

***Common Sense Epistemology***  
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*Jean-Christophe Bardout, « Le sens commun est-il un sens ? L'apport de Claude Buffier »*

C'est probablement au jésuite Claude Buffier, auteur en 1724 d'un *Traité des premières vérités*, qu'il revient d'avoir inventé la notion moderne du sens commun. Fortement influencé par le cartésianisme, Buffier intègre à sa réflexion bon nombre de thèses lockéennes. Cependant, et pour faire pièce au scepticisme que recèle le cartésianisme, voire l'empirisme, c'est à une faculté irréductible au « je pense », mais aussi à la sensation ou à la réflexion qu'il confie l'appréhension des vérités dites premières, autrement dit des premiers principes de la connaissance. Il s'agit du sens commun, dont Buffier s'attache dès lors à préciser le concept et l'usage : quel est son degré de certitude ? Quelles sont ses limites ? Quel type de croyance peut-il justifier et comment ?

*René van Woudenberg, “The Delineation of Common Sense”*

Discussions about common sense (CS) concern (1) how “common” it is (CS is person- and context-sensitive; it changes through time), (2) what epistemic weight CS has, and (3) what “belongs” to CS, i.e. how CS should be delineated (which propositions fall in the extent of CS propositions?)

In order to be able to take up discussion (1) and (2), one first need to take up discussion (3). This paper concentrates on discussion (3).

I compare the lists of propositions that Thomas Reid and G.E. Moore held belong to CS. On that basis I argue that CS propositions can be delineated by reference to a number of contrasts, such as (i) impossible or foolish propositions, (ii) scientific propositions, (iii) popular propositions, (iv) non-vague propositions.

*Claudine Tiercelin, “A Defense of Critical Commonsensism”*

As many defenders of commonsensism have argued, questioning doubt may actually raise more problems than questioning knowledge. Doubt itself, just as much as belief, needs reasons, and a major fault with the sceptic is that he does not wonder why, and most of all, how, one should doubt. However sticking to such a position also raises important issues, in particular, concerning the status of the first principles or hinge propositions one claims to be entitled to rely on. Despite the difficulties also posed by a reverse position consisting in sticking to a radical type of fallibilism, close at times to radical scepticism, I shall try to show that a combined version of commonsensism and criticism provides both a more convincing account of the logic of our epistemic practices and a better parry to various forms of scepticism.

*Jean-Baptiste Guillon, "Common Sense Epistemology as a Meta-Generativist Philosophy"*

The tradition of Common Sense epistemology contains a variety of epistemological arguments, some of which are little represented in the contemporary literature. The argument I want to develop here is the "chronological" argument which we find in Reid's works, namely the conception of common sense as the starting point of philosophy, or the original system of belief from which all subsequent philosophical systems must derive. In order to develop this line of thought, I will use the conceptual tools of contemporary "dynamic epistemology" (Gilbert Harman, Isaac Levi). In the proposed framework, every philosophical system must be conceived as ultimately "generated" from the principles of an original (common sense) system, through a series of justified revisions. This epistemology of common sense also gives the foundations of a new methodology for philosophy in general.

*Roger Pouivet, « L'émotion du ridicule »*

Reid affirme que la nature nous a donné une émotion particulière : l'émotion du ridicule; elle nous sert à repérer les opinions philosophiques absurdes, c'est-à-dire qui contredisent le sens commun. Cela suffit pour exclure l'erreur radicale, le sophisme, la foutaise – tout ce que Reid tend à regrouper sous l'appellation d' « absurde ». L'émotion du ridicule joue ainsi un rôle intellectuel prépondérant. La philosophie du sens commun apparaît comme une philosophie de la philosophie et des risques intellectuels qu'elle nous fait courir. Le sens commun serait ainsi doté d'un radar intellectuel détectant les opinions philosophiques à rejeter, sans même avoir à les réfuter. Mais n'est-ce pas exactement ce qui rend la philosophie du sens commun peu crédible aux yeux de la plupart des philosophes ?

*Angélique Thébert, "Common Sense and Deep Epistemic Disagreements"*

Considering the persisting disagreement between common sense philosophy and scepticism, it seems that we are faced with a deep epistemic disagreement. In the Epistemology of Disagreement literature, it has been sustained that deep epistemic disagreements cannot be resolved through rational means. This consequence is grounded on Wittgenstein's *On Certainty*. Hinge epistemology, inherited from Wittgenstein, is also considered as an illuminating detour to understand common sense epistemology.

This leads me to ask two questions : 1. Can we really compare the disagreement between the common sense philosophers and the sceptics to a deep epistemic disagreement? Could it not be considered that they share a common background? 2. If so, is the rational resolution of their disagreement logically possible? What rational means can common sense use to convince someone of the privileged status of an epistemic principle?

Basing my talk on Reid's, Alston's and Lynch's arguments, I will show that common sense epistemology is a more promising approach than hinge epistemology, because it is driven by an optimism about reason in the solving of disagreements. If so, common sense is not to be understood in opposition to reason.

*Pascal Engel, "Hinges are Known"*

Against Moore, Wittgenstein famously held that some propositions which compose our common sense scheme are primitive certainties and that some of them are "hinges". Some are linguistic ("The words composing this sentence are English"), others are personal ("For months I have lived at address"), others local ("No one was ever on the moon"), some "universal" ("There are physical objects"). They are indubitable, foundational, non empirical, grammatical, ineffable. They have been interpreted in various ways. Some writers say that they are commitments, others that they are entitlements, yet others say that they are based on our primitive schemes actions in an enactivist sense.

I want to argue here that they are simply pieces of knowledge, most of the time of the sort that Sosa calls animal as opposed to reflective, which does not need internalist justification. I do not deal here with the problem of scepticism and of Moore's proof, but indicate how this reading of hinges could be developed as a vindication of Mooreanism.

*Patrick Rysiew, "Common Sense in Reid's Response to Scepticism"*

As with his positive epistemological views, Reid's response to scepticism – just what it is, what it's meant to establish, and how – is matter of controversy. Of course, insofar as it respects and defends our ordinary view of ourselves as having plenty of knowledge, and from a variety of sources, any response to scepticism is, as such, "commonsensical". Conspicuously, however, interpreters of Reid, and those who take inspiration from his views, differ in what role (if any) they see common sense itself as playing in Reid's response to the sceptic – hence, in whether they think his response to scepticism is commonsensical in some more substantive sense. Here, I review some central interpretations of Reid's response to scepticism. I suggest that even those who do see common sense as playing a central role in Reid's defense of our pretheoretic epistemic commitments underrate the importance therein of his specific conception of common sense.

*Noah Lemos, "The Weight of Common Sense"*

In the first section, I briefly describe what I take to be a central feature of the common sense tradition in philosophy. I would say that it is characteristic of the common sense tradition to hold that we do know, pretty much, what we ordinarily think we know and that it is reasonable for us to reject philosophical theories that imply that we do not. Among the things that we think we know are various "common sense" beliefs. Why give some common sense beliefs more weight than various philosophical views? It is because some common sense beliefs are things we know. In the second section, I consider some objections to the common sense tradition. These objections include the charges that it is question-begging and that it stifles epistemological inquiry. In the final section, I consider some skeptical objections that hold that the common sense philosopher doesn't know what he thinks he knows because he fails to meet some necessary condition for knowledge.

*Laurent Jaffro, "Common Sense in the Epistemology of Social Sciences: from Reid to Boudon"*

Little attention has been paid to the fact that Thomas Reid's epistemology applies to "political reasoning" as well as to perception and other operations of the mind. Reid was interested in identifying the "first principles" of political science as he did with other domains of human knowledge. This raises the question whether the study of human action falls within the competence of "common sense". The aim of this paper is to reconstruct and assess Reid's epistemology of the social sciences on the basis of his manuscript lectures as well as of his published works, and to determine how it connects with the fundamental tenets of his general epistemology. The first part of the paper draws on Reid's lectures on politics, portrays him as a methodological individualist, and focuses on the epistemological status and source of the first principles of political reasoning. The second part examines Reid's views on the explanatory power of the principles of human action. Finally, a parallel is drawn between Reid's epistemology and the methodological assumptions, in the wake of Max Weber, of the sociologist Raymond Boudon.

*Lucas Thorpe, "Common Sense and Comparative Linguistics"*

In this paper I discuss the role of translatability in philosophical justification. I begin by discussing and defending Thomas Reid's account of the role that facts about comparative linguistics can play in philosophical justification. Reid believes that common sense offers a reliable but defeasible form of justification. We cannot know by introspection, however, which of our judgments belong to common sense. Judgments of common sense are universal, and so he argues that the strongest evidence that a judgment is a part of common sense is that it is to be found in all languages. For Reid, then, evidence that a certain distinction is to be found in all languages is evidence that the distinction is part of common sense rather than being a common local prejudice. From such a perspective, empirical work in comparative linguistics can play a defeasible justificatory role in philosophical arguments. I contrast Reid's position with the more radical position of defenders of the Natural Semantic Metalanguage approach, such as Anna Wierzbicka, who argue that only judgments that are translatable into *all* natural languages are justifiable. I show how such a position is rooted in an implausible view, although one common among cognitive scientists and linguistics, about the nature of concepts, which does not allow for novel concepts.