Philosophies of Common Sense

Fall 2009 - Winter 2010

This course will focus on a series of philosophers whose work can be loosely characterized as philosophy of common sense, namely, Hume, Reid, Moore, Austin, and among contemporaries, Mark Wilson. Our goal will be to trace a number of inter-related meta-philosophical themes: naturalism, the nature and viability of conceptual analysis, and the role of ordinary language. (The 'naturalism' in question will often be the specific form I call 'Second Philosophy', so some grasp of that approach, as in Maddy [2007] or [200?], would be useful as background.) Skepticism, and particularly the Argument from Illusion, will feature as a recurring case study for comparing and contrasting these various approaches to philosophical inquiry.

The default requirement for those taking the course for a grade (other than S/U) is three short papers (750-1250 words) due at the beginning of class in the 4th week, 7th week, and 10th week. Each paper should isolate one localized point in the readings and offer some analysis and/or critique. Other options are open to negotiation.

I assume everyone has access to copies of:

    J. L. Austin, *Sense and Sensibilia.*

    Mark Wilson, *Wandering Significance.*

All other assigned materials are available to enrolled students at the links below.

Copies of these books will be available in Brian Rogers's office (795 SST):

    Austin, *Philosophical Papers*.

    Baldwin, *G. E. Moore.*

Cuneo and Woudenberg, *Cambridge Companion to Thomas Reid*.

Fratantaro, *The Methodology of G. E. Moore.*

Moore, *Philosophical Papers.*
    Philosophical Studies.
    Some Main Problems of Philosophy.

Reid, *An Inquiry into the Human Mind on the Principles of Common Sense.*

Reid, *Essays on the Intellectual Powers of Man.*

Schilpp, ed., *The Philosophy of G. E. Moore.*

Please come to the first meeting (Thursday, September 24, at 3:30 in 777 SST) prepared to discuss the readings in Topic #1.

Topics:

1. Hume's naturalism

Hume, 'Introduction' to *A Treatise of Human Nature*.

Stroud, *Hume*, chapter 1, and pp. 219-224.

Broughton, 'What does the scientist of man observe?'.

    'Hume's naturalism about cognitive norms', §§I-IV.

Extra reading:

George, 'James Jurin awakens Hume from his dogmatic slumber with a short tract on visual acuity'.

2. Hume's skepticism

Hume, Book 1, Part 4, of *A Treatise of Human Nature*, §§2, 4, 7.

Stroud, *Hume*, chapter V.

Fogelin, 'Hume's skepticism', pp. 90-94, 105-111.

    (*Hume's Skeptical Crisis*, pp. 55-85, 96-100, 125-137.)

    (*Hume's Skepticism*, chapter VI.)

Broughton, 'Hume's naturalism about cognitive norms', §V.

'Hume's voyage', pp. 182–190.

('Hume's naturalism and his skepticism', pp. 430–432.)

Extra reading:

Broughton, 'The inquiry in Hume's *Treatise*'.

Maddy, *Second Philosophy*, §I.3.

The relationship between Hume's naturalism and his skepticism is one of the most difficult and debated points of Hume exegesis, including the vexed question of how he manages to pick himself up after the shipwreck of Book 1 and go on to write Books 2 and 3. This will be the topic of Sean Greenberg's Winter Quarter Hume seminar in the Philosophy Department. For our purposes here, we'll focus on the line of interpretation that sees his skepticism as arising out of his naturalism, and try to unpack the arguments that seem intended to do this job, particularly the role of the Argument from Illusion. (Don't kill yourself trying to sort out the 'genetic' part of the argument.)

As it happens, Kant wasn't the only one awakened from his dogmatic slumbers by Hume's *Treatise*. Until he read Hume's work, Thomas Reid had thought his own philosophical views compatible with the Theory of Ideas, but Hume convinced him that this way leads inevitably to skepticism. (Brookes traces this development in Reid's thought in his [1997] introduction to Reid [1764].)

Reid has interconnected views on nearly everything. I've tried, no doubt imperfectly, to pare down to four topics: (i) his view of common sense and philosophical method, (ii) his attack on the Theory of Ideas, (iii) his theory of perception, and (iv) his response to the skeptic. Once again, let's see if we can distill anything about the Argument from Illusion along the way.

3. Reid I (on common sense/method)

Reid, *Inquiry into the Human Mind*, pp. 11-24.

Reid, *Essays on the Intellectual Powers of Man*, pp. 11-59, 423-452.

Extra Reading:

Hatfield,'Remaking the science of mind: psychology a natural science'.

4. Reid II (on common sense/method and the theory of ideas)

> Reid, *Essays on the Intellectual Powers of Man*, pp. 452-490.

> Wolterstorff, 'Reid on common sense', pp. 77-100.

> Reid, *Inquiry into the Human Mind*, pp. 54-76.

> Reid, *Essays on the Intellectual Powers of Man*, pp. 171-187.

5. Reid III (on the theory of ideas and perception)

> Van Cleve, 'Reid's theory of perception', pp. 101-104.

> Greco, 'Reid's reply to the skeptic', pp. 134-141.

> Reid, *Inquiry into the Human Mind*, pp. 95-103, 132-137, 167-178.

> Reid, *Essays on the Intellectual Powers of Man*, pp. 104-112, 193-233.

6. Reid IV (on perception and skepticism)

> Reid, *Essays on the Intellectual Powers of Man*, pp. 234-252.

> Van Cleve, 'Reid's theory of perception', pp. 104-128.

> Reid, *Essays on the Intellectual Powers of Man*, pp. 513-526.

> Greco, 'Reid's reply to the skeptic', pp. 141-155.

> Van Cleve, 'Reid's response to the skeptic'.

Reid's *Essays* appeared in 1785, between the two editions of Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason*. The 19th century saw the rise of idealism in many post-Kantian forms, most influentially in the writings of Hegel. By the early 20th century, Bradley was the leading representative of idealism in the U.K. The next chapter of our story begins when the early Moore throws off his Bradlian upbringing (followed by Russell: 'Moore led the way, but I followed closely in his footsteps', see Baldwin [1990], p. 311, also Hylton [1990], p. 117). Apparently Moore had been persuaded by Kant's arguments for the ideality of space and time in the antinomies, and Russell's refutation of those arguments using the

modern mathematics of infinity freed him of that burden (see
Baldwin [1990], pp. 6-7, Hylton [1990], p. 131).

Moore developed a range of direct arguments against Kant, Hegel
and Bradley, but much of the force of his case comes from the
sheer blunt denial. (Finding one's way out of a bad argument for
idealism isn't the same as having a good argument against
idealism.)

> When I say that chair exists, what I think is *not* that
> certain sensations of mine are connected by the categories.
> What I do think is that certain *objects* of sensation really
> do exist in a real space and really are causes and effects
> of other things. (Quoted in Baldwin [1990], p. 12)

> If truth is something independent of knowledge and
> therefore of consciousness, no theory that tries to explain
> the validity of necessary propositions by showing them to
> be involved in knowledge or consciousness can possibly
> attain its purpose. It may be a true theory, but it cannot
> explain what it professes to explain. (Quoted in Hylton
> [1990], p. 119)

For Moore, the world is independent of us, truth is objective,
and idealism is just foolish. (See Baldwin [1900], chapter 1;
Hylton [1990], pp. 117-130.)

As it happens, these familiar-sounded views of Moore's are, at
this early period, embedded in a dense Platonistic metaphysics,
again largely adopted also by Russell (see Baldwin [1990],
chapter 2; Hylton [1900], pp. 130-152). Concepts, propositions,
meanings are objective, atemporal beings, entirely independent of
us; they are composed of simple concepts. The process of
decomposition is analysis.

Early Moore has great faith in analysis as a philosophical tool:

> It appears to me that … in all … philosophical studies, the
> difficulties and disagreements, of which its history is
> full, are mainly due to a very simple cause: namely to the
> attempt to answer questions, without discovering precisely
> *what* question it is which you desire to answer. I do not
> know how far this source of error would be done away, if
> philosophers would *try* to discover what question they were
> asking, before they set about to answer it; for the work of
> analysis … is often very difficult. … But I am inclined to
> think that in many cases a resolute attempt would be
> inclined to ensure success. (Moore [1903], p. vii)

Contrary to what we might expect, Moore doesn't regard linguistic
evidence as to the point here ('verbal questions are properly
left to the writers of dictionaries … philosophy … has no concern

with them', Moore [1903], p. 2); we're investigating objective meanings, not word usages (we want 'definitions which describe the real nature of the object or notion denoted by the word', ibid., p. 7). Inspection of our thought is the method -- 'a direct mental analogue of the literal physical process of breaking a thing to pieces, breaking down its constituent parts' (Hylton [1990], p. 145) -- but not an infallible one. And again contrary to what we might expect, the result is not analytic. For reasons I won't try to sketch, Moore embraces synthetic necessary truths accessible to some kind of direct, perception-like intuition.

The only period of his life that Moore spent outside Cambridge was 1904-1911. Part of that time he was in Edinburgh, where he studied both Hume and Reid. By 1911, the early Moore had evolved into the famous defender of common sense.

7. Moore on common sense

Moore, *Some Main Problems of Philosophy*, chapter 1.

'A defense of common sense'.

(Malcolm, 'Moore and ordinary language'.)

(Moore, 'Reply to my critics', pp. 670-674.)

Stroud, *The Significance of Philosophical Skepticism*, pp. 88-96.

Fratanaro, *The Methodology of G. E. Moore*, pp. 10-18.

(Malcolm, 'George Edward Moore'.)

Somerville, 'Moore's conception of common sense'.

Extra reading:

Fratanaro, *The Methodology of G. E. Moore*, pp. ix-xii, 1-18, 41-48, 58-65.

8. Moore on analysis

Moore, *Lectures on Philosophy*, pp. 153-171, 191-196.

'Reply to critics', pp. 660-667.

Some Main Problems of Philosophy, chapter 2.

'Visual sense-data'.

Baldwin, *G. E. Moore*, pp. 149-160, 193-195, 219-226, 233-250.

Snowden, 'G. E. Moore on sense-data and perception'.

Extra reading:

Moore, 'The status of sense data'.

'Some judgments of perception'.

'Reply to my critics', pp. 627-660.

Fratantaro, *The Methodology of G. E. Moore*, chapter 5.

9.   Moore on skepticism I

Moore, *Some Main Problems of Philosophy*, pp. 119-126.

'Proof of an external world'.

'Reply to my critics', pp. 668-670.

'Four forms of skepticism'.

'Certainty'.

Extra reading:

Moore, *Some Main Problems of Philosophy*, chapter 6.

10.   Moore on skepticism II

Baldwin, *G. E. Moore*, pp. 267-279.

(Malcolm, 'Defending common sense'.)

Moore, 'Letter to Malcolm'.

Stroud, *The Significance of Philosophical Skepticism*, pp. 96-102.

Baldwin, *G. E. Moore*, pp. 279-303.

Sosa, 'Moore's proof'.

Lycan, 'Moore's anti-skeptical strategies'.

Greco, 'How to Reid Moore'.

Extra reading

> Fratantaro, *The Methodology of G. E. Moore*, pp. 48-58.
>
> Marconi, 'Being and being called', pp. 113-125.
>
> Stroud, *The Significance of Philosophical Skepticism*, chapter III.
>
> Weatherall, TBA?

> --- End of Fall Quarter - Beginning of Winter Quarter ---

One of Moore most ardent admirers was J. L. Austin, who famously remarked, 'Some people like Witters [i.e., Wittgenstein], but Moore is my man' (Hacker [1996], p. 172, cites Strawson and Grice as sources).

11. Austin and the Argument from Illusion I

> Austin, *Sense and Sensabilia*, pp. 1-103.

Extra reading:

> Austin, *Sense and Sensabilia*, pp. 104-142.

12. Austin and the Argument from Illusion II

> Warnock, *J. L. Austin*, pp. 11-22, 27-31.
>
> Smith, *The Problem of Perception*, chapters 1 and 2.

Extra reading:

> Warnock, *J. L. Austin*, pp. 22-27.

13. Austin on method

> Austin, 'A plea for excuses'
>
> > 'Are there *a priori* concepts?'
> >
> > 'The meaning of a word'
>
> Warnock, *J. L. Austin*, chapter 1.

Maddy, 'Naturalism, transcendentalism, and therapy', pp. 42-51.

Extra reading:

Fischer, 'Austin on sense-data: ordinary language analysis as "therapy"'.

14. Austin on skepticism

Austin, 'Other minds', pp. 44-71.

Warnock, *J. L. Austin*, pp. 32-44.

Kaplan, 'Austin's way with skepticism'.

Leite, 'Austin, dreams and skepticism'.

Extra reading:

Stroud, *The Significance of Philosophical Skepticism*, chapter 2.

Grice, *Studies in the Way of Words*, pp. 3-40.

In the preface to his magnum opus, Mark Wilson includes the following parenthetical remark, 'I will be flattered if the work is regarded as a worthy continuation of the school of tempered common sense pioneered by Thomas Reid and J. L. Austin'.

15. Wilson's *Wandering Significance*

I. pp. 1-112.

II. pp. 112-222.

III. pp. 222-335.

IV. pp. 335-445.

V. pp. 445-552.

VI. pp. 552-662.

Extra reading:

Maddy, *Second Philosophy*, §II.6.

Brandom, 'Platforms, patchworks, and parking garages'.

Wilson, 'Of whales and pendulums'.

Friedman, 'Logic, mathematical science, and 20th century philosophy'.
'Wandering Significance and the dynamics of reason'.

Wilson, 'What can contemporary philosophy learn from our "scientific philosophy" heritage?'
'Background to *Wandering Significance*'.

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