



WHAT REALLY IS COMMON SENSE? A DEFENSE IN THE LIGHT OF G. E MOORE'S EPISTEMOLOGY

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Abstract

This work explores the question regarding the 'common sense' view of the world as postulated in G. E. Moore's analytic philosophy. It part ways with the views of scholars, philosophers who have engaged in the dominative historical problem of knowledge and who have as well attempted to either prove that something exists or that material substance do not exist. Originating from this is the idealism of Hegel. For him, neither material entities nor space and time exist. This thought found its extremity in the views of the neo-Hegelians such as Francis Bradley and McTaggart who equally denied the existence of the material world, space and time. The above epistemic impasse prompted G.E. Moore to defend the existence of the material world, space and time through what he called the common sense view of the world and the prove of the external world. Some of the objectives set to guide this study are; to examine the post Hegelians - Bradley and McTaggart on reality; and to determine through Moore's view of proposition and truism of common sense how necessary and possible that reality exists. This study adopts the method of *content analysis*. This involves textual analysis, conceptual analysis, contextual analysis and evaluation. Thus, this research demonstrates that G. E. Moore's 'common sense' picture of the world is absolutely true because its propositions are commonly understood by everyone who speaks the language and it consists of evidently true propositions which are obvious and indubitable. The study recommends, amongst others, that scientists must look into philosophical findings for the possibility of discoveries that can occasion a paradigm shift.

Keywords: Common Sense, Epistemology, Reality, Idealism.

Introduction

The philosophy of ordinary language preceded idealistic philosophy because Hegel's idealism was prevalent in British territories towards the end of the nineteenth century. As such, those who made an effort to popularize his thoughts were Francis Bradley and James McTaggart, among others. These philosophers are referred to as neo-Hegelians. One central thought or belief of the neo-Hegelians is the assumption that 'time' and 'space' are not real. These views actually do contradict our common sense perception of the world. This idea of the neo-Hegelians is what prompted the criticism and rejection of idealism in Britain and the birth of the

analytic movement that was led by G. E. Moore, Bertrand Russell and Ludwig Wittgenstein. As popularly held by most authors, Moore was the leading figure who started the revolt on idealism in Britain, it was him who brought about the downfall of idealism and gave early twentieth century thought its thrust towards realism. One critical point of this attack was to establish the fact that “things and facts about things are dependent for their existence and their nature upon the operation of a mind” (White 174). Thus, this work is confronted with some questions viz; what then or *really* is common sense? How can we prove common sense propositions to be true or false? And finally, can common sense communicate any valid knowledge to us?

The Post-Hegelians on Reality

After Hegel’s death in 1831, those who were his adherents and followers broke into two major groups known as the Hegelian left wing and the Hegelian right wing. From these groups, the Hegelian system spread to the twentieth century. “A group of British and American thinkers, whose philosophy of idealism and adoption of Hegelian dialectics gave them a common bond, became known as neo-Hegelians” (Sahakian 203). The growing trend of the neo-Hegelians was to revive Hegel’s idea that; the universe as we know it to be is the manifestation of the absolute spirit and that, things cannot be known separately from each other. Among the notable neo-Hegelians were James McTaggart and Herbert Bradley.

John McTaggart

John McTaggart as a neo-Hegelian was concerned with the problem of being and existence. His method of analysis is unique and different from other Hegelians. This is evident in his thesis that, “Hegel’s philosophy is the question of the relation between the succession of the categories in the dialectic and the succession of events in time” (McTaggart 490). But that, whatever that exist can be known through the individual experience for they are substance. In his book, *Nature of Existence* volume 1, Uduma O. Uduma notes that McTaggart argues that things actually do exist; but that they are related to each other and this relationship of substance does not take away their infinite nature. Substance in his view has parts and, in this regard, they are considered as being personal. McTaggart in this respect can be considered as a Personalist: this which has to do with his view on metaphysical pluralism as distinct from Hegelian metaphysical monism. In this way he rejects the idea of a God. For him, the idea of an absolute is only possible when we begin to look at things as a unity of the selves. As each substance possesses its separate parts and is distinct, its parts however should not be seen as possessing a personality. Sahakian posits that, “the Absolute is related to its parts in the same way that a college is related to its members ... the college and its members are spiritual entities but only the individual members may properly be considered persons” (278).

However, in the second volume of the *Nature of Existence*, Uduma records that, McTaggart equally denies the existence of material things. “He applied these results to the empirical world and argues that matter is unreal, since its parts cannot be determined by determining correspondence” (19). It is from this that McTaggart rejected the idea of ‘time’, in his work titled *Time and the Hegelian Dialectics* of which he tried to interpret the Hegelian theses concerning the universe of which from Hegel, “the Absolute is the whole ... the Absolute is not something that transcends existence; it is the whole of existence itself understood as a system in which each part is organically and inseparably related to every other” (Magee 19-20). In this process, reality unfolds and becomes rational and reality is equally what is known in Hegel’s view as Pure Being. This idea or process is what Hegel refers to as dialectics, which forms part of his major works on logic. It is the unfolding stages of Absolute idea that McTaggart sees as that which is finite and not infinite. However, in “*Time and the Hegelian Dialectic*, McTaggart

puts up some propositions to discard any idea as to the existence of time. This is because, it cannot be used as an explanation of the absolute idea, due to its finite nature and any attempt to postulate infinite time would lead to what he refers to as, “false infinite ..., of endless aggregation” (McTaggart 491).

The development of this Hegelian thought leads one to question the scientific believes of cause and effect, because it is commonly held that every event has a cause which requires the existence of time. The idea of cause and effect implies the non-existence state of affair, event of a phenomenon must require the existence of time and time in Hegelian dialectics is a contradiction to the idea of Pure Being or Absolute. For this reason, McTaggart posits that:

Time, as Hegel expresses it, is that which is outside itself. It has no principle of unity or coherence. It can only be limited by something outside itself... thus no event in time could be accepted as an ultimate beginning (492).

To think of the absolute idea in time became unacceptable, though, some philosophers may want to argue that events are explained in the same way as the manifestation of the absolute idea. And this implies for them that; the existence of anything at the beginning is the Pure Being. On the other hand, the Hegelian dialectic conceives of reality as a whole. That, which makes any existence in time, to be impossible, because in reality, the universe must correspond to the Absolute idea. Following from this Hegelian thesis, the Absolute idea or dialectics is not one which occurs in time but one which is eternal. With this also, we can only arrive at Hegel's dictum that, the rational is real and the real is rational.

Francis Herbert Bradley

Francis Herbert Bradley (1846-1924) was born in London and attended the University of Oxford. Despite his not being able to attain success academically, he is however one of British greatest philosophers, through his most celebrated work titled *Appearance and Reality*. His work influenced the likes of Bertrand Russell and George Edward Moore who later reacted to his idealism. Bradley as a neo-Hegelian supported Hegel's monistic approach to reality that; reality is a process and it is equally known as the absolute. That, the absolute, is not one, to be conceived as different from the world. Apart from his work, *Appearance and Reality*, he wrote other works such as *The Presuppositions of Critical History*, *Ethical Studies* and *the Principles of Logic*.

Bradley's famous work is his *Appearance and Reality* published in 1893. The work is divided into two significant parts and both are highly metaphysical in nature because they contain issues about the conception of reality. It must be noted that Bradley is among the many neo-Hegelians who try to expound the metaphysical works of Hegel. For him, “metaphysics is an attempt to go beyond the appearance and get to the reality which then reveals itself as a coherent totality, an un-fragmented whole” (Omoregbe 3). Through metaphysics, one finds inadequate - some common sense, scientific, popular religious theses about reality. These cannot be used to ascertain what constitute the nature of the absolute, because as deduced from the Hegelian thesis that, the absolute is the totality of the whole and not any separate part. In line with this, Walsh notes that:

Among the notions which Bradley examines in this part of his work are these. First, the view, common enough philosophically minded students of natural science, that we can get at the truth of things by distinguishing two sorts of qualities in them, primary and secondary, the first of which indubitably characterize while the second are derivative and subjective. Secondly, the common sense idea that the familiar categories of thing, quality, every day

notions of space and time suffice for a full and adequate description of the world (429).

This is because since these views are held by men and they are parts of nature and the absolute, they cannot comprehend it as it truly is. In this sense, all relation of a thing and its ideas are contradictory to what constitute the absolute reality since it must be a complete whole. "Using the infinite regress argument ... according to which ... if one posits the existence of two or more things, then there must be relations of some sort or other between them, and then ... conclude that there must be further relations between these relations ad infinitum" (Uduma 15). This is what is impossible: to define the nature of the absolute; the extreme of his arguments has to do with the contradiction of human thought because they are deduced from mere appearances, which are arrived at through experience. He equally argues that none of the attributes of substance, qualities and its relations are a part of the true nature of reality. This leads to the argument that: the absolute is not many and there is no independent reality. Hence, metaphysics or "man as a metaphysical animal who cannot help but philosophize as he tries to reconcile the contradictions in the appearance of things" (Sahakian 281). It is the nature of the Absolute to harmonize all these contradictions.

What *Really* is Common Sense in the Light of Moore's Epistemology?

Having noted the positions of the idealist philosophers such as Francis Herbert Bradley and John McTaggart on reality, George Edward Moore found it necessary to come to the aid of Common Sense. In 1925 Moore published his work titled *A Defense of Common Sense* in which he listed a number of common sense propositions that he argues to know with certainty. For him, the common sense picture of the world is absolutely true, because, its propositions are commonly understood by everyone who speaks the language and "it consists of evidently true propositions, which are obvious and indubitable. For otherwise, our language and actions would be unintelligible" (Coliva 19). But then, what is common sense in Moore's conception?

Moore, it must be noted never actually gave a definition of what common sense is in his philosophy. Whatever that is sensed as his idea of common sense is implicit in his description of the concept as posited in his work titled, *Some Main Problems of Philosophy* where he states the common sense view as:

There are, it seems to me, certain views about the nature of the universe, which are held, nowadays, by almost everybody. They are so universally held that they may, I think, fairly be called the views of common senses (Moore 2).

Since it is the case that we can deduce Moore's conception of a common kind of inquiry that is neither too narrow nor naive, an investigation that charts a course between dogmatism and looking at both views of idealism, dogmatism and distinct worlds, and common sense in Moore's philosophy is a systematic way of rejecting both conceptions of reality. This is because, for the idealist, it reacts to any proposition that claims that it has *a priori* knowledge of the essential nature of phenomena and on the other hand, it rejects the unreasonable skeptical statements which is directed as a reaction against dogmatism which is of the view that we can have no knowledge of phenomena. Furthermore, Moore intends common sense to be a starting point for both philosophy and science because common sense "believes that there are in the universe, at least, two different kinds of things ... material objects —and also a very great number of mental acts or acts of consciousness" (Moore 4). Common sense establishes a relationship between both. Though overtime some commonly held believe may change, this cannot take away the fact

that there are material objects in the world. It is in this regard that we think Moore intended the defense of common sense.

Proposition and Truism of Common sense

Here we will attempt to show how Moore defended the truth of common sense by stating some propositions which he believes to know with certainty to be true. He notes that these propositions are of two classes the second of which is a single truism. Thus, he observes:

I now come to the single truism which, as will be seen, could not be stated except by reference to the whole list of truisms also (in my own opinion) I know, with certainty to be true (Moore *Philosophical Papers* 34).

In what follows, we shall quote Moore's defense of common sense as much as we deem necessary. Moore writes:

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. Ever since it was born, it has been either in contact with or not far from the surface of the earth. Among the things which have, in this sense, formed part of its environment there have, at every moment since its birth, been large numbers of other living human bodies, each of which has, like it, (a) at some time been born, (b) continued to exist from sometime after birth. (c) Been at every moment of its life after birth, either in contact with or not far from the surface of the earth; and many of these bodies have already died and ceased to exist.... Finally (to come to a different class of propositions), I am a human being, and I have, at different time since my body was born had many different experiences, of each, of many different kinds: E.g. (sic) I have often perceived both my own body and other things which formed part of its environment including other human bodies (Moore *Philosophical Papers* 33).

He goes on to state:

I now come to the single truism which, as will be seen, could not be stated except by reference to the whole list of truisms, just given in (1). This truism also (in my own opinion) I know, with certainty to be true; and it is as follows: In the case of very many (I do not say all of the human beings belonging to the class (which includes myself) defined in the following way, i.e. as human beings who have had human bodies, that were born and lived for some time upon the earth ... it is true that each has frequently, during the life of his body, known, with regard to himself or his body, and with regard to sometime earlier than any of the times at which I wrote down the propositions in (1), In other words what (2) asserts is only (what seems an obvious enough truism) that each of us has frequently known, with regard to himself or his body and the time at which he knew it (Moore *Philosophical papers* 34).

Following from these two propositions, Moore presents two defenses for common sense; this will be our next course of concern. However, for the present, (3) follows from (1) and (2): Just as Moore claims to know that some sort of propositions that are about himself are true - (1) -. There exists at present a living human body, which is my body; similarly, everyone else knows

that about each of them. But since (2) which assert that each of us has frequently known, time at which he knew it in its turn, is a common sense truism that Moore claim to know, then not only Moore, but also every one of us knows that another person knows that the propositions in (1) are true when they are about himself or herself. In order to make clear in what sense Moore was using the word true as pertaining to propositions which may appear ambiguous. He argues that he is using the term in its ordinary usage and when a statement is partially false it follows that it is not true. This, Moore intended should be applicable to his lines of proposition as in (1) and (2) respectively and not in the sense in which some philosophers want to make us understand the philosophical usage of the form true and false as follows:

Philosophers seem to have thought it legitimate to use the word 'true' in such a sense that a proposition which is partially false may never the less also be true; and some of these, therefore, would perhaps say that propositions like those enumerated in (1) are, in their view, true, when all the time they believe that every such proposition is partially false (Moore *Philosophical Papers* 35).

It is in Moore's view that a skeptic who denies that one can know that there are material objects, such as cars, tables, chairs, beds, and people (both the skeptic and other philosophers alike), maintain a self-contradictory position which cannot be held consistently. However, he recommends considering the existence of material objects and of all other proposition as beliefs which is different from knowledge *per se*, which makes up the common sense picture of the world. In other case, "some would even say that we know them to be highly probable; but they deny that we ever know them, for certain, to be true ..." (Moore *Philosophical Papers* 42). And some skeptics in denying common sense propositions would likewise maintain that: No human being has ever had knowledge of the existence of other human beings; which is not just about the skeptic himself, but also about all other human beings, whose existence he is calling into doubt. To put it otherwise, when a skeptic says, 'no human being has ever had knowledge of the existence of other human beings' he is thereby saying according to Moore, "there have been many human beings, myself included, and none of them has ever had knowledge of other human beings" (Coliva 20). In doing this Moore considered all such propositions to be self-contradictory because it entails two mutually incompatible propositions, since the skeptic makes and assert a proposition concerning human knowledge in general.

Moore goes on to counter the skeptic to have labeled his view a common sense belief, and seems too had failed to accept the fact that they are true because, if they are, the belief that there are material objects and other people is a belief of common sense, but it does not amount to knowledge. This would equally lead to claiming that; there have been many more human beings beyond myself who have shared these beliefs, but neither I nor anyone else who share in this belief has ever known them to be true. In Moore's demonstration every such proposition are self-contradictory, since they assume the existence of common sense beliefs and hence in particular of other objects and humans, but only to deny that it is known that they exist. Deducing from this, Hume posits: "they seem to me constantly to betray the fact that they regard the proposition that those beliefs are beliefs of common sense, or the proposition that they themselves are not the only members of the human race, as not mere true, but certainly true (Moore *Philosophical Papers* 43).

Hence, Moore notes in his defense of common sense against the skeptics; he proceeded to take a position in his defense of common sense. He claims that "nevertheless, my position that I know, with certainty, to be true all of the propositions in (1), is certainly not a position, the denial of which entails both of two incompatible propositions" (43). In demonstrating this view,

for him, the claim to know that propositions stated in (1) to be true, it follows that I think, it is however certain that other human beings also have known the corresponding propositions in (2) to be true therefore (2) is true. And I know such propositions to be true, but are there no possibility or high probability that these statements are mere belief and not true? To this, Moore responded with certainty "... I only know them because, in them I have known to be true other propositions which were evidence for them" (43).

To admit that selves and time are real, in the sense required. Other philosophers, on the other hand, have used the expression, time is not real, to express some view that they held ... think, meant by this expression something which is incompatible with the truth of any of the propositions in (1) ... (Moore *Philosophical Papers* 39).

For Moore, though such expressions or propositions as 'space is not real' may be ambiguous, their ordinary usage is all together incompatible with the single truisms of (2). As such, the idealist thesis is false. This is because, the denial of or any attempt to accept the idealist thesis that material objects are not real, will imply that no philosopher has ever existed. This in other words call into question the very spatio-temporal existence of the idealist hence, prohibits him from denying the reality of space, time and selves. That is to say, those philosophers are human beings, who have had experience over time both in the past and present corresponding to Moore's list of truisms. On another note, Moore gave four demonstrations to prove the idealist thesis against material objects, time and space to be false. The first demonstration is that, "(a) If none of the propositions in (2) is true, then no philosopher has ever existed, and thus none can have held that none of the propositions in that class is true" (Moore *Philosophical Papers* 40).

The prior existence of at least one philosopher in the classes shows that the proposition that humans exist is true and the proposition which denies it, if at all, it is denied is certainly false. In this respect, a 'philosopher' in Moore's view would "mean, of course (as we all do), exclusively philosophers who have been human beings, with human bodies that have lived upon the earth, and who have at different times had many different experiences" (40). From the above, this demonstrates the fact that; if there have been philosophers (the idealist inclusive) and there have been human beings in this class, then all what is asserted in proposition (1) is certainly true. And any view that is incompatible with proposition (1) is also in fact mistaken and wrong. The second demonstration is an appeal to the inconsistency inherent in the thesis of the idealist. According to Moore:

(b) ... no philosopher has ever been able to hold such views consistently. One way in which they betrayed this inconsistency is by alluding to the existence of other philosophers. Another way is by alluding to the existence of the human race, and in particular by using 'we'.... Any philosopher who asserts that 'we' sometimes believe propositions that are not true," is asserting not only that he himself had done the thing in question, but that very *many* other human beings, who have had bodies and lived upon the earth ... (40).

This postulation, to Moore, is a self-refuting argument, because if philosophers are human beings and are in the class of (1) and they have knowledge of experiences corresponding to (2) then, held views that are inconsistent with propositions which they themselves had believed in are self-contradictory. In the third demonstration, Moore took time out to respond to most of his critics that his list of truisms is not wholly true or that they contained both of two incompatible propositions. Moore proceeded to demonstrate logically his propositions of the list of truisms thus: (c) All of the propositions in (1) are true; no true proposition entails both of two

incompatible propositions; therefore, none of the propositions in (1) entails both of two incompatible propositions (Moore *Philosophical Papers* 41). This implies that any of such arguments put forward against some of the propositions in (1) cannot be true, since according to Moore; the class of (1) is certainly true. The fourth demonstration is to be true:

(d) Although, as I have urged, no philosopher who has held with regard to any of these types of propositions that no propositions of that type are true, has failed to hold also other view inconsistent with his view in this respect, yet I do not think that the view, with regard to any or all of these types, that no proposition belonging to them is true, is in itself self-contradictory views, i.e. entails both of two incompatible propositions. On the contrary, it seems to me quite clear that it might have been the case that time was not real, material things not real, space not real. Am in favor of my view that none of these things which might have been the case, is in fact the case, I have, I think, no better argument than simply this. Namely, that all the propositions in (1) are, in fact, true (Moore *Philosophical Papers* 42).

Deducing from all these demonstrations it became crystal clear to common sense that; there is an external world. Hence, Moore asserts about his list of truisms that any negation of the propositions entailed by his truisms are not only self-contradictory but certainly false, since his list of truism cannot but be true because: if we know that they are features in the 'common sense view of the world', it follows that they are true: it is self-contradictory to maintain that we know them to be features in the common sense view, and that yet they are not true; since to say that we know this, is to say that they are true (44). Therefore, common sense propositions are the kinds that we need to further prove or evidence for their existence such as his demonstration in his work titled *Proof of an External World*.

Evaluation

A critical assessment of Moore's defense of common sense, certainly could reveal many shortcomings. But we should not take it for granted that his defense of common sense is relevant, because of its role as a foundation to both science and philosophy. This is after he noted the many attacks by philosophers before him and during his time such as George Berkeley, Francis Bradley and John McTaggart and the skeptics on the possibility of common sense to communicate the true nature of reality to us. Hence, in the defense of common sense Moore begins with a list of common sense beliefs which he holds to be as fundamental, so clear as to be not worth mentioning, if it were not for the fact that some philosophers like the idealists and skeptics have said things that appear to be contrary to the propositions of common sense. Thus, his main objective was not solely to refute skepticism and idealism, rather the refutation of skepticism and idealism was a step towards his primary task of defending common sense. For according to Keith DeRose in "Four Forms of Skepticism", Moore considers a skeptical argument of Bertrand Russell's to the conclusion that he does not know, that this, is a pencil or that you are conscious. He demonstrates it thus:

What I can't help asking myself is this: is it, in fact, as certain that all four of these assumptions are true, as that I do know that this is a pencil or that you are conscious? I cannot help answering: it seems to me more certain that I do know that this is a pencil and that you are conscious, that any single one of these four assumptions are true, let alone all four (3).

Moore's defense of common sense as exposed in this work is conceived to be a starting point to philosophy and, as such, is not the sorts of claims that can be overturned by philosophical arguments. Part of his reason for specifying these propositions in such a careful way, was to make clear that he was not including among them every proposition that has commonly been believed at one or another time in history. For instance, the proposition that God exist and the inherent goodness or badness of human beings is not included in what Moore means by the truisms of his common sense, no matter how many people may believe them. Suffice to say that Moore's common sense is an appeal to ordinary language; Annalisa Coliva meant this when she argues thus:

...his truisms are not only known with certainty by (almost) everyone but they are also perfectly well understandable to any competent speaker of English. However, ... such a claim clarifies how, for Moore, there is, on the one hand, an ordinary meaning of words and sentences, and, on the other, a legitimate philosophical activity of analysis of that meaning (16).

For Moore there is an ordinary usage of language and a professional usage of language, such as the use of the term *Time* and *Reality*. To the idealist, the concept of time and reality has a special usage in their philosophy. This is not to say all philosophical problems are pseudo problems. What Moore intends to say is that, the reason why philosophical problems are often so difficult to answer is that sometimes it is not clear in the first place precisely what is being asked?

The first reaction to Moore's common sense philosophy was from Ludwig Wittgenstein, a fellow analytic philosopher from the ordinary language tradition. Both philosophers felt that, the problem in philosophy has to do with the correct usage of language and when once this is solved then everything can be resolved. Hence, ordinary language for them is the correct language. Wittgenstein's criticism is on Moore's use of the phrase 'I know' and 'I am certain'. This can be found in his work titled, *On Certainty*. In this work, Wittgenstein is more concerned on how the meaning of a word can be arrived at. This can also be seen in his other works *the Blue Book* and *the Philosophical Investigations*. "...he contends that in order to understand the exact meaning of a word or phrase or sentence, we have to put it in a context or situation in which it is used (Dutta 5). This reflects his arguments in the language game theory, but that, to get at an appropriate meaning of a word we should go beyond the language game to look at the world-picture. In the world-picture we can know the various ways in which a particular word is used, in it; we can observe the entire framework of propositions, concepts, beliefs and practices. This also represents what Wittgenstein refers to as 'form of life' which is an agreement in conceptual framework, beliefs, practices, social surrounding, and cultural way of life. Furthermore, Wittgenstein posits what is meant by the term world-picture. By world-picture he means something that is shared, which makes communication possible. However, the world-picture of one proposition may be different from that of another proposition of the same proposition at different times, which also shows the differences in their logical status. Thus, for Wittgenstein, Moore took it for granted that language also function in context. No wonder he notes, "Moore failed to note these facts he takes an unchangeable, unique, universally accepted framework of common sense into consideration and thus, failed to study the use of the phrases 'I know' and 'I am certain'" (Dutta 6).

What Wittgenstein is driving at is that taken in isolation, apart from the context in which a word is used or proposition as for instance, "I have two hands", this phrase cannot be said to belong to any particular world-picture, hence it has no use in that sense. Its meaning will

depend on the circumstance or context in which it is used and, on the world-picture which it belongs to:

If... someone says "I don't know if there's a hand here" he might be told "look closer". This possibility of satisfying oneself is part of the language-game is one of its essential features... if anatomy were under discussion I should say: "I know that twelve pairs of nerves lead from the brain. "I have never seen these nerves, and even a specialist will only have observed them in a few specimens... this just is how the word "know" is correctly used here (Dutta 7).

In Wittgenstein's view, Moore misconceives the phrase in question and the role they play in a particular speech community. Hence, his uses are incorrect. Thus, his defense of common sense is also inappropriate and therefore fails. In 1949, Norman Malcolm raised a similar objection to Moore's defense of common sense. This he focuses on the verb to know in his list of truisms. For Malcolm, the appropriate use of the expression 'I know' with certainty requires that; there be an open question and a doubt to be removed. And the person who makes the assertion be able to produce reasons in favor of his claim to knowledge. Also, it be possible to take an enquiry that could determine what the case is in Malcolm's view, none of these features is respected by Moore in the use of the verb 'to know' in his defense of common sense. "An objection that Malcolm takes into account is that Moore is here responding to a philosophical kind of doubt..., skeptical question is, 'How do you know that there is a hand here'? (Coliva 34). Thus, for Malcolm, there is no enquiry that could determine that reality is a hand, a body, etc.; the more touching and observing only goes to show that Moore misunderstood the nature of skeptical doubts, which cannot be put off by ordinary empirical propositions. Another line of objection to Moore's defense of common sense is Wai-Hung Wong's 'conceptualist idea'. For him, this conceptualist idea marks the difference between our everyday use of language and our philosophical usage. Thus, his aim is to "... show that the skeptic does not really have contradictory beliefs" (Wong 11). In his view, the theory has two lines of thought and the first of which is referred to as 'the temporal objection' and the second is 'the semantic objection'. According to Wong, the first line of thought states that, "... the difference between the everyday and the philosophical contexts implies temporal exclusion, that is, one cannot be in both contexts at the same time" (Wong 11). To make it clear what he meant by the temporal objection is that; though the skeptic's knowledge-beliefs may contradict his skeptical belief, he does not have a contradictory belief. This is because, "... he has those beliefs in two different contexts, which implies that he has them at two different times" (Wong 13). Thus, the skeptic is only having those doubts when he is in a skeptical frame of mind, which is brought about only by a philosophical thinking. On the other hand, when the skeptic is relieved of his philosophical mode of operation, he picks up his knowledge-beliefs which are necessary for his everyday life and put behind him, his skeptical belief. Thus, words should be given their contextual meaning.

G. E. Moore's renowned argument for the existence of the external world, famously illustrated by his declaration 'Here is one hand', has been subjected to continuous scrutiny by modern epistemologists. Although Moore's argument appears logically valid and straightforward, many recent philosophers argue that it is epistemically inadequate or inherently circular in its reasoning. Crispin Wright, in his work, *Warrant for Nothing and Foundations for Free*, contends that Moore's reasoning fails to effectively transfer epistemic justification from its premises to its conclusion. Wright maintains that, "once one seriously considers skeptical scenarios, such as the possibility of being deceived or dreaming, perceptual experiences can no longer serve as reliable grounds for belief in the external world". He goes on to emphasize that, "one's experience would

lose all tendency to corroborate the particular propositions about the material world which I normally take to be certain" (Wright 337). Wright further clarifies that the justification for Moore's claim 'I have hands' cannot be extended to justify the broader claim 'there is an external world', precisely because the very connection between perception and the external world is what skepticism fundamentally calls into question" (Wright 178). Michael Williams offers a broader and more critical perspective, conceding that Moore may successfully block specific skeptical claims. However, Williams argues that Moore's approach fails to address the deeper structural motivations behind skepticism. He suggests that Moore's defense does little to explain why skeptical arguments are flawed and contributes nothing towards the construction of a more robust epistemological theory. As Williams states, "Moore's strategy does not show what is wrong with skeptical arguments ... and contributes nothing to a broader understanding of epistemic justification" (93).

Another philosopher James Pryor, in his essay, *What's Wrong with Moore's Argument?* offers a related but distinct critique, acknowledging that Moore's argument might provide justification for someone who already accepts its conclusion. However, Pryor argues that the argument lacks persuasive power in a philosophical debate because it does not directly engage with the skeptic's underlying premises or reasoning. He describes Moore's approach as 'odd' since it merely reiterates the conclusion without effectively undermining the skeptic's challenge (Pryor 350). Consequently, Moore's argument is considered dialectically weak, capable of reassuring a believer but offering no compelling reason for a skeptic to change their mind. Building on these concerns, Nicholas Silins and Aidan McGlynn utilize Thomas Bayes' reasoning to expose further weaknesses in Moore's position. Silins argues that if skeptical scenarios are assigned even a small degree of initial credibility, the likelihood of Moore's conclusion being true based on sensory evidence significantly diminishes, causing Moore's perceptual beliefs to lose justificatory strength under conditions of doubt (Silins 76-78). McGlynn adds that Moore's confidence in common sense relies on epistemic conservatism -the idea that one is justified in maintaining beliefs in the absence of defeaters -but this conservatism becomes unstable when the entire belief system is under scrutiny (McGlynn 185-187).

G. E. Moore's defense of common sense, also encountered substantial criticism from contemporary philosophers, particularly his assertion that everyday beliefs like, "I have hands are more certain than skeptical hypotheses" (Moore 273). A primary objection is that Moore's argument is 'epistemically circular'. Critics like Barry Stroud, Ernest Sosa, etc., say he presupposes the reliability of sense perception to establish the existence of external objects, which is precisely the point skepticism challenges. For Stroud, "one cannot legitimately claim to know that an external world exists by depending on experiences whose trustworthiness is the very subject of the skeptic's doubt (Stroud 88). Sosa similarly argues that, "Moore's method fails to confront the skeptic on their own terms and does not provide the rigorous, reflective justification that philosophical inquiry demands" (Sosa 147). Critics Further highlight that Moore offers no clear, principled criteria for determining why certain beliefs should be considered undeniably true. This lack of criteria leaves his defense open to accusations of arbitrariness, especially considering historical precedents where widely accepted common sense beliefs, such as the geocentric model of the universe or phrenology, have later been disproven. This critical stance is further supported by naturalistic and cognitive scientific perspectives, which demonstrate that perception and intuition are frequently prone to bias and error (Churchland 308). Another significant line of criticism originates from contextualist epistemologists like David Lewis and Stewart Cohen, who argue that the validity of knowledge claims is highly dependent on their context. They contend that what qualifies as 'knowing' something can vary significantly

based on the specific conversational or philosophical setting. Lewis articulates this by, “stating that while individuals might ‘know many things, in the ordinary sense’, in philosophical contexts where skeptical possibilities are prominent, their knowledge is considerably diminished” (Lewis 550). Cohen similarly asserts that, “in situations where skeptical scenarios are raised, ‘the standards for knowledge rise’, thereby weakening the persuasive force of Moore's assertions” (91). Additionally, critics have pointed to the phenomenon of ‘Moorean inversion’, where a skeptic can reverse Moore's argument. This allows the skeptic to propose, for instance, “If I don't know that I'm not a brain in a vat, then I don't know I have hands” (Stroud 92). This reversal suggests that Moore's strategy does not genuinely refute skepticism but rather relies on a clash of differing intuitions, leaving the epistemological dispute unresolved and without a definitive conclusion (Stroud 92).

What we have observed above from Wittgenstein, Malcolm, Wong, Wright, Williams, Pryor, Silins, McGlynn, Stroud, Sosa and others is their objection to Moore's use of the phrase ‘I have hands’ which is tagged ‘epistemically circular’ and ‘I know’. Hence, on another note, we wish to point at something different in Moore's thesis in his *A Defense of Common Sense and Some Main Problems in Philosophy*. This has to do with the dichotomy between belief and knowledge, which for Moore, in his work, can be used interchangeably. But in our opinion both words cannot be used in that sense. In his work, titled, *Some Main Problems of Philosophy*, Moore implicitly used the phrase ‘common sense believes’ to mean knowledge of an object when he stated that, “... common sense believes that there are in the universe, at least two different kinds of things. There are... materials objects... and... mental acts (4), whereas he uses the phrase ‘I know’ in his *A Defense of Common Sense*”, they are, in fact, a set of propositions, every one of which ... I know, with certainty...” (Moore *Philosophical Papers* 33). This is one of the inconsistencies that is inherent in his postulation. To this extent, the claim we have of the existence of an object does not mean that the object exists in the true nature of the term; one can hold a belief claim of something without really having knowledge of it. If as stated by Moore that, “the most important... thing which philosophers have tried to do is no less than..., to give a general description of the whole of the universe...” (1), then this description cannot be based on their beliefs but on truth that is objective. Since many of the things we commonly believe in has changed with time, as for instance, it was generally believed that ‘the earth is at the center of the universe’ of course this notion has changed with the modern and contemporary view as follows, that, the sun is at the center of the universe and that, neither the earth nor the sun is at the center of the universe.

Summary and Conclusion

From the foregoing, we saw that G.E. Moore's defense of common sense is primarily as a counter to Hegelian idealism. Neo-Hegelians like Francis Bradley and James McTaggart argued that ‘time’, ‘space’, and material reality are not truly existent, positing instead a monistic ‘absolute’ and denying material existence. This contradiction with everyday experience prompted Moore to champion common sense view theory. Moore contended that the common sense view of the world is ‘absolutely true’ and ‘universally held’ by nearly everyone. He proposed it as a fundamental starting point for both philosophy and science. To prove its veracity, Moore presented what he calls ‘truisms’, -propositions he claimed to know with certainty, such as the continuous existence of his body, the environment, and the presence of other human bodies and their experiences. He clarified that ‘true’ implied entirely true, not partially false. Moore argued that skeptics and idealists’ denial of these common sense propositions are ‘self-contradictory’, as they implicitly assume the existence of what they deny. He offered four

demonstrations against the idealist thesis, highlighting logical inconsistencies and asserting that his truisms are, in fact, true, hence invalidating arguments against them. Despite its foundational role, Moore's defense faced significant criticisms. Ludwig Wittgenstein and Norman Malcolm questioned Moore's use of 'I know'. Wittgenstein emphasized that language's meaning is context-dependent, operating within a 'world-picture' or 'form of life', which Moore failed to consider. Malcolm argued that 'I know' with certainty requires an open question, doubt, and reasons, which Moore did not provide against philosophical skepticism. Wong introduced the 'temporal exclusion' idea, suggesting that skeptical beliefs occur in different contexts or times, thus not constituting inherent contradictions. This study also noted an inconsistency in Moore's interchangeable use of 'belief' and knowledge', considering that common beliefs can undergo disproof over time. Since many of the things we commonly believe in has changed with time, as for instance, it was generally believed that, 'the earth is at the center of the universe' of course this notion has changed with the modern and contemporary view as follows, that, the sun is at the center of the universe and that, neither the earth nor the sun is at the center of the universe. On another note, modern and contemporary epistemologists like Wright, Williams, Pryor, Silins, McGlynn, Stroud, Sosa and others hold primarily the objection that Moore's argument is 'epistemically circular' which is seen in Moore's use of the phrase 'I have hands'; they say he presupposes the reliability of sense perception to establish the existence of external objects, which is precisely the point skepticism challenges.

Ultimately, Moore's primary goal was to defend common sense as a foundational concept, using the refutation of skepticism and idealism as a means to that end. His methodology relied heavily on the analysis and clarification of ordinary language. This essay underscores the enduring philosophical challenge of defining knowledge and the role of doubt. Which is why Philosophy, according to Aristotle, began when human's curiosity and wonder caused them to enquire about the nature of things. Thus, the question of truth is one of the most important questions of our life which no man can do without in his concrete existence. This work from the onset was confronted with the question of what *really* is common sense? How can we prove common sense propositions to be true or false? And how can common sense communicate any valid knowledge to us? Hence, when we try to describe how we know something, we discover that we do not really have a clear idea of what it means to know. In Bertrand Russell's view, the theory of knowledge is a product of doubt. He holds that when we ask ourselves whether we really know anything at all, we are led into an examination of knowing, in the hope of being able to distinguish trustworthy beliefs from such as are untrustworthy. No wonder the history of science and thought is replete with theories that have been thoroughly believed by the wisest men and were then thoroughly discredited. Repeatedly people have attempted to impose their beliefs on others and punish those who rejected them. There have been many 'martyrs' whose 'crimes' were that they challenged the 'infallible wisdom' of the rulers of their society. If so much, of what had been taken as certain, could prove to be false or doubtful, then how can we ever be certain of anything, which is why in our critical evaluation we were of the view that the common sense concept of Moore should not be taken for granted that his defense of common sense is relevant, because of its role as a foundation to both science and philosophy.

Moore's aim was not just to refute skepticism and idealism, but, the refutation of skepticism and idealism was an attempt towards his main task of defending common sense, of course, using the tool of ordinary language. Hence, while common sense view is his theory, ordinary language is his method. That is why, for Moore, philosophy is the analysis and description of the world as a whole. It is of common sense statements of ordinary language;

which the task of philosophy is to analyze and clarify them. With this Moore could also be termed as a leading proponent of the ordinary language philosophy.

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