# On Common Sense, Moore and Wittgenstein

## *Kelly Dean Jolley*

*Let us leave theories there and return to here's here.* Finnegans Wake
*Uncommon sense is common nonsense* Chesterton

## Introduction[19]

Common sense. My aim here is to talk a little common sense about common sense. This is harder than it sounds. Especially if your hope is, as mine is, to avoid advancing a theory about common sense.

What I hope to do is to sneak up on common sense; and I hope by my indirection to find common sense's direction out. But that does not mean (if you will forgive the phrase) that I hope to catch common sense with its pants down: I am not interested in anything hidden. You might say that I hope to catch common sense with its pants *up*, in all its everyday splendor. I hope to catch common sense in its very activity as common sense and to set it down without philosophical preservatives.

I recall that Socrates once described his activity as argument mixed with music. In what follows, I am going to mix argument with narrative. I have a story about common sense to tell. I do not have the time to buttress each section of my narrative with argument. However, I rate my story a good one--a good enough story,

in fact, for its very quality as a story to supply it with some probative force.

That reminds me. I am going to talk about philosophy, about G. E. Moore and about Wittgenstein. I am going to talk a little common sense about philosophy, and about them. To pull this off, I may need what the enemies of the Indians in all the old American movies had--a forked tongue. We will see. At any rate, the first section of this paper--this section--is much too short; the second and third sections are much too tricky; and the fourth section is much too quick and high-flying, especially the last part of it.

I begin with Moore. Moore sets out to defend common sense against philosophers who attack it. What these philosophers attack Moore understands as a long list of truisms. The truisms are, Moore thinks, "such obvious truisms as not to be worth stating" (32). He states them anyway; and sets out to defend them. Because Moore's truisms--and especially the notion of truism--will be of concern to me, I note a few of Moore's truisms:

> 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...I am a human being, and have, at different times since my body was born, had many different experiences, of each of many different kinds...I have had expectations with regard to the future, and many beliefs of other

kinds, both true and false; I have thought of imaginary things and persons and incidents, in the reality of which I did not believe; I have had dreams; and I have had feelings of many different kinds...(33-34)

To attack any of these truisms, to attack any part of the commonsense view of the world, is for Moore, "quite certainly the height of absurdity" (45).

Much is puzzling in just this pinch of Moore. Notice that if attacking common sense is "the height of absurdity", what are we to make of defending it? It is safe to say that what we only absurdly attack we only absurdly defended. If the notion of an attack on common sense is absurd, the notion of a defense of it is absurd as well. No one can defend what no one can attack, and vice versa. (I am commenting on how "defending" and "attacking" are used, not confessing to adversarial impotence.) So why does Moore claim he is defending common sense?

## Truisms

Moore claims that he is defending truisms. His claim is straight out of the odditorium. (By *that* I mean that the claim sounds odd.) Now, I admit that the odd sound is not particularly loud, at least not at first. But let me try to make it louder. I begin by describing truisms. I will argue for my description along the way.

I do not think that truisms can be defended, not Moore's way, anyway. Truisms are not objects of belief and are not objects of knowledge. No one can know (believe, doubt, suspect) a truism. No one can take a propositional attitude toward a truism. Our relationship with truisms is not of that sort. Of course, I can know a truism, t, in the sense that I am perfectly familiar with it; and, I can also know that t is a truism; but, I cannot know that t, where t is a truism. If I know that t is a truism, claiming to know that t would

make nonsense. And, if two of us are undecided about whether t is a truism, realizing that one of us knows that t is not going to qualify t as a truism--realizing that would disqualify t as a truism. If I can in fact know (believe, doubt, suspect) that t, then t is not a truism. I can mistakenly believe that I believe (doubt, suspect) that t, where t is a truism. Such a mistake is a part of the natural history of many philosophical problems. (I will come back to this point.) Truisms are, so to speak, too obvious for propositional attitude words; they are beyond believing and knowing.

I am describing truisms. I am not trying to word- or mystery-monger. Part of the reason why what I have just said may sound that way is that what I have just said appears to make truisms something extraordinary, or to ascribe some extraordinary property to them. But what I have just said only exhibits the office that truisms hold in our lives: Truisms are standards of truth. As such, truisms are not false and they are not true. Neither true nor false, truisms are not propositions--although they are proposition-like--and they are not the objects of propositional attitudes. I can best contest my unflattering monger-status by considering a remark from PI. In *PI* 50, Wittgenstein describes the office of the standard meter stick in Paris:

> There is one thing of which we can say neither that is one meter long, nor that it is not one meter long, and that is the standard meter in Paris. -- But this is, of course, not to ascribe any extraordinary property to it, but only to mark its peculiar role in the language-game of measuring with a meter-rule.

What Wittgenstein describes here is something that needs describing. It is all-too-easy to lose sight of the office, or role, of standards. The pressure to treat our

standards other than standards is tremendous, especially when philosophizing. We stare at a truism, on the page or on the blackboard, or we hear one, and we find ourselves wondering: "Is this true (or false)?" After all, "There exists at present a green coat, which is my coat" is true (and, it could be false), so why isn't "There exists at present a living human body, which is my body" true (or false)? The answer is that the first is not a truism, but the second is (or is at least plausibly a truism): The first could turn out to be false; and, if it did, normally little would change except the color of my winter wardrobe. But if the second could turn out false, I would lose my sense of what truth is. It is important to note that I would not lose my sense of what truth is because I regard the second as true; but rather I would lose my sense of what truth is because the second is among my standards of truth. If it could turn out true, I would *in that case* lose my sense of what truth is as well. Without standards of truth, the language-games that involve truth and falsity would lose their point--*all cognitive bets would be off.* Standards of truth make the language-games involving truth and falsity possible, just as the standard meter makes the language-game of metric measurement possible.[20]

One reason why it is so hard to appreciate our standards when philosophizing is a picture we have of what we are doing. We picture ourselves, as philosophers, occupying the Standard-free Zone. While in the Zone, and only while in the Zone, it is proper to ask Manichean questions like "Is this standard *really* a standard?" or "Are we justified in

following this standard?" or "Does the sense we make make sense?" or "Is our grammar grammatical?". The obvious and Catch-22-ish problem with these questions is that we only properly ask them in the one place in which they are not answerable.

But back to business. Consider the standard meter: Without a standard meter, the language-game of measuring with a meter-stick would lose its point. Unless we fix the meaning of "a meter" by the standard meter, nothing is or is not a meter long.[21]

---

[20] I should note here that I am not concerned to sort Moore's putative truisms, trying to decide which are and which are not truisms. I think that many, *mutatis* various *mutandis*, are truisms. But my goal here is to describe the office of truisms in our lives. Moore's putative truisms will serve that goal well enough.

[21] It can be hard to get all this into focus, particularly because of the way that philosophers tend to think about concepts. We tend philosophically to think about concepts as abstractionists think about them: we think of concepts as recognitional capacities. So, we think that a concept like 'meter' must have been gotten by abstraction: we must have abstracted a particular property of things, and having abstracted it, become capable of recognizing it when it confronts us. This way of thinking makes it seem as though the choice of the standard meter could not have been autonomous at all. The choice, this way of thinking goes, must have been constrained, entirely constrained, by the particular property that we abstracted and now recognize. This way of thinking has things topsy-turvey, however. There were constraints on the choice of the standard meter; but the constraints were all internal to the procedure--metric measurement--of which the standard meter was to be part.

Constraints of these sorts do not seem like constraints at all to the abstractionist. These sorts of constraints comes from the wrong side of the logical tracks, so to speak--they are constraints involving us (the amount of time certain procedures will cost us, the amount of trouble, etc.), and *we* ought not to factor in. For the abstractionist, a procedure--metric measurement--can only be constrained by the things to which the procedure is applied. The procedure must, somehow, be anchored only in the things to which it is applied--*abstracted* only from them. How else could the procedure of metric measurement purport to measure the things it measures? Any autonomy in the choice of the standard meter looks to the abstractionist as if it could only result in opening the possibility of what Peter Geach dubbed "conceptual thought's falsifying reality"

Unless we fix a standard meter, calling something measured "a meter long" means nothing. For example, if two people claim to be measuring something with a "meter-stick", but there is no standard meter stick, it is not clear what either is doing, or could think he is doing, even if their "answers" "agree". If their "answers" "disagree", how is do they "settle" the matter? By fistfight? How would either man know whether his current "measurement" "agreed" with any past "measurement"? How could either know that there had been any measuring going on, past or present?[22]

---

(*Mental Acts* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1957) pg. 40).

Carefully diagnosing and deconstructing abstractionism is a huge task. Geach works toward it in *Mental Acts* and in "Abstraction Reconsidered" (in Ginet, C. and Shoemaker, S., eds., *Knowledge and Reality* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983) pp. 159-173). Robert Brandom works to a similar end in his *Making it Explicit* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1994), pp. 330-333.

Brandom argues that worries about a gap between procedures and things, worries about "losing the world", are misplaced. He notes (pg. 332) that our procedures incorporate actual things. They are solid—as one might say, *corporeal*; they involve actual bodies, including both our own and the others (animate and inanimate) we have practical and empirical dealings with.

What Brandom brings to light is the fact that saying that the constraints are internal to the procedure does not leave out the things involved in the application of the procedure (unless, of course, we have a Manichean picture of practices).

[22] One worry that may be felt at this point is that my handling of the standard meter stick plays fast and loose with Bivalence. The worry is that denying that anything is or is not a meter long until the standard meter has been fixed flouts Bivalence. For the sake of clarity, let's put the Principle of Bivalence this way: "For any predicate P and any object x, P is either true of x or false of x". I hope my response to the worry can be anticipated. My response is that until the standard meter has been fixed, "...is one meter long", e.g., cannot be among the possible interpretations of P. Since the standard meter itself fixes the meaning of the predicate "one

---

I multiply these questions just to heighten the vertigo that I hope set in when I asked the first one. The same sort of vertigo should set in when we deny truisms their role in the language-games of truth and falsity. Unless we have standards of truth, our talk of truth and falsity means nothing.[23]

There are, I think, two *primus visus* promising strategies for denying that truisms have the office in our lives I have

---

meter long", it cannot itself fall under the predicate. The standard meter is a predicate-fixative.

When we fix the standard meter, we don't change the things that we navigate among day-to-day. True, before fixing the standard meter, metric talk made no sense--nothing was or was not a meter long. After fixing the standard meter, metric talk does make sense. But that does not mean that any of the things change. It does not mean that a table, e.g., grew or shrank the night before the standard meter was fixed. Nothing true of the table the night before is false about it the day after (assuming the table spent the night unmolested). Of course, we can the day after say true (or false) things about he table's metric length, something we could not do the day before. But if this means the table has changed, it could only mean (borrowing and extending Peter Geach's term) that it has Cambridge-changed. Whatever was true of the table the night before is still true of it the day after (and whatever false, false); and, even though there are new-fangled metric truths (and falsehoods) to tell about the table the day after, the table has not actually changed. It would be best to say that *we* have changed, that we have added a new procedure-- metric measurement--to our cupboard of procedures. We can do something the day after we could not do the night before. But the table knows no new tricks. It underwent no non-Cambridge change in the night.

[23] One thing that needs emphasis is that the distinction between a truism and a non-truism is use-sensitive. Something can be a truism on one use, and not on another. Nothing need be a truism across all its uses. For more on the notion of use-sensitivity, cf. Charles Travis' "Facts about Truth-bearing and Content" in Travis, ed. *Meaning and Interpretation* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1986), pp. 233-269, and his *Uses of Sense* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), *passim*. Cf. also note 6.

been trying to show that they have. One strategy is to attack Wittgenstein's comments about the standard meter, and so deprive me of the analogue I need. The other strategy is to attack the analogy itself, granting Wittgenstein's comments about the standard meter, but claiming that truisms do not hold an analogous office in our lives. I reckon the second strategy the most promising of the two. However, I respond to the first, briefly, first.

One reason why Wittgenstein's description of the standard meter might seem muddled is that we tend to conflate measuring something with comparing one thing with another. When I measure my table with a meter-stick, it is tempting to suppose that all I am really doing is comparing the length of my table with the length of the meter-stick. So, if my table measures a meter in length, it does so because its length is precisely comparable with my meter-stick's length. However, as I said, this conflates measuring and comparing.

This also begs the question against Wittgenstein, since it assumes as true precisely what Wittgenstein's description makes meaningless, namely the putative claim that the meter-stick has a length. I point out the question-begging, but I am not going to rest my response on it. I can all-too-easily imagine someone shrugging his shoulders at the charge and commenting, "I'm not begging the question; what I am saying is self-evident. I only look like I am begging the question because Wittgenstein is denying the self-evident". Such a comment would begin a downward dialectical spiral I do not want to begin.

Measuring my table with the standard meter is not comparing the length of my table with the length of the standard meter. *Comparing* one thing *with* another (in the sense that is relevant here) requires treating each as resembling the other in

some respect. The respect in which they resemble each other is what allows comparison. The trouble that someone who thinks of measurement as comparison runs into is the trouble of allowing a standard to resemble the things for which it is a standard. If a putative standard resembles the things for which it is a standard, then the putative standard cannot be a standard. If the meter-stick has a length, and if the meter-stick's length resembles the length of my table, then the meter-stick cannot be the standard of measurement I appeal to when measuring my table. To measure my table, I will need another meter-stick, and another, until I get to one that does not resemble my table.

Let me come at this slightly differently. When I compare the length of one thing with the length of another, the type of conclusion I get will involve, explicitly or implicitly, a comparative. If I compare the length of Man-o-War's stride with the length of my car, I will get a conclusion of the form: "Man-o-War's stride is *longer than* (*as long as; shorter than*) my car." But when I measure Man-o-War's stride, I do not get a conclusion that involves a comparative. My conclusion will be of, say, the form: "Man-o-War's stride is 9 meters long". When I measure Man-o-War's stride, I do not conclude that his stride is longer than (as long as; shorter than) anything. I found out how long his stride is. Finding that out equips me for certain comparisons, should I want to make any. That it so equips me may explain, or partially explain, conflating measuring with comparing. But finding out how long the stride is is not making a comparison.

Another reason Wittgenstein's description might seem muddled is captured in the exasperated response to *PI* 50 that teachers of *PI* often hear: "But we call it the standard *meter*" The best way to

respond to this is to distinguish between naming and describing. (It is no accident, by the way, that Wittgenstein makes just this distinction in *PI* 49.) When I choose a particular object as the standard meter, I am naming it "the standard meter". I identify it as the means we will use for determining metrical length. Identifying the object as the meter-stick is not describing the object as one meter long. I should not be describing it as one meter long, because I have not measured it. (I am surely not guessing. I have prepared no place for a guess.) Naming an object "the standard meter" does not involve measuring. Instead, the naming is part of the preparations for measuring. Naming an object "the standard meter" is to inaugurate the object, to place the object in office. So the response "But we call it the standard *meter*" is true in that the standard meter holds a particular office in our lives. But it is false in that we do not describe it as a meter long when we call it "the standard meter".[24]

---

[24] It may seem that I have sinned by omitting Saul Kripke's famous discussion of the standard meter in *Naming and Necessity* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1972), pp. 54-57. I have so far steered clear of Kripke largely because of the difference between Kripke's aims in discussing the standard meter and Wittgenstein's. (The difference is clear from the context of both discussions.) Despite the difference in aims, Kripke claims that Wittgenstein is mistaken in thinking that the standard meter neither is nor is not one meter long. Kripke says: "If the stick [the standard meter] is...39.37 inches long (I assume we have some different standard for inches), why isn't it one meter long?" (pg. 54). Treating the parting question here as rhetorical, I grant that the conditional statement is true. But, of course, the trouble is the antecedent, and its justificatory parenthesis. Is the standard meter 39.37 inches long? Do we have a different standard for inches? I think the answer to my second question is "Yes, but..." While there is a different standard for inches, *it is still a standard for length*, as is the standard meter. As such, one cannot (intelligibly) measure the other unless the second is taken from

Now for a response to the second strategy. I cannot meet the second strategy head-on. I know of no straightforward way to convince you that truisms hold the office I think they hold in our lives. My response to the strategy will consist only in my sketching the way in which truisms hold a standard meter-ish place in our lives. (There are disanalogies: Primarily, the founding (standard meter)/finding (truisms) disanalogy.) As I suggested above, truisms are standards of truth and, as such, they are neither true nor false. So they are not the objects of propositional attitudes; and, so, *a fortiori*, they are not the objects of factives. How, then, do truisms enter into our lives? How do we relate to them? Let me put it this way: *We abide by truisms.* Truisms are the standards of a life in which there is truth or falsity. Although truisms lack truth-conditions, they do have *abidance-conditions*. The abidance-conditions allow us to differentiate among truisms. More importantly, they allow us to recognize that a life--or a stretch of a life--is one that makes sense or one that does not.

Revealing the abidance-conditions for a truism is difficult. The best way to reveal the abidance-conditions for a truism is by describing a language-game, a

---

office. Either way, the answer to my first question is "No, but...": if the stick is the standard meter, if it is in office, it is not 39.37 inches long and it is not not 39.37 inches long. If the stick is not the standard meter, if the stick is taken from office, then *the stick* may be 39.37 inches long, but that fails to make the standard meter 39.37 inches long.

Kripke attempts to transubstantiate the office the stick holds into a property of the stick. This is made clear by the remark prefacing the remark I quoted above: "[Being such that one can say neither that it is one meter long nor that it is not one meter long] seems to be a very 'extraordinary property', actually, for any stick to have" (pg. 54). Put another way, Kripke turns Wittgenstein's logical discussion into a metaphysical discussion. (This should help shed some light on the difference in aims I mentioned.)

language-game of truth and falsity. In such describing, the abidance-conditions show themselves, even if they are not, individually and explicitly, described. Normally, we can describe abidance-conditions, individually and explicitly, only when someone violates them.

I am tempted to try to say more about abidance-conditions than this; I am tempted to try at least to say something more contentful. However, I think that more contentfully characterizing the place of truisms in our lives is liable to mislead in at least two ways: (1) It is liable to mislead in that it may blind us to the likely variety among the abidance-conditions of particular truisms and (2) it is liable to mislead in that the characterizing will sound as though I am explaining or justifying the abidance-conditions, instead of describing them. To do anything more with abidance-conditions, and to do it non-misleadingly, I would need to supply particular examples, to describe particular language-games of truth and falsity. I do not have the time to do this, but, luckily, *On Certainty* is replete with such examples. Those examples exhibit truisms and show the abidance-conditions for truisms.

I suspect that truisms, or that their abidance-conditions, are what supply the *form* of *a form of life*. When Wittgenstein says that forms of life are what must be accepted (pg. 226), notice that he is not using "accepted" as a propositional attitude: We do not say "I accept *that* a form of life..."--that's ungrammatical. (To accept *that* there is a particular form of life is to miss W's point.) We *accept a form of life*--in roughly the way we might accept a gift (forms of life are *the given*, after all) or the way in which we might accept another person: "I accept Tom for the person he is".

I have been describing truisms. I have done this so that the oddity of

Moore's claim to be defending truisms sounds loudly enough for all of us to hear it. Insofar as we neither know nor believe truisms, insofar as they are neither true nor false, Moore's defense of them is hard to fathom. He cannot know each truism with certainty; he cannot defend each truism's truth. Moore may believe he can do both, but his second-order belief is false. Moore is confused.

Moore's confusion is unfortunately common: The metaphysician shows it in arguing that a truism is true, or necessarily true, or indubitable; the skeptic shows it in arguing that a truism is false, or necessarily false, or dubitable. Perhaps disputes between metaphysicians and skeptics limp along interminably because, having mistreated a truism, each has lost his sense of what the relevant truths are. Even though all cognitive bets are off, each still believes that he is playing hand after hand after hand. Sitting at a card table, going through the motions of playing, each thinks he must after all be playing.[25]

---

[25] One very general problem my handling of truisms faces is that it looks to have elective and non-elective affinities with a brand of anti-realism--a brand called "expressivism" by Crispin Wright in his *Truth and Objectivity* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1992). The charge of anti-realism arises because I treat truisms--what by all surface syntatical features look like sentences with genuine assetoric content--as lacking genuine assertoric content. As Wright understands expressivism, it holds "that the possession of genuine assertoric content is a relatively *deep* feature of the sentences of a discourse, with its overt syntax can serve to mask, or to simulate" (pg. 28). I take Wright's use of the term "deep" to consciously echo Wittgenstein's "depth grammar". That is, I take Wright to be saying that the expressivist treats the possession of genuine assertoric content to be something settled, not by surface grammar, but by depth grammar. The problem with expressivism, from Wright's point of view, is that expressivism lacks a "well-conceived" notion of depth grammar--it lacks a well-conceived notion of deep assertoric content, e.g. (pg. 36).

## Common Sense

Moore thinks of common sense as something we believe. This is wrong-headed. So what might common sense be, if we believe it?? One thing it might be is a theory or creed. Consider.

> That Christ was crucified for our sins is a tenet of Christianity.

> That the planets affect our behavior is a

> tenet of astrology.

> That there is no matter is a tenet of Idealism.

Philosophers often take "common sense" logically to rime with the "Christianity", or "astrology", or etc. For philosophers, common sense is in Theoretical or Creedal space: it is the Theory of Common Sense, or it is the Common Sense Creed.

However, when Moore lists his truisms, he is surely not theorizing. "I theorize that there exists at present a living human body, which is my body. This body was born at a certain time in the past..." This sounds funny. And, anyway, how could we compose a theory of *truisms*, even in Moore's sense of the term? *Perhaps* a theory needs to preserve truisms (in some way) or to be reconcilable with them, but we make no theory of them. Einstein, as almost everyone knows, proposed the Theory of Relativity. We can be sure that at some point Einstein theorized. We can also be sure that the Theory of Relativity is not composed of truisms. The Theory was put to the test, checked and double-checked. However, we can put no truism to the test, or check it, not even once. If we put something to the test, check it and double-check it, then it is not a truism.

So Moore is not theorizing. Is he, perhaps, stating a creed, the Common Sense Creed? After all, we have the Apostle's Creed, which begins

> I believe in God the Father Almighty, creator of heaven and earth; and in Jesus Christ, His only Son, our Lord, who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary...

Perhaps Moore's list of truisms is a creed, too.

> I believe in the existence at present of a living human body, which is my body. This

---

There is a tangle of important issues here, and a full response to them is beyond what I can now offer. I grant, at least provisionally, that I am guilty as charged, i.e., guilty of (something with an affinity to) expressivism. I do treat what otherwise look like truth-valuable sentences as not really being truth-valuable sentences. But the issue is complicated: I do not deny that what on one use is a truism can, on another use, be a truth-valuable sentence. As Wittgenstein argues in *On Certainty*, truisms (he calls them "hinge propositions", among other things) are, on some uses, truth-valuable. My handling of truisms requires that their truth-value-ability, or lack of it, is use-sensitive, not use-insensitive. Whether we are confronted with a truism or with a truth-valuable sentence is not something determined by the surface grammar of what confronts us. Instead, we need to examine the use of what confronts us—its depth grammar—to see whether or not it has genuine assertoric content. Genuine assertoric content is not something a set of words carries from use to use. Whether a set of words' content is assertoric, interrogative or optative is not something revealed by its surface syntactical features. Of course, even if I am right, Wright's complaint about a "well-conceived" notion of deep content is still in place; but it is, in an important respect, beside the point. I am not proposing that there are any use-insensitive criteria of deep content. Decisions about deep content will have to be made case-by-case, and the criteria appealed to or involved in one case many not be among the criteria appealed to or involved in another (not even defeasibly). If denying that there are any use-insensitive criteria of deep content means that my notion of deep content is not well-conceived (and this is how I understand Wright's complaint), then it is not well-conceived. But I do not think that use-insensitive criteria of deep content are well-conceived. For now, I will live with only this "charge: counter-charge" response to Wright, while acknowledging that more needs to be said.

body was born at a certain time in the past, and has existed contin-uously ever since, though not without undergoing changes...

The Common Sense Creed. If there is such a Creed, I guess most of us must have adopted it, although I am pretty sure few of us went through any ceremony when we did so, or have ever recited it in common with anyone else. I am also pretty sure that few of us were ever taught the Common Sense Creed--not even in grammar school.

We could change that. Moore could be part of the grammar school curriculum... Little kids could be taught the Pledge of Allegiance and then the Defense of Common Sense, the Common Sense Creed. Even little Johnny needs to know that there exists at present a living human body, which is his body. Every day little Johnny can come home one truism smarter, and can amuse his family by telling them that at school he learned that he "has had many different experiences, of each of many different kinds". Later, when little Johnny is no longer so little, perhaps he will rebel, and reject the Creed. Undoubtedly, a philosophy course will be to blame. Anyway, we could all recite the Creed, say, before baseball games, or before court is called to order, or when joining the army.

So, is Moore stating the Common Sense Creed? Clearly, there is something queer and comical, something *queerical* (a useful term of philosophical criticism), in the notion that he was. Notwithstanding Moore's Defense, there is no Common Sense Creed. No one was ever taught the Creed and no one ever adopted it or rejected it. Common sense is neither a theory nor a creed.

Before I go on, I need to stop for a moment and take stock. What I have just been doing is toying with common ways of misunderstanding common sense I have

tried to exhibit them as misunderstandings by playing out the nonsense that each creates. If common sense is neither a theory nor a creed, then it is hard to see how it is going to be a candidate for a defense or attack. Common sense is neither a theory nor a creed because it is, in part, a grab bag of truisms, and no grab bag of truisms will play the part of a theory or a creed. As a grab bag of truisms, common sense needs no defense, so any "attempt" to defend it is going to be nonsense, philosophical bustle, like getting on horseback aboard a boat. Nonetheless, Moore was right to put his finger on truisms, even if he misconstrued them: "truisms" are part of the grammar of "common sense"; that's why I have spent so much time on them.

Before you accuse me of advancing a theory about common sense, let me point something out. Our everyday talk about common sense is much more like everyday talk of the standards or rules than it is our everyday talk of theories or creeds. When we say of someone, as we often do, that "he does not have an ounce of common sense", we are not criticizing him for having or for lacking a particular belief, for failing to hold a tenet of some theory or creed. We talk about him as someone who defies comprehension, someone whose talk or actions fail to make sense. When we chide someone--"That's just common sense"--we chide them for citing a truism as if they were informing us of something or advancing a claim. Since this is the way we talk of common sense, I deny the accusation of advancing a theory. All I have done is to describe common sense commonsensically. Or, to put this another way, all I have done is to show you our *concept* of common sense; I have not offered a *theory* of common sense.

(I will, however, adventure the following: Just as most people absorb a language, their native language, most

absorb common sense. And, just as our absorbing of our native language is quite different from our learning of any second language, so too our absorbing of common sense is quite different from our learning of any theory or creed, etc. My guess is that we absorb common sense as we absorb our native language; but that's just my guess.)

Earlier, I hesitated in describing common sense as wholly a grab bag of truisms. If you recall, I said that we should describe common sense that way *in part*. Beyond being a grab bag of truisms, common sense is also a motley of procedures. The important thing to realize is that these procedures are sense-making procedures, not truth-decision procedures. The motley of procedures that partly compose common sense is a motley of procedures for making sense of things, not for deciding whether things are true or false. Examples of these procedures are: reminding ourselves of the kinds of statements we make about things; putting remarks into context; and, figuring out the grammar of a statement. Since I will discuss these procedures individually in the next section, I will refrain from discussing them individually here. Instead, I want briefly to elucidate the distinction between sense-making and truth-decision procedures.

Sense-making procedures are procedures that are prior to truth-decision procedures. Before we can decide whether something is true or false, we must first decide whether it makes sense, and, if so, what sense it makes. This means that sense-making procedures are related to truth-decision procedures in that sense-making procedures are negative touchstones of the application of truth-decision procedures. If something fails to make sense, then it fails to be a candidate for truth-decision procedures. What this comes to, more particularly, is that failing

to make sense renders truth-decision procedures inapplicable to the thing. Failing to make sense is thus to fail to be truth-valuable at all. If, for example, sense cannot be made of a string of words, then the string of words is not false, but is rather a farrago.[26] Understood in this way, the procedures of common sense are not to be understood as procedures for finding out how things actually are, but are instead procedures for something like finding out how things intelligibly might be.

Sense-making procedures, the motley of procedures that partly compose common sense, are not going to be open to defense of the sort Moore tries to provide for common sense. Such procedures are not, clearly, truth-valuable. (What *procedure* is truth-valuable?) In fact, it is not clear that sense-making procedures can be defended at all. To adapt a distinction of Wittgenstein's, the concepts of 'sense' and 'nonsense' *belong* to sense-making procedures and do not *fit* them (*PI* 136). The handle we have on the concepts is no firmer than the handle we have on the procedures. To call a sense-making procedure into question is to call into question the concepts of 'sense' and 'nonsense'. We do not have an independent handle on the concepts, as the Prince had an independent handle on Cinderella's slipper, such that we can try to *fit* the concepts onto the procedures. Any attempt to defend the procedures, then, is going to have to employ the procedures, since any such defense is going to have to be judged (prior to anything else) to make sense.

Moore's claim to be defending truisms is odd; so, too, is his claim to be defending common sense. Common sense

---

[26] Like the distinction between a truism and a non-truism, the distinction between what is truth-valuable and what is a farrago is use-sensitive: what is truth-valuable on one use may be a farrago on another, and vice versa.

admits of no defense. A defense might make sense if common sense were a theory or a creed, but it is not. If we know something is a truism, if we know something to be a procedure of common sense, then *that's that*. Common sense needs no defense because defending it is unintelligible.

## Wittgenstein and (The Claim Of) Common Sense

As I turn to the topic of Wittgenstein and common sense, I want to pick once more at Moore. I realize that this may by now strike you as an exasperating exercise, but I am only taking Moore at his words.

Moore also calls what he is defending the "commonsense view of the world" (44). In There is a currently fashionable word for the English phrase "view of the world". That word is "Weltanschauung". One way of understanding Moore then is as calling common sense a Weltanschauung. In *PI*, Wittgenstein worries about whether his practice of philosophy is or constitutes a Weltanschauung. At 122, he writes

> The concept of a perspicuous representation is of fundamental significance for us. It earmarks the form of account we give, the way we look at things. (Is this a `Weltanschauung'?)

I shall have more to say about why this worries Wittgenstein, but for now I only want to note that it does. It does not worry Moore. Moore's thinks of his philosophical position as the commonsense view of the world, as the commonsense Weltanschauung. By now, I hope that the phrases "Commonsense world-view" and "Commonsense Weltanschauung" both sound out-of-tune; and, I hope that treating common sense as a philosophical position strikes you as a sign that someone has gotten the wrong orders from

philosophical headquarters. Common sense is not a philosophy: the commonsense person is in virtue of her common sense neither Idealist nor Realist (nor anything in-between).

Truisms again cause Moore trouble. A Weltanschauung or a philosophy is a particular way of looking at things, one way among other, competing, ways. As such, a Weltanschauung or a philosophy will not consist of truisms (not even in Moore's sense of "truism"). A Weltanschauung consisting entirely in truisms would be the Truistic Weltanschauung—the Weltanschauung with no competitors. In other words, "truistic" in "Truistic Weltanschauung" would be an alienating adjective, like "decoy" in "decoy duck": The Truistic Weltanschauung is no Weltanschauung; a decoy duck is no duck. The Truistic Philosophy is not a philosophy. A person can argue for a Weltanschauung or a philosophy, invent one, advance one, adopt one, defend one, and so on; but, a person cannot do any of these where a truism, or a grab bag of truisms, is concerned.

Back to Wittgenstein. Why does Wittgenstein worry about whether his way of looking at things, his perspicuous (re)presentations, constitute a Weltanschauung, or, I think we may now safely add, a philosophy? Answering this requires some accounting, some adding up of the differences concerning common sense between Moore and Wittgenstein. Readers of *PI* often take it to be a book in a tradition begun by, or at least continued and amplified by, Moore. That is, many have thought that *PI* is a book-length defense of common sense. Thinking that *PI* is a defense of common sense is easy enough to understand. We can take all of Wittgenstein's talk of language-games and grammar (and such) as an attempt to prove to his reader that common sense is "wholly true" (Moore's term). But although Moore

is attempting such a proof, this is not quite what Wittgenstein is doing. As he says in the *Blue Book*

> There is no commonsense answer to a philosophical problem. One can defend common sense against the attacks of philosophers only by solving their puzzles, i.e., by curing them of the temptation to attack common sense, not by restating the views of common sense. (58-9)

This is no picnic passage, and it requires that we attend to it closely. What Wittgenstein is saying is, first, that common sense and philosophy are not competitors. That is, common sense and philosophy share no problems and so common sense answers no philosophical problems. The two would share problems only if common sense were a philosophy, only if there were commonsense answers to philosophical problems. Second, he is saying that we cannot defend common sense. This stands to reason if common sense is not a philosophy. What Wittgenstein calls the "only defense" of common sense is not really a defense, because it does not repel any attack. Notice that what he says is that we can defend common sense only by curing philosophers of their temptation to attack it. But if philosophers stop attacking common sense, if we cure them, then the need, or putative need, to defend common sense vanishes. If, as garrison commander, I convince invaders that my outpost is not worth attacking, then I have defended my outpost only in the sense that I have made defending it unnecessary. Wittgenstein's idea is not to repel attacks on common sense, but rather to dispel the temptation to attack it.

The passage from the *Blue Book* is important because it can serve as an epigraph for *PI*. *PI* does not provide commonsense answers to philosophical problems and it does not defend common

sense. The book instead works to cure our temptation to attack common sense. How does it do that?

Moore defends common sense by providing commonsense answers to philosophical problems. For example, if someone is worried about other minds, Moore supplies the worrier with commonsense answers to the problem.

> Among the things which have...formed part of [my body's] environment...there have, at every moment since its birth, been large numbers of other human bodies... (33)

> And, just as my body has been the body of a human being, namely myself, who has, during his lifetime, had many experiences... so, in the case of very many other the other human bodies which have lived upon the earth, each has been the body of a different human being, who has, during the lifetime of that body, had many different experiences... (34)

Wittgenstein does something importantly different. He shows or tries to show that there are no philosophical problems, at least of the traditional sort, to require answers, common sense or otherwise. If Wittgenstein shows this, then the temptation to attack common sense will vanish, since the very problems putatively posed for common sense will turn out to be poseurs, not really problems at all. If someone is worried about other minds, Wittgenstein does not trot out commonsense answers to the problem; rather, he burkes the problem, commonsensically: "Just try--in a real case--to doubt someone else's fear or pain" *PI* 303. Wittgenstein's aim is not to let sleeping dogmatists lie. His aim is rather to shock us (back) into our commonable sensibility, back into common sense.

That is what Wittgenstein does. But, again, how does he do it? At *PI* 127

Wittgenstein offers the following reminder:

> The work of the philosopher consists in assembling reminders for a particular purpose.

128 extends and modulates 127. At 128 Wittgenstein continues

> If one tried to advance theses in philosophy, it would never be possible to debate them, because everyone would agree to them.

Together, these remarks make clear that the reminders that philosophers assemble are not theses; instead, the reminders remind us of truisms, of bits of common sense. The particular purposes for which the truisms are assembled are not as answers to philosophical problems, but rather as ways of showing that the philosophical problems that tempt us can only be posed if we deny a truism, or advance one as if it were a thesis (part of a theory or creed or Weltanschauung or philosophy). But denying or advancing a truism is unintelligible. Both forms of words--"denying a truism" and "advancing a truism"--lack a clear sense. What Wittgenstein does in 127 and 128 is to indicate the way in which a philosopher can critically use the grab bag of truisms of common sense. The truisms are not answers to philosophical problems. But they are among the tools with which philosophers dismantle philosophical problems, they are part of the craft of disfuting philosophical claims. The philosopher confronts philosophical claims with truisms, with the standards of truth; and, the confrontation shows us that the claims are senseless--common senseless.

Another way in which Wittgenstein cures the philosopher's temptation is by using various of the motley of procedures of common sense. For example, many readers of *PI* have taken the concept of

'language-games' to be a philosophical novelty, a discovery or invention of Wittgenstein's. This is a mistake, and it makes it hard to see how language-games function in *PI*. While the term "language-game" is undeniably new, the description of language-games that is so important a part of *PI* is itself one of the motley of procedures of common sense. We all are always already describing language-games, although we typically fail to pay any special attention to it and never use the term "language-game". Think about the following familiar scraps of conversation:

> No. No! You did not understand. I wasn't giving you an order; I was asking you to do it.

> Well, it was really funny, then. I guess You would have had to be there.

> I don't think you'll see the point of what was said until you've heard all that lead up to it.

> You were serious? The other things you said made me think you were joking.

Each of the foregoing describes a language-game. We sometimes call the procedure "putting a remark in context". The procedure is not a novelty; but no one before Wittgenstein had ever thought to put the procedure to work on philosophy. What Wittgenstein did was to use the procedure to show that we cannot put many philosophical questions or theses into context, or can put them into context only in such a way as to no longer provoke us to metaphysics or to skepticism.

Another commonsense procedure that Wittgenstein finds a way critically to use is grammar. Wittgenstein claims that when he says "grammar" he means-- "grammar".[27] Although Wittgenstein

---

[27] Cf. Anscombe, G. E., "A Theory of

undoubtedly thinks there are many more grammatical categories than we unreflectively think there are (for instance "number" and "psychological verb"), he also thinks that he is simply adding to grammar, not changing or altering it. Wittgenstein uses grammar to attack philosophical problems as well. For Wittgenstein, many of the putative questions and claims of philosophy are ungrammatical--and so they require no answer, or counter-claim or support.

What I have been doing is showing that Wittgenstein *does not* defend common sense in *PI*. And I have been showing that he *does not* provide commonsense answers to philosophical problems, or make common sense answerable to philosophy. Let me now say more about what he does. What Wittgenstein does is to make philosophy and philosophical problems answerable to common sense. Contrary to the way it may look, this is not the same as turning common sense into a philosophy. To see that this is true, consider Wittgenstein's life-long commitment to the idea that philosophy is an activity and not a body of doctrine. What Wittgenstein calls "philosophy" is nothing more, and nothing less, than the activity of making sense of things, or better, the activity of making common sense of things. As he says at *PI* 133, philosophers of his sort are aiming at "complete clarity". By "complete clarity" he does not mean a God-like Intuition of the State of Things, but rather (and merely, but not simply) the complete disappearance of the philosophical problems that tempt us. We make the problems disappear by putting critically to work the grab bag of truisms and the motley of procedures that are ours as commonsense folk. Of course, it is important to remember that making

philosophical problems disappear once does not mean that they will not materialize again later. "Complete" in "complete disappearance" is not a time-term, it is a space-term. It does not mean "once-and-for-all", it means "entirely out-of-sight" or "not obscuring the horizon". Complete clarity is a state that we win lose and re-win, acquire, lose and reacquire.

Wittgenstein makes the critical use of commonsense philosophy, but he does not make common sense a philosophy. While that remark probably sounds like nothing more than a play on words, it is more. The remark encapsulates what worries Wittgenstein when he asks if his way of looking at things is a Weltanschauung.

Wittgenstein's worry is that we will take philosophy as he practices it to be something other than it is, that we will take it to be a Weltanschauung, a philosophy. Wittgenstein is right to worry. There is and has been much talk of Wittgensteinianism and of Wittgensteinians, and even a little unflattering talk (by Cerf) of Wittgensteininnies. It is talk that treats *PI* as advancing theses, as defending common sense as Moore defends it. It is talk that treats Wittgenstein as offering his reader a new Weltanschauung, a new philosophy, instead of a new way of practicing philosophy. What Wittgenstein does is really much more radical, and in sense, much more conservative, than offering a new philosophy. He transvalues philosophical values. He re-orients philosophy, "rotates its axis of reference", in his own phrase, but around "the fixed point of our real need" (103). Our real need is clarity--to make sense of things, to understand; and, common sense is what we use to get clear, to make common sense of things and to understand. The philosophical questions with which philosophers have interrogated common

Language?", in Block, I., ed., *Perspectives on the Philosophy of Wittgenstein* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 1981), pp. 155.

sense, Wittgenstein uses common sense to interrogate.

This may not sound like philosophy. But it shows Wittgenstein's philosophical practice for what it is. It is not philosophy, at least not in the once-and-future sense of the term. It is not *a* philosophy, i.e. it is not a new set of answers to the once-and-future set of philosophical problems.

I conclude by responding to a couple of questions that by now probably seem urgent: Why should anyone philosophize as Wittgenstein does? Why should common sense interrogate philosophy, and not vice versa? There are answers, at least implicit answers, to these questions in what I have said. However, I want to respond to the questions explicitly, albeit somewhat speculatively and much too briefly. To do so, I need first to discuss what I call "The Master Argument" of *PI*. Discussing the Master Argument will be easier if I borrow a notion of Thomas Reid's. In his *Essay*, Reid points out what he calls "a good argument *ad hominem*":

> It is a good argument ad hominem if it can be shown that a first principle which a man rejects, stands upon the same footing with others he admits; for, when this is the case, he must be guilty of an inconsistency who holds the one and rejects the other.

The Master Argument of *PI* is a good *ad hominem* in something like Reid's sense. What Wittgenstein shows his reader is that if the reader can spurn common sense in one case in which we abide by it, then he can spurn it in all cases in which we abide by it. However, the reader cannot spurn it in all cases in which we abide by it, so he cannot spurn it in one case in which we abide by it. Why is it that the reader cannot spurn common sense in all cases in which we abide by it? Because such spurning uberhaupt is not intelligible; the ambition is meaningless. If the reader thinks he spurns common sense in one case

in which we abide by it, he does so on pain of self-deception. It may be a contingent fact that there are creatures like us, creatures who abide by common sense; but that we abide by common sense is not a contingent fact about us. Abiding by common sense is part of what it is to be one of us, to be human. To quit abiding by common sense is to abdicate being one of us. It is to quitclaim the very status needed to make the spurning command our attention. A creature otherwise like us, but which, while not mad, did not abide by common sense in any case, would be a Conceptual Medusa--a creature on which we could not bear to think, a conceptual monstrosity that would turn our thoughts to stone. (I'll say a bit more about this, below.) Whatever perverse or philosophical fascination such a creature might hold for us, the creature is not going to be a source of--or inspiration for--compelling arguments in favor of spurning common sense. The reason we should philosophize as Wittgenstein does is that the more we attempt to philosophize in any other way, the more our intelligibility darkens. Eventually, our philosophical ambitions will all but eclipse our intelligibility. (Of course, we may fail to recognize that we are philosophizing in the dark, darkly.)

My response to the second question is closely related to my response to the first. Common sense interrogates philosophy because the distinction between commonsense matters and matters that are not common sense is itself a *common sense distinction*. Let me explain: Imagine we decide that a certain question falls outside the purview of common sense--say that we decide the question is a scientific question. Our decision will be a commonsense decision, a decision that abides by common sense. We cannot bring scientific methods to bear on the question of whether something is a scientific question. So the

distinction between what is common sense and what is, say, scientific, is a distinction drawn by common sense, and not by science. *Mutatis mutandis ditto* for art, theology and so on. Common sense is self-adjudicating.[28] (Think of the way in which the U.S. judiciary has the authority to draw the boundaries between its authority and the other branches' authority.) As Wittgenstein almost put it, back in 1914:

Common sense must take care of itself.[29]

---

[28] For this notion of "self-adjudicating", see Robert Brandom's "Heidegger's Categories in *Being and Time*", *Monist* 66, no. 3 (July 1983), pp. 387-409, esp. pp. 387-390; see also Brandom's "Freedom and Constraint by Norms", *American Philosophical Quarterly*, April 1977, pp. 187-196. Brandom's notion of "self-adjudication" is of use at another central crossroads in *PI*--the conceptual/empirical distinction. That distinction is itself a *conceptual*, not an empirical, distinction. "Conceptual" is the *self-adjudicating* category.

[29] The line from the *Notebooks* is: "Logic must take care of itself." My twisting of the line will be clearer if Wittgenstein's comment that Moore's "Defence" was a contribution to logic is kept in mind. The point of twisting the line is to call attention to the lack of a Standard-free Zone, a philosophical meta-perspective, from which to assess common sense. One of the continuous (Fregean) features of Wittgenstein's work is his rejection of philosophical meta-perspectives. Rejecting these is what requires distinguishing between showing/saying in *TLP* and what requires emphasizing description at the expense of explanation in *PI*. Consider the following passage of Sellars' ("Language, Rules and Behavior" in *Pure Pragmatics and Possible Worlds* (Ridgeview Publishing Co, 1980), pg. 155):

The more I brood on rules, the more I think Wittgenstein was right in finding an ineffable in the linguistic situation, something which can be *shared* but not *communicated*. We saw that a rule, properly speaking, isn't a rule unless it *lives* in behavior, rule-regulated behavior, even rule-violating behavior. Linguistically we always operate *within* a framework of *living* rules. To *talk about* rules is to move *outside* the talked-about rules *into* another frame-work of living rules. (The snake which sheds one skin lives within another.) In attempting to grasp rule *as rules* from without,

## Afterwords

> When a man suffers himself to be reasoned out of the principles of common sense, by metaphysical arugments, we may call this *metaphysical lunacy*; which differs from the common form of the distemper in this, that it is not continued, but intermittent...
> Thomas Reid

> It is time to let my cats on the table.

Although I think the details of my story so far are right, the central burden of my story is not establishing its details but rather is *undoing the psychologizing of common sense*.[30] The biggest obstacle to

---

we are trying to have our cake and eat it...Even one and the same rule may be both living as a *justificans* and dead as a *justificandum*, as when we justify a rule of logic. Indeed, can the attempt to justify rules, from left to right, be anything but an exhib-ition of these rules from right to left? To learn new rules is to change one's mind. Is there a rational way of losing one's reason?...The convert can describe what he was. Can he understand what he was? But here we are on Wittgenstein's ladder, and it is time to throw it away.

What goes for linguistic rules, or logical rules, goes too for common sense's truisms. I mirror Sellars' move to the interrogative, and attempt to motivate it, in what I say below. On these (and related) topics, see also Van Heijenoort, J. "Logic as Language and Logic as Calculus", *Synthese*, Vol. 17 (1967), pp. 324-330, esp. n. 5, pg. 329; Smiley, T. "A Tale of Two Tortoises", *Mind*, Vol. 104, no. 416 (Oct. 1995), pp. 725-736, esp. pg. 732; and Akiba, K. "Logic as Instrument: The MillianView on the Role of Logic", *History and Philosophy of Logic*, Vol. 17, no. 2 (1996), pp. 73-83, esp. pg.79.

[30] Thomas Reid, who I have already mentioned, deserves more credit here than is often given to him. Arguably, Reid's attacks on the New Way of Ideas is the central thrust of his attack on psychologism, and in particular on psychologized common sense. Reid arguably anticipated Bradley's and Frege's attack on psychologism. (For more on their attack, see Palmer, A. *Concept and Object* (London: Routledge, 1988), esp. Chapter One.) As in Bradley's and Frege's work, the concept of 'judgement' is on center stage in

seeing common sense aright is the philosophical pressure to psychologize it. What I mean is this: When philosophizing, we are under pressure to think of common sense as *in the head*—as the similar contents of many minds over many years. Or, to put this more precisely, we think of common sense as a set of generalizations over the beliefs and procedures of many generations of folks. Thought of as a set of generalizations, common sense looks uncommonly philosophically vulnerable.[31] First and

foremost, thinking of common sense as a set of generalizations makes it look as though common sense intelligibly could have been different; as though, had folks only believed and proceeded differently, we could have had a different common sense. (This "line of thought" is related to the Conceptual Medusa of the last section.) The problem here is that the form of words we call on, namely "common sense could have been different" lacks any clear sense: what, exactly, do we mean? If we mean that we might have run across creatures who lacked common sense—well, ok; but what does that show? We already have run across such creatures: zoos are full of them. If we mean we might have run across humans—more of us—who lacked common sense, wouldn't we think of them as a group of madmen and madwomen? And, again, we have already run across such humans, although generally we try to avoid them or suggest that they should seek professional (non-philosophical) help. If we mean that we might run across "humans" who are not mad, but who *also* lack common sense, then what manner of "humans" have we run across? Say that they are just like us, except that when we invoke or use common sense, they invoke or use *common schmense*. *Perhaps* we can imagine this, although—as the end of the last section makes clear—I have serious doubts about whether claiming that we can (or that we cannot) is intelligible. And even if we can imagine this, why would these "humans" matter philosophically to us? If we run into situations where common sense dictates one thing to us, and common schmense dictates another to

---

Reid's; and Frege's Context Principal, Frege's principle weapon against psychologism, is anticipated in a number of different places in Reid's writings (e.g., see Todd, D. D, ed., *The Philosophical Orations of Thomas Reid* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1989), "Oration III", pp. 52-67). I suspect that Kant—whose work aspired to anti-pychologism and helped inspire Frege's anti-psychologism—missed much of the merit in Reid's work because of he (Kant) failed to extend anti-psychologism to common sense.

[31] In his "Realism and the New Way of Words" (*Pure Pragmatics and Possible Worlds*, pp. 53-85), Wilfred Sellars characterizes *psychologism* about meaning as "taking meaning to be a psychological fact". Psychologizing common sense is taking common sense to be a (set of) psychological fact(s). In his paper (pp. 58-9), Sellars goes on to distinguish two types of psychologism, epistemologism and narrow (empirical) psychologism. In the latter, empirical psychology dominates; in the former, "epistemological content appears in the guise of psychological acts and objects *sui generis* (*Wesensschau*, universals as apprehendable objects, intentional acts, intentional objects, etc.)". I take it that most forms of psychologized common sense are forms of narrow psychologism (and they are my main target, here). One of Moore's merits is that he avoided narrowly psychologizing common sense: Moore saw clearly that whatever vulnerability common sense may have, it is not the vulnerability of a set of generalizations. Unfortunately, Moore avoided narrowly psychologizing common sense only at the expense of epistemologizing it. Reid, for all his efforts to avoid psychologizing common sense, sometimes epistemologizes it.

As I note above, I think narrowly

psychologizing common sense is unintelligible. I think epistemologizing it, while perhaps intelligible, mucks up the works. A crucial part of my response to Moore's (and to Reid's) epistemologized common sense is my rescuing truisms from among the objects of propositional attitudes. Common sense procedures, for I hope obvious reasons, need no such rescue.

"them", will we treat both things as intelligible responses to the situation? If we do, won't we be guilty of abandoning both common sense and common schmense? Where would that leave us, or "them"? I am not here retreating into the interrogative for safety's sake. I ask because I do not think the answers are clear. Each of the questions is at best a riddle--something for which a clear sense-- a clear answer--is indefinitely in the offing.[32] Unriddling the questions is not something that philosophical thinking can do, if it can be done at all. The form of words we are calling on, "common sense could be different", lacks a clear sense and, even worse, is projected into a context whose details we do not have a secure enough handle on to decide what the form of words means, if anything.[33] We lack the common sense necessary to make sense of what it would be like without it, or with something else.

---

[32] I nod here first in the direction of John Wisdom--I am borrowing his notion that many questions in philosophy should not be treated as rhetorical but rather as riddles (cf. "Moore's Technique" in *Philosophy and Psychoanalysis* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1957), pg. 142). I nod second in the direction of Cora Diamond, whose "Riddles and Anselm's Riddle" (in *Realism and the Realistic Spirit* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 1991), pp. 267-289) shows what treating a question as a riddle might come to in philosophy.

[33] As Alasdair MacIntyre puts it, "...[T]he onus is upon those who make claims to show how and why...possibilities of which we can make so little when they are articulated only in general terms can be acknowledged. For until the detail has been spelled out, we do not know precisely what it is that we have been invited to declare possible or impossible." Cf. "Colors, Culture and Practices" in French, Uehling and Wettstein, eds. *Midwest Studies in Philosophy XVII* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1992), pg. 13.

# Discussion of Jolley

AJ    This is the same vein. I guess - I'm not sure what you'll say about (it). I'm not sure about the idea that if you deny a standard of truth you lose a sense of truth. I guess one question would be whether they really operate singly or whether they operate in a cluster, so that that might shift. Let me give you two examples where it seems that people's commonsense might deny something that one would take as commonsense. Science will do this, I know lots of students, for example, who will deny that they have had the same body - I mean all the matter changes every seven years and its just not the same body. And that doesn't seem to ramify into - I mean that's something we debate and it doesn't ramify into a kind of a loss of the standards of truth. And then I guess another thing is, for example, Derek Parfitt's attack on how we sued to think of as personal identity which is, would seem to be another thing. I am the same person throughout my lifetime, and a lot of people have revised their views on that, and its not clear to me that they're sceptics or - you know I would have thought that, if anything -- it's implied by Moore that he's the same person.

KJ    One thing I should say here is that I'm not committed to Moore's list as being an example of - all of them - of every single thing on there as being an example of a truism.

AJ    Okay.

KJ    I'm not sure of what I think about each of those. What I've tried to do is give you something like identity conditions for a truism - identification conditions. That's something that's not yet been done,

or not much has been done. The question about the students, and their scientific belief that they have different bodies, I think that everything is going to depend here on what they - how they cash out their own claim. If what we've got here is a stipulated sense of 'body', by what I mean is 'the atter of which I'm composed', then I don't know that we're going to have anything that's going to come into conflict with the kind of truisms that presumably would be operative there.

AJ    But that doesn't - let me raise a question about how determinate the content of truisms are. You may be able to force them to determinacy and say "Well, since you're counting this as a truth condition your concept must be this".

KJ    Yeah, well one of the things that's interesting here is if you think about how I've described truisms and their use in philosophical debate, it's going to be different than we might picture it initially. You can't, for instance, show a student that a view they have is false because there's some truism that's true and their view contradicts it. It's going to have to end up being, oddly enough, a demonstration something like this - that something they've said would force you into something that they agree being a truism no longer being a truism, suddenly taking on a truth value. So it becomes the case that they're now committed to defending a truism as true or false. So that the type of debate that one has philosophically is going to shift, in a very interesting way I think.

WC    I think we're rather seduced by the

idea of - your phrase 'a standard of truth', as if it had a criterial role, as if these truisms were maxims, if you like, that had a criterial role, which I don't think you're saying. You're saying they actually operate in an *ad hominem* fashion. It's not as if we cite the truism and say 'Do you agree with that?'. In that way you are never going to persuade the sceptic, but it works by undermining the sceptic, in a much more *ad hominem* way.

KJ That's right. If you'll allow me the analogy, the citation of a truism is going to be more like the citation of a 'rule' in chess when someone attempts to move the bishop incorrectly. That's the sort of speech act that I take it you're performing in response to the sceptic. The sceptic, of course, is going to hear a counter-claim.

SM But what's the piece that has been moved incorrectly?

KJ Whatever this particular claim is that is in dispute, in a particular statement that's been made.

SM Presumably you might want to suggest that it's a word that they are missing.

KJ Perhaps a word, or perhaps it's a phrase.

SM But this is what I'm having problems with.

KJ Well it just turns on what case we are talking about. It might be the word 'body' in a particular instance. It might be the word 'idea' or the word 'thought', if we're talking about words. It might be an entire statement that we want to focus on. I'm not sure how that has to go.

SM But then it does sound as if the standard of these truisms, the kind of standard they are, are standards concerning the correct use of words.

KJ Yeah, that's at least one of the things they do. That's part of what I meant to suggest when I said to Anne that her way of doing this struck me at least off the cuff as being compatible with what I was thinking about. When I say that they give us standards for the language game of truth and falsity what I'm thinking about here is that as we make claims that we take to be true or false these things function in a rule-like way.

SM This seems to me to be the crux of what - of your suggestion. How do they do that? Is it that we think 'Look, you want to know what a true proposition is? Here's one'.

KJ No.

SM Are they paradigms?

KJ No.

SM When someone's saying something true that we think is false, so we cite these propositions to show them what -

KJ When someone's saying something they believe to be true that we take to be, say, meaningless. I take it that that's the kind of moment at which these things typically come up.

SM You see, that's precisely my worry. You say that it's a standard of truth but in fact the contexts in which you imagine their citation are contexts in which it's sense that's been violated.

KJ Oh yeah. But look, I think I've granted you - I think that's been - I may have confused you but that was meant to be clear all the way through. When I said that they were the things that make things truth valuable, true or false. I mean I'm not just talking about truth, I'm not just talking about falsity, but the whole language game of truth and falsity. So of course it's meaning that's at issue, and maybe I've just been talking at cross purposes with

you. That's what the inclusion of both options - that's what
(                    ) truth valuable appeals to me here. So it is about meaning at the end of the day, and not just about truth and falsity. Clearly the sceptic thinks that what he's said has particular truth value. I think that the philosopher who's working this way, the way I've been sketching it, doesn't think that, and that the truisms get cited as a way of trying to relieve the person of that impression. That's the kind of activity you are performing.

\*

\*

JC   Part of the trouble, I think, is the way in which we make these kinds of things into objects of cognition, which is probably not what they are, not what their role is. I've always been worried about Wittgenstein's use in *On Certainty* of the notion of 'hinge propositions', because it's not really that they have a propositional function.

KJ   That's right.

JC   And 'truism' - there's something that will strike some readers as counter-intuitive in the notion that a truism has no truth value.

KJ   I know, yeah. I just stuck with Moore's term there -

JC   So we need something -

WS   A belief that can't be false.

JC   Yeah, a belief that can't be false, exactly, right. So none the less, there's clearly something to the notion that certain things stand fast for us, and that's what we are trying to get at and that was what Wittgenstein was trying to get at, in a different way to Moore. In fact part of the attack on Moore, in *On Certainty*, was that he intellectualises what Wittgenstein is now trying to

remove from the intellectual domain.

KJ   Yeah, that's right.

JC   But even so, fails to, by calling them 'hinge propositions'.

KJ   Yeah, that's part of what I meant by talking about the 'psychologising' of commonsense.

JC   Right. So, although 'truism' gets us started, there's something that we have to do with this notion, not to lose the point but to change the way we are trying to articulate the point, because it's still too much in the language game of cognition, you know, of 'intellectual object'.

KJ   Yeah, it's interesting, in (Fowler) 'truism' is a bunch of different - a bunch of discussions. There is a sense of truisms that (Fowler) recognises that's not far removed from the way I'm using it here, but I admit that the term is not one that I'm crazy about. I just decided to stick with the
(                    ) of Moore. It's a way of just setting up the paper, erm, but I don't think at the end of the day anything hinges for me on calling it that. If it's in fact true that that term creates trouble then, of course, let's find something better, y'know, even if we call them 'abracabra's' or whatever. Something else would be fine.

\*

\*

ML   I'd like to get back to the standards examples. I think that, the metre stick may be a very bad example of a standard, for the purposes you want to use it for. The metric system is a very strange system and the role of the metre stick in the metric system and in the language game of measuring is odd. I mean we don't have - I don't think there's a 'standard foot' anywhere, there's not

61

a 'standard ohm' that's embodied in
-

KJ  Is there a standard yard? I've heard that expression, I think.

ML  Yeah, well there's measures - there's various ways of sustaining standards. There's actually a growing amount of historical research on how exactly standards develop, for currency, for things like a 'standard bushel', right, that would vary from one locality to another. In some sense if you look at some of these historical examples you  something like a 'standard ohm' where the embodiment of the standard in the device actually is a whole series of devices and (they) average them out to maintain the standard for an ohm. An' the device itself can degrade over time, so then the standard itself has to be measured - with respect to - some other way. So you get the sense that also is very prominent in *On Certainty*, which is that our sense and use of truisms, if you want to call them that, the temptation is to say propositions, is held up by what surrounds it, in the way - in what practices, the practices that surround what counts as, y'know whether this is the measure of some length, or who counts as somebody who has one of these that's okay for some practice, or whether a 'heaped bushel' is what the convention would allow in some locality, where accusations start coming in where things will be changed or straightened up and so forth. You have to take in the whole complex, before you can talk about what will count as a standard. In some way I thin some of the difficulty of grappling with - the difficulty of trying to avoid turning these into the language of some sort of precise criterion of proposition with a truth

value has to do with that complex way in which - if you want to talk about 'practices' - practices sustain a sense of their standardisation..

KJ  Yeah, I certainly think that practices and truisms are going to be interdependent in very important ways. It's part of what I - actually (I'm asking) the little word 'abide' to do a lot of work for me in the paper. But it's part of what I want that work to do. One thing that occurred to me (one single thing) you know that phrase 'let's do lunch',
(          ) in doing philosophy, it seemed to me that one of the things about this is that we 'do truisms', right? That's another way of trying to put the point, and what ( I want there) is for the sense that there's a conciliance of actions and practices . that are important here to be brought out. I don't want that to be lost. The famous - is it (PI) 217 - the famous "My spade is turned", and "this is what I do". It seems to me that that is another place where truisms come to the fore in the Investigations.

ML  But they don't do philosophical work, that Moore would have them do.

KJ  Not that Moore does, no, certainly not. I think that's what makes Wittgenstein's reaction to Moore so interesting. You know he said of Moore's 'Defence' - and this is one of the other things that drove me on to the paper, in fact it was meant to be revealed in that little lost line of the paper - Wittgenstein said of the 'Defence' and of the 'Paradox', Moore's 'Paradox', that both were contributions to logic. And that little line I put at the end 'Commonsense must take care of itself' was a (violation) of Wittgentstein's comment that 'logic must take care

of itself".

(                    ) put that in, as a way of thinking about this and thinking about what Wittgenstein might mean by logic in *On Certainty* (Hay O'Lin) once said to me "What does he mean, does he mean formal logic?", "No", "Informal logic?", "No", "Well, lets call it non-formal logic, but I don't know what that is". And so I'm sort of calling it commonsense. Heh heh.

RR I think (a certain) part of Mike's worry (that you've just given) is that - there's a portion of your paper where you seemed to suggest - this is only a small point, it might just be a minor point in the paper - but there seemed to be a point in your paper where you suggested that if we didn't have a standard metre, then our practice of talking of
(                    ) would be
(                    )
those practices which are relatively similar, but where there's no (equivalent) to the standard metre. In other words, if we didn't have the standard metre we'd have some other way of organising it.

KJ (                    ) we may have some other way of organising it.

JL Can I make a very brief point. It seems to me that the standard metre is a symbol of - that we preserve a standard, and in so doing keeping it is one of the practices. Let's face it the bloody thing has probably been eaten away by woodworm. We don't use it in that way but the very having of it is part of the ways in which we sustain the standardness of the notion of the metre.

WS Well, I take it that the standard metre is just a perspicuous example
(                    ) Wittgenstein

is at great pains to point out that standards and measures alternate, something was (once) used as a standard now it's a measure. It's not a fixed thing -

KJ - Yeah, and that's -

WS - So, and of course the fact is that (not) a whole lot of practices have something like the standard metre, (though they all) have standards.

KJ That actually is what I was leading up to. (                    ) not plainly opposite. It's going to be something that takes the form of something like the standard metre. But I take it that - what's the old line of
(                    ) 'practices are gravid with' standards. Standards (graviding) the practices, they are going to be interdependent in very important way.

RR Sometimes though it may be very vague. People may have a practice of saying 'Well this is, roughly, this'. You know, everyone sort of agrees.

KJ Oh sure. 'Stand roughly here.'

RR Anne.

AJ I'm also wondering what you'd do with a developmental story. Mightn't a child have a strong sense of truth, and yet not have all the concepts that enter into our truisms. Then, truisms might vary from group to group or -

KJ - Yeah, this is a really hard question I think (      ) okay, truisms change. How do they change? I think that's a very hard question. I'm tempted to say that the place to start in terms of Wittgenstein is with Section 2 part 12, where Wittgenstein talks about very common facts - or very general facts of nature changing and what of our concepts would become intelligible to us. And I suppose that we can do something like conceive

63

of our truisms changing.

(                              )

But we really can't appreciate the change, those aren't the truisms that we have. I think that one thing we have to recognise if we are going to talk about this is that if truisms change, the mechanism of change presumably is a philosophical one. If these things are at all like I've described them then it's not going to be the case that decisions we make are going to the mechanisms, the straightforward mechanisms of change for truisms. So I honestly don't have a very good story, Anne, about what to say about the change here. I think that it's one of those places where you run out of intelligible gas, and it becomes very difficult to say anything that's really clear. As far as the kids, let me go back to that question, specifically I suppose that, you know, it could be the case that children come to appreciate - I don't know if you want to say that it happens at 4.01 on a Tuesday, but that children - "light dawns gradually over the whole for children", to use the line from *On Certainty*. And there may be a point at which a child doesn't appreciate certain language games of truth and falsity, can't participate in them, because they haven't absorbed the relevant truisms. That may in fact be true, so that we can say something like 'This child appreciates something that this child doesn't'.

AJ   I guess I'm wondering whether it would all happen at one time, I mean whether there mightn't be a strong sense of truth before that.

KJ   Yeah, Anne, I'll be straightforward. I don't have any really good story to tell you there. I wish I had something snappy to say but I don't.

AJ   That does seem to me at least relevant to the idea that

KJ   It is a failing on my part that I don't have a story.

AJ   I didn't mean to push you (to one), but it would be interesting to see if you wanted   to (qualify).

KJ   Yeah, that's certainly something I've got to think about.

AJ   It does strike me that the story so far doesn't have much about development. I guess I'm worried, and maybe I'm just wrong here, that truisms would function as a group, that its boundaries might shift.

KJ   Well, Wittgenstein says some things in *On Certainty* that would certainly suggest that kind of thing, he talks about 'nests' of these things, and so on. So that yeah, can we imagine someone who appreciates, only has a mastery of one language game of truth and falsity, well

(                              )

I don't know if you can imagine something like that or not, whether that makes sense or not, again I (thought to) the limits of my abilities.

WS   I take it that also the other side of your argument was that you cant assert the truisms either

(                              ),

you can't in philosophy. I mean, there's the problem of the proposition, and its residual, and its virtually impossible to get away with (as propositions). What you want to say is that there are certain sorts of things that you can't intellectually say. Right. And then you have to try and say what they are in order to give an example. How can you indicate these things that we cannot - and so - but they're not propositions. And I was wondering to what extent a lot of your argument is actually

that the (sense) is carried by grammar. For example, look at Moore's stuff about 'I am only body', as being a very peculiar notation for 'I am G E Moore, I am 47 years old'. Now I don't have to have a belief that the had a smaller body and so forth, but given the grammar of our things I can say "Nice to meet you Mr Moore, where were you in school?" or "Did you go in the Army when you were 18?" I can ask all kinds of questions then about what life he had before and things he did, before this time.

KJ    Yeah, the size of shoes he wore.

WS    Yeah, and that's just = that comes out of the grammar, and so much of it the grammar will do a lot of the work that commonsense that you're trying to get commonsense to do.

KJ    Yeah.

WS    Commonsense, I think, does some of that work.

KJ    Yeah, I certainly want that sort of thing to be seen as a commonsense practice.

WS    Yeah, but of course in that sense a great part of commonsense is actually the grammar. So for example, if someone says "Grab the other end of the rod" "Why does it have two ends?" Yeah? And that's not because I believe rods have two ends, its just that I'm taught the grammar, so if somebody says "Grab that end of the rod" you say "Okay, what about the other one?". And so on.

KJ    Yeah, and actually that little section where I was going to (venture something) I talked about picking up commonsense as you pick up the language, is meant to suggest (that), I really agree with you about that.

WS    But the other thing, you said that you are really interested in *On Certainty*,

and of course Wittgenstein struggles in a most tortured way with the desire to put into words these things that on the other hand he's really maintaining you can't sensibly say. What's your view on the inner grappling in *On Certainty*? How do you think it pans out?

RR    Do you want to say a bit more about what you take that to be, Wes?

WS    Well yes, I mean Wittgenstein's saying you can't say these things, it makes no sense. Moore's talking nonsense, you can't assert these things as propositions, but then as Jeff said we must have the 'hinge propositions', yeah, but what about the 'hinge propositions', these - you can see why he's forced to that. I can't - you know, if you try and express what *On Certainty* says, it's very, very hard in a lot of ways without resorting to notions like 'hinge propositions', though, clearly, there ain't no such things.

KJ    Yeah.

JL    Well, he can't get away from talking to philosophers can he?

KJ    Well that's part of the problem, yeah. You are going to be forced into this sort of talk, and there are going to be philosophical occasions for it again and again. I don't know exactly what to say, Wes, about how *On Certainty* gets - how to resolve that problem. (Unlike) you, this, I mean, one of the things that worries me a great deal about this paper beyond the kinds of things that you brought out, is, am I back to this damn saying and showing distinction in just its Tracterian form? It doesn't have to be seen that way but the clear worry here is that you're back to telling people again that there's something, you know, that -

WS    Well, but actually the other thing is

the 'beliefs' business, and there your position on 'what's out there matters'. Because we are philosophers and we are talking philosophy we keep
(                          ) in terms of beliefs and statements. But of course they're facts. It's just a fact that there's this 67 year old guy at the end of the table reading out this paper with his tedious list of peculiar statements. It's a fact, it's not a belief, it's not a belief that Moore is there or that the world is there, and I walk out of the door and I don'[t fall into a huge chasm or anything. That's the thing, philosophers can't say what the - so the actual description of what people're doing, the description of how they behave, how they act, what they do, is a factual description. It's not anything where there's propositions. And it's only in the description of the factual matters of what they do, how they talk, what's the legitimate way of responding to one utterance with another. If somebody says, "I'm 48" can you say, you know, "What did you do on your 42nd birthday?" "Oh that." They're just facts about - so the notions of 'form of life' - I don't like these terms at all, but 'form of life', 'language game' and so on, pushes you towards this, but it still, nonetheless you still get dragged back towards talking about propositions and beliefs. And of course beliefs then make it sound as though in fact these aren't - you know, it's not my belief that we're all in this room, because if you're seriously going to say it's a belief then there's got to be some doubt, and so on.
*
*

RR  Dave

DF  I was a bit concerned with your reply to Anne a little while ago, about children and development and so on, when you said that you didn't have a story. I wondered why you needed a story about children and the development of commonsense. In that, what would that story be other than some kind of theory. And going back to the point about practices, surely the point about children is that we don't include them in certain kinds of practices, and that's what it is to be children. They're children 'cos they're children. And that's a truism ((laughter)) So that, to take an example, something like objects. We don't allow children, and we don't expect children, and we don't deal with children in terms of objects in the way that we do with adults. So that, for example, I don't take offence if my child does something with an object of mine that would be offensive if an adult did it, you know, like take it, without asking my permission, 'cos this is a child doing it. So I wondered what the problem was, about not having a story to tell.

KJ  Well, when I say that I don't have a story I don't mean that I want to have a theory, I just - to the kind of question that Anne's asking I would like to have had something more informative to say about, than I did about - worries about whether you can pick these up singly or you pick them up in a bunch, that sort of thing. I would like to have been able to say something about that but perhaps anything I would have said there, from your point of view would force me into a theory that wouldn't have been welcome, at that point. Also, there was just a textual point,

66

that was meant to be separate, that there is a lot of talk about children, and children entering into practices in *On Certainty*, and I would like to be able to say something about that, since *On Certainty* is obviously a large part of the motivation for the project. That's just a textual matter, a matter of trying to do justice to it.

RR  Would you say that Dave's correct?

KJ  I'm very much tempted to buy it, yeah. I very much liked what you said.