm responds that by such a move, we would have gained nothing; now "vague" would have to do double duty, but it could not because it would lack a contrary. Without its polar mate "vague" itself would be useless and it too would be dropped.1

Malcolm’s argument is bad because he misconceives what the philosopher’s proposal would be, if indeed he were making one. First, he seems to suggest that the philosopher is banishing "clear" altogether. C. K. Grant responds: "Even if we accept 'All words are really vague,' all that follows is that we cannot use 'vague' and 'clear' to qualify words; all the other manifold uses of these polar terms remain unaffected."2 Similarly, the philosopher whom Malcolm might suggest is banishing "know for certain," cannot be successfully countered by Malcolm’s argument as long as he reserves "know for certain" for at least some

---


Malcolm might answer, e.g. in the case of "All words are vague," that, as regards words, the predicate "vague" becomes useless, that as regards words it would have to do double duty and could not, for the former distinction marked by "vague" and "clear" when predicated of words would be lost. Even if "vague" and "clear" be disallowed a use as distinguishing predicates, distinguishing some words from others, it does not follow that "vague" becomes useless.

It will indeed be useless for certain purposes—
as a mode of distinguishing between or of identifying particular kinds of things...but it does not follow that such a predicate is useless for all purposes. Predicates may be used to remind, or to make a formal point or to reject a conceivable classification, as well as to distinguish and identify.  

If anything, the polar terms argument should lead us to the conclusion that philosophers are not making proposals. Wouldn’t it be silly to suggest that people no longer distinguish between vague words (or expressions) and clear ones? The proposal theory was supposed to explain Moore’s Paradox, which in this case would be the fact that the philosopher while making a proposal, does not abide by or subscribe to it. Moore delights in pointing out places in which a philosopher who says that time is unreal


goes about using words like "before" and "after," in ordinary contexts. Similarly one can surmise that Ramsey would not object to someone's pointing out that a particular expression is crisp and clear. And these facts are inconsistent with the theory that philosophers are proposing changes in ordinary language.
CHAPTER IX
PHILOSOPHICAL CRITERIA

Let me now review, in a general sort of way, the path which is taken by the critics who have been discussed in this part of the paper. The critic's problem arises from Moore's defense of common sense and proof of an external world. The critic feels, perhaps, that traditional philosophical views cannot be refuted in the way that Moore seems to go about refuting them. He feels that something is going on beneath the surface of the dialogue between Moore and traditional philosophers. So he launches into an examination of philosophical statements, an examination which he expects will issue in some sort of theory about what philosophical statements really are. He notes the sort of things which led Kant to say that philosophical statements are synthetic a priori. He has certain criteria by which to judge whether statements are empirical or necessary statements. Since philosophical statements do not fit easily into either classification, he feels that they are peculiar, he feels uneasy about them. Perhaps he feels so uneasy that he concludes they are somehow not respectable. He feels that philosophical statements are deceptive, they are not what they seem to be. They appear to be empirical; but in reality they are not, since they are not like other empirical statements, they are dissimilar to other empirical statements in important respects. He concludes that philosophical statements are not really empirical, they are really something else. They are really such and such or such and such and such and such.

1 I am thinking of the verificationist, although I have not discussed his view.
Moore is reported to have said that "when a philosopher says that really something is so we are warned that what he says is really so is not so really."\(^1\) The path which Moore’s critics take in examining philosophical statements clearly parallels the path most philosophical investigation takes. The critic finds that philosophical statements do not fit easily into a certain classification; or he is concerned that, to use Ambrose’s words (out of context), "there are no clear distinctions" between philosophical and scientific statements, that there is the "possibility of confusing"\(^2\) them. On the other hand, philosophical statements are in some ways similar to another sort of statement, a linguistic proposal or whatever. But nobody has ever recognized this similarity before. The way in which philosophical statements are argued for, the language in which they are asserted, hides this similarity, it is a disguise, as it were. The critic concludes that, despite this disguise, philosophical statements are really linguistic proposals. To quote Malcolm (out of context): "This linguistic device of speaking paradoxically, which the philosopher adopts in order to stress a similarity, does of course ignore the dissimilarities..."\(^3\)

The critic’s conclusion turns out to be as paradoxical as other philosophical statements. One is tempted to ask the proposal theorist, "Are you proposing that, from now on, we should call philosophical statements linguistic proposals; are you making a linguistic proposal?" But he says now that he was

---


\(^2\)Alice Ambrose, "Moore's Paradox," Paul A. Schilpp, op. cit., p. 413.

exaggerating. When he said that philosophical statements are really linguistic proposals, he did not mean that they were linguistic proposals really.

Instead of attempting to disrobe philosophical theories, as it were, let us, first, sum up their interesting peculiarities. Although philosophers often appeal to both scientific and commonly known empirical facts, they themselves have no laboratories, perform no experiments, and can claim to no closer observation than other people. With the same empirical facts available, philosophers may come to opposite conclusions; philosophical disputes continue unresolved. While empirical facts and scientific theories do tend to suggest, influence, and possibly discredit philosophical theories, they do not clearly disprove such theories; no consensus is brought about in philosophical thought by empirical evidence, as it is in science. (This is not to suggest that there is never general agreement on certain issues or, broadly speaking, acknowledged tendencies or goals.) Clearly the philosopher's conclusion, when it is a generalization, as it usually is, does not issue from a straightforward inductive argument.

A metaphysics is unlike a typical inventory in that philosophers are not concerned with which items there are, but with, roughly speaking, how to classify items, and with which types of items there are. Philosophers are often concerned with the most abstract and general of types of items, or categories, and these types, or categories, are peculiar (though not unique) in that whether an item belongs to one of these categories is often an analytic matter (that a house is a thing, etc. is logically necessary). If a philosopher subscribes to a particular classification, a statement he might make to the effect that a certain item belongs to a certain
category will sound very peculiar, or perhaps nonsensical, as will all statements which cross the usual categories, though to varying degrees.

Many philosophers examine concepts and words in arguing for their conclusions. Some philosophers seem to believe that their conclusions are logically necessary, though in some cases this would be inconsistent with other assertions which these philosophers make (about appearance). Necessary statements do often appear in philosophical arguments, and a case can be made that some philosophical conclusions are necessary statements. But perhaps the most noteworthy fact about philosophical statements is that often the words which appear in them are used in unordinary ways.

The philosopher's unordinary ways of speaking are now notorious. The fact that the philosopher uses words in unordinary ways is perhaps the primary datum which suggests the various metaphilosophical theses we have been considering. But, as Chisholm points out, from the fact that people use words differently, it does not follow that they have different beliefs about what is correct language, or what should be correct language. Why, then, do philosophers use words in an unusual way? This question does not have one answer but many. There are many unordinary ways in which words can be used, not only in philosophy, but also in poetry and in science. In philosophy and science, special terminology is often employed. There are various purposes for special terminology and also various motives that a philosopher or a scientist may have for employing such terminology. I cannot hope to attempt to give a full account of what is peculiar about philosophical uses of terminology. But there is one way of describing the

---

philosopher's unordinary use of ordinary words which is especially apt for clarifying the relationship between Moore and the traditional philosopher.

We may say that the philosopher often uses words in unordinary ways because he is employing special philosophical criteria. Often, traditional philosophers are rebuked for using words in unordinary ways. Passmore says, "It is as if an economist were to be rebuked for overlooking the fact that a person can 'demand' something which he has no means of paying for." He believes that most philosophical statements are of the criteriological sort, that "they are emphatic ways of pointing out that particular philosophical criteria of solidity, certainty, clarity are never in fact satisfied." If a philosopher says that we do not know material-thing statements for certain, we can paraphrase him: the evidence which we have for material-thing statements does not meet such and such a criterion for certain knowledge.

Setting special criteria for knowledge is similar to proposing a new meaning for "know," but they are not the same thing. Setting a criterion for knowledge is specifying a standard by which to judge whether any item is or is not an item of knowledge. When we set up such a standard, it is likely that we desire that others accept and employ our standard, or criterion. Philosophers rarely explicitly propose that others accept their criteria. In fact, in some cases, they may not say or even be aware that they are employing special criteria. But if they are aware that they are using special criteria, they may expect other philosophers to examine those things which they considered and which influenced them to accept their criteria and to

---

examine these problems which arise when other criteria are employed.¹

One may attempt to "reduce" a criteriological statement to some sort of statement about language. But such a reduction statement may itself be reduced to a criteriological statement. Reduction statements are often of the form: "X is really Y." But this statement may be "reduced" to: "X meets such and such criteria for something's being Y."

The reasons for holding or accepting a particular criterion are various in kind. The empirical facts which philosophers are concerned with are very often facts about abnormal, atypical, or novel situations.

Consideration of atypical cases often points up possible inadequacies and may suggest improvements in our conceptualization of the "normal" cases. By far the greater number of important and interesting traditional philosophical problems...have arisen out of these non-paradigmatic cases which are either the results of scientific discoveries or of speculation along scientific lines.²

Clearly, empirical facts do not dictate a criterion. The fact that people suffer hallucination suggests the possibility of being mistaken about material-thing statements despite the usual immediate evidence. This

¹ See Roderick Chisholm, Theory of Knowledge, pp. 58-69, for a general discussion of the problem of the criterion.

similarity of typical and atypical experience may suggest a stiff criterion of knowledge; and those facts also show that according to a stiff criterion, we cannot be said to know material-thing statements.

On another level, there may be various sorts of motives which incline a philosopher toward a criterion. He may conceive his enterprise to be one of saving morality in the face of scientific claims, or constructing a conceptual underpinning for the sciences, or working out the philosophical consequences of religious dogma, or indicating, without use of dogma, the existence of God, or pointing toward a method for the salvation of mankind,—or defending common sense against philosophical attack.

Finally, on other levels, the philosopher's work may be symptomatic of subconscious tendencies, political leaning, and religious upbringing. The philosopher's work is not immune from psychological, sociological, biographical, and historical analysis. It is reasonable to believe that the philosopher's work is more open to such analysis than is the scientist's.

But, in general, philosophy books differ from other books in that special criteria are employed for deciding whether or not items

---


2Like Quine.

3Note Anselm's conception of his proof as a sort of conceptual underpinning for faith.

4Like Berkley, Bradley, Jaspers and others.

5Like Marx.
belong to the most general and sometimes abstract categories. The criterion for something's being a material object may be that its appearance is qualitatively different from a delusive or illusory appearance; thus, certain items are said not to be material objects. The criterion for something's being an event may be that events take place within its parts; items which are usually categorized as material objects are thus categorized as events, or perhaps constructs of events. The criterion for something's being known with certainty may be that the thing can be proved; items such as that there are hands may not be provable in a prescribed manner. They are not categorized as known with certainty. And philosophers may also have special criteria for items being identical, real, good, and so on.

The criteriological metaphilosophical thesis has two important virtues. First, it helps explain why philosophical disputes continue through the ages. If philosophers are using different criteria, their disputes about whether items are of a certain type cannot be resolved by reference to empirical facts. Secondly, this thesis has the virtue of solving Moore's paradox without raising a new one. Philosophers are not men holding inconsistent beliefs but rather men using different criteria at different times. One set of criteria is deemed sufficient for ordinary life and another necessary for philosophical purposes. One set of criteria is used in practice, the other in theory. Moore's insight is that such a dualism can be done without. The criteriological metaphilosophical thesis suggests itself as at least the most handy one with which to both account for traditional philosophy and illuminate Moore's special contribution to philosophy.
I do not here wish to get into a long discussion on the virtues and vices of traditional philosophy. It is now almost a truism that the form philosophical statements take is often misleading as to their pur-
port. In "Philosophical Perplexity," Wisdom attempts to give a short account of the ways in which philosophy can be misleading. Yet in "Moore's Technique" he asks,

In view of the fact that on the covers of their books they print the warning "Philosophy" and that so many of them inside misuse language like this, is it a mis-
use? Wisdom answers (obliquely) concerning statements which seem but, according to him, do not go against common sense:

It's muddling to express oneself this way and it may temporarily confuse others and even oneself into sus-
pecting those everyday remarks...It's muddling, but it's natural.

That philosophers often convince themselves that they have proved astounding theses is well documented in the literature. One example which both Moore and Wisdom give is this statement of McTaggart's: "So Matter is in the same position as the gorgons and the harpies."  

---


3. Ibid., p. 433.

We naturally, with Moore, gasp at such a statement. We feel that Moore must be right in saying that at least sometimes some philosophers have meant their statements to be paradoxical, to go against common sense. Yet we nod to Wittgenstein's reaction upon hearing Moore's proof of an external world: "Those philosophers who have denied the existence of matter have not wished to deny that under my trousers I wear pants."\(^1\) The rhetorical device of emphasizing what you are saying with striking remarks\(^2\) oversteps the boundaries of sober discourse when it reaches the heights (or depths) illustrated by McTaggart's statement. Yet most traditional philosophical theories can be put in language more sober, though less exciting, than has been the practice.

Thus, Moore's defense of common sense is a good defense in the sense that what he says seems true. Some philosophers have meant to confound common sense, or thought that this is what they were doing. The belief that there are material objects, they have suggested, is a common error. Or they have suggested that the belief that we know that there are material objects is a common error. They have given, or have been under, impression that their criteria for an item being known or for an item being a material object are the same as the ordinary criteria. Or while being aware at some times that their criteria are especially stiff, they have ignored this fact at other times. Alternately, we can say that they have used words in unordinary ways. They were not therefore recommending usages nor were they recommending criteria. Often, whether unaware of or

---

\(^1\)Reported by John Wisdom, "Moore's Technique," Paul A. Schilpp, ed., cit., p. 431.

ignoring the fact that their criteria are not the criteria of common sense (or alternately that their language is not the language of ordinary usage), they have asserted, e.g., "We do not know that there are material objects," in the sense which Moore calls ordinary, in the sense: we humans we do not have good evidence that there are hands, soap bubbles, and telephone poles. Patently, according to the ordinary criteria we do have good evidence that these things exist. When Moore shows his hand he gives good evidence. Moore, though, goes a step further, in saying that we even have the sort of evidence which the traditional philosopher demands, although he acknowledges that he cannot give this evidence. Still, he stands by ordinary criteria in claiming that we can know things which we cannot prove.

But what has Moore to say to those philosophers—or to philosophers in their more sober moments—who do not mean to deny the existence of Wittgenstein's pants. Explicitly, he says that they are misusing language or that there is no good reason to accept their theses, or that they are really offering analyses which he cannot accept. But implicitly, he has something of much more importance (I think) to say. Implicitly, Moore's career is a defense of the ordinary criteria. It is not that he is defending those criteria against attempts to have them changed. It is that he is defending those criteria as philosophically relevant. He is exemplifying the fact that one can do good philosophy with those criteria and thereby showing that we have no good reason to be suspicious of common sense beliefs in general, or of the knowledge which we ordinarily claim to have about our environment. Of all the critics in the Schilpp volume, Murphy seems to have the best grasp of what Moore is about when he says,
the kind of understanding and knowing so far defended are precisely the sort which a philosophically comprehensive estimate of the world we live in and our ways of finding out about it should have led us to expect in this situation. Such knowing does not conform to the pattern of clarity and certainty which a philosopher intent on reducing the world to logic or analyzing it into sensation would require, but it is wholly arbitrary and unreasonable to demand that it should. And while it is not "final" as satisfying the epistemologist's or metaphysician's aspirations, it is quite "ultimate" as a source of reliable and in some cases certainly truthful information not otherwise procurable about the world around us...Thus in defending common sense against its critics and exhibiting once more its primacy and authentic cogency, Moore has made an important contribution to philosophical good sense.¹

The great conflict between philosophy and common sense which Moore pictured as being largely a matter of disagreement on substantial issues is really largely a criteriological split. We might call it philosophical schizophrenia. It is misleading to suggest that philosophers have had contradictory beliefs about proper usage. Rather they have measured beliefs by different standards, one for the streets, and another for the study. Thus, they can say, yes, according to the ordinary criteria I know that I

have a hand, but according to the philosophical criteria, alas, I do not
know that material objects are real. It may be that some philosophers
have held contradictory beliefs about which are the correct criteria.
It seems to me that for the most part they have believed that their philo-
sophical criteria are correct, their ordinary criteria incorrect though
useful in everyday intercourse and perhaps inevitable. Hume retreats
from the "delirium" of philosophy to friendly merriment and conversation
wherein he finds himself determined to live, talk, and act like other peo-
ple in the common affairs of life. But he returns to philosophy thereby
reaffirmed in his sceptical principles. It is not that he has different
beliefs about correct usage or correct criteria, but that he uses dif-
ferent criteria, one set for the "cold and strain'd" speculation of philos-
ophy, another for social merriment and amusement. What Moore has shown is
that this philosophical schizophrenia is not inevitable, that philosophy
and common sense can live together in harmony, and that for the sake of
intellectual peace (and clarity), they should.
BIBLIOGRAPHY


COMMON SENSE AND ORDINARY LANGUAGE

A Thesis

by

Ronald Isaac Rothbart

Approved by:

Murray J. Kiteley

Kenneth Stern

May 23, 1968