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Philosophies of common sense from Reid to experimentalists

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Philosophies of common sense from Reid to experimentalists[1]

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Introduction

In this paper I will first try to show that there is a long tradition of philosophers defending common sense; a tradition that links J. L. Austin and, nowadays, *experimental philosophers* back to Thomas Reid, all of whom use common sense as a norm that could appraise philosophical theories or methods; secondly, I will suggest that *common sense*, after all these years of philosophical use, has become a technical term that carries a certain philosophical burden, implying, at the very least, a pragmatic and naturalistic commitment. However, and this will be my conclusion, if theory enters *common sense* then it cannot deliver what it bargained for. Common sense supposedly derives its authority from all kinds of propositions we take for granted. If we impose philosophical views on it, it loses the authority that is claimed for it.

To make a long story short, in this paper I will try to show that Reid, Austin and many experimentalists, all sound alike when defending common sense. I should note however, that I am not claiming that those philosophers are the only ones who defend common sense. American pragmatists, such as Peirce and Dewey, or Wittgenstein, among others, might fit a similar reading. However, Austin and today's experimentalists very straightfowadly appeal to a Reidian sense of common sense and use this appeal to invite pragmatistic and naturalistic views. Their attempt to defend common sense can be used as *an example* of how *common sense* becomes a philosophical notion with certain connotations.

Philosophies of common sense
Often in the history of philosophy there have been attempts to ground theses or theories on some neutral principle. *Neutral* here means *not philosophical*. So, it should either be pre-philosophical or scientific or even theological. *Common sense* has been a strong candidate for such a principle because it describes our ordinary dispositions *before* philosophy influences them.

In the English empiricist tradition, philosophers often mention common sense: David Hume, John Locke, even George Berkley evoke common sense to verify their views. Their arguments and proposals *are mere common sense*, they say from time to time.

Thomas Reid writes within the same tradition. He, however, takes common sense to a different level: it is not just used to validate his arguments. For Reid *common sense is a criterion by which philosophy is to be measured*; it stands against certain doctrines; and it justifies his sarcastic remarks about philosophy, philosophers or the very act of philosophising.[2]

> If a plain man, uninstructed in philosophy, has faith to receive its mysteries, how great must be his astonishment! He is brought into a new world, where everything he sees, tastes, or touches, is a idea- a fleeting kind of being which he can conjure into existence, or can annihilate in the twinkling of an eye.
>
> After his mind is somewhat composed, it will be natural for him to ask his philosophical instructor: Pray sir, are there then no substantial and permanent beings called the sun and the moon, which continue to exist whether we think of them or not?[3]

The philosopher no longer starts with wonder about the world. Now he wonders about philosophical suggestions. Philosophy is a technical and paradoxical construction that has lost all touch with reality. Hence it should be tested against common sense.

G.E. Moore brings the same attitude to twentieth-century philosophy. He recites a list of obvious beliefs that philosophers have denied:

> There exists at present a human body, which is my body ... Among the things which have ... formed part of its environment ... have ... been large numbers of other living humans bodies, each of which has, ... (a) at some time been born (b) continued to exist for some time after birth (c) been at every moment of its life ..., either in contact with or not far from the surface of the earth ... [4]

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[2] See W. Hamilton (ed), *The Works of Thomas Reid* (Bristol, 1999); *An Inquiry into the Human Mind* (cited hereafter as *IHM)*, 127, 304, 470; *Essays on the Intellectual Powers of Man* (cited hereafter as *EIPM*), 254 and *passim*.

[3] Reid, *EIPM,* 299.

[4] G.E. Moore, 'A Defence of Common Sense', in T. Baldwin (ed.), *G.E. Moore: Selected Writings* (New York, 1925), 93, 107.

Moore goes on with his list of truism. These are all *obvious truths that people in common hold.* There is no need for further justification; these propositions represent native good judgment. According to Moore, the mere reminder of our certainties shows how absurd sceptical arguments are. And, even though Moore does not cite Reid, one can suspect he is under Reid's influence. After all, it was written around the time when A.D. Woozley was working on an edition of Thomas Reid's *Essays on the Intellectual Powers of Man*, which was published in 1941.[5] Just like Reid, Moore uses our everyday dispositions to attack the scepticism and idealism of his predecessors—in his case, Cambridge neo-Hegelians.

Appealing to common sense was not the only way out: Bertrand Russell turned to logico-linguistic analysis. The linguistic turn also influenced those who would eventually follow Moore, namely ordinary language philosophers. Ludwig Wittgenstein, in his later work, and especially on *On Certainty*, evoked our background certainties as some kind of criterion in order to explain meaning and understanding. His appeal to our rock bottom certainties is not a straightforward appeal to common sense; in fact, Wittgenstein claims philosophers cannot just defend commonsensical answers on philosophical problems. However they should offer such an analyses of our linguistic terms that would 'cure us from the temptation to attack common sense.[6] Even though he challenges Moore's conception of common sense, he too suggests that philosophy should somehow affiliate with common sense.[7] In fact Nicholas Wolterstorff argues that only in the light of *On Certainty* can one better understand Reid's appeal to common sense.[8]

While Wittgenstein confronts certain aspects of Moore's *defence* of common sense, J.L. Austin explicitly claims *Moore is his man*.[9] Austin is escpecially drawn

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[5] See K. Lehrer, *Thomas Reid* (London, 1989); J. Haldane, 'Introduction' (24–44). In J. Haldane and S. Read (eds), *The Philosophy of Thomas Reid: A Collection of Essays* (Oxford, 2003).

[6] G. E. M. Anscobe and H. von Wright (eds), Ludwig Wittgenstein, *On Certainty* (Oxford 1977), 58–9; see also R.Rhees (ed), Ludwig Wittgenstein, *The Blue and Brown Book* (Oxford 1970), passim.

[7] See R. Gasparatou, Moore and Wittgenstein on Common Sense. *Philosophical Inquiry,* 31:3 (2009), 65–75; and also A. Stroll, *Moore and Wittgenstein on Certainty* (Oxford, 1994) and *Twentieth Century Analytic Philosophy* (New York, 2000).

[8] See Nicholas Wolterstorff, *Thomas Reid and the Story of Epistemology* (Cambridge, 2001), 215–50.

[9] Austin is said to have declared: "Some like Witters [Wittgenstein], but Moore is my man". In A. Stroll 2000, 87. However, Wittgenstein's influence is also apparent in all his work.

to Moore's analysis of common sense. And even though Moore's defence only appears in a couple of papers, Austin evokes common sense throughout his work. One should note here that probably Moore and Wittgenstein were not his only influence; Woozley taught in Oxford at the same time that Austin did. In any case, J.L. Austin is, I think, a true offspring of the tradition of common sense philosophy as developed in the twentieth century, for he appeals to the *plain man*; he straightforwardly asks "*what he would say and what he would mean by it and why*".[10] Philosophers used to misunderstand the folk; in fact these misconceptions are the main source of philosophical perplexity. For example:

> It is clearly implied [i.e. philosophers clearly imply], ... that the ordinary man believes that he perceives material things. ... But does the ordinary man believe that what he perceives is (always) something like furniture ...? We may think, for instance, of people, people's voices, rivers, mountains, flames, rainbows, shadows, ... – all of which people say that they see or ... hear or smell ... it would surely never have occurred to anybody to try to represent as some single *kind of things* the things which the ordinary man says that he 'perceives'. (*SS,* 7–8)

Just like Reid, Austin now appeals to folk dispositions; philosophers often distort our everyday perception of things; and it is important that he corrects such distortions. Austin and Reid, then, both try to scan our pre-theoretical dispositions and use them as a norm:

(a) Common sense will correct philosophical misconceptions:
> Let us suppose for a moment that it is the real table that we see: must not this real table seem to diminish as we remove farther from it? It is demonstrable that it must. How then can this apparent diminution be an argument that it is not a real table? (*IHM,* 304)

> ... then, the familiar case of the stick in water. ... Does anyone suppose that if something is straight, then it jolly well has to look straight at all times and in all circumstances? Obviously no one seriously supposes this. So what mess are we supposed to get into here, what is the difficulty? (*SS,* 29)

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[10] J.L. Austin, *Philosophical Papers* (Oxford, 1979; hereafter: *PP*). This phrase is from his 1956 paper 'A Plea for Excuses', 181–182. See also: Austin, *Sense and Sensibilia* (Oxford, 1964; hereafter: *SS*), 3, 7–9, 19, 29.

(b) Common sense will also regulate the philosophical use of language:

> To say that an object which I see … makes an impression in my mind, is not … good English … (*EIPM,* 254)

> … it is quite plain that the philosophers' use of 'directly perceive', whatever it may be, is not the ordinary, or any familiar, use … (*SS,*19)

And finally

(c) common sense will assess the reasoning patterns of philosophy and the legitimacy of philosophical investigation in general:

> Men are often led into error by the love of simplicity, which disposes us to reduce things to few principles, and to conceive a greater simplicity in nature than there really is. (*IHM,* 470)

> … over-simplification, schematisation, and constant obsessive repetition of the same small range of jejune 'examples' are … far too common to be dismissed as an occasional weakness of philosophers. The fact is, … that our ordinary words are much subtler in their uses, and mark many more distinctions, than philosophers have realized … (*SS,* 3)

Both Reid and Austin accompany their appeal to common sense with sarcasm against philosophy. For it is just *absurd* to deny common sense. Austin's appeal however is a renewed version because of the emphasis on language. The philosopher no longer evokes foggy commonsensical intuitions for he is able to point to more stable data: linguistic usage.[11] Language provides a tool by which we can get to common sense. Commonsensical beliefs manifest themselves in ordinary language distinctions and descriptions. Language guides us all to say the appropriate thing in this or that context and thus can help the philosopher detect common sense, thus providing us with safer data.

Today's 'experimentalists' build on Austin's ideas. They perform experiments in order to discover what *the folk would really say* in a given circumstance. They design questionnaires that describe some hypothetical story (a thought experiment). Using this story as a stimulator, they ask laypersons about

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[11] See N. Malcolm, 'Moore and Ordinary Language', in R. M. Rorty (ed.), *The Linguistic Turn* (Chicago, 1967), 111 – 25, and A.D. Woozley, 'Ordinary Language and Common Sense', *Mind,* 247:62 (1953), 301 – 12.

knowledge, reference, free will, and so on. They claim this allows them to describe how plain people understand that very topic.[12] They then use such studies to detect the philosophical errors of the past, and Austin is indeed mentioned as an ancestor of experimental philosophy,[13] since, after all, he proposed collecting 'experimental data' in philosophy (*PP*, 274).[14]

I am not going to get into the details of experiments here, nor debate their significance. But I need to note that *experimental philosophy* is not a homogeneous movement.[15] I will try though, to limit myself to observations that do apply to *most* experimental studies. Besides, what interests me is the rationale behind their method. And most experimental studies, following Reid, Moore and Austin *defend common sense against philosophy.* For they use the same pattern: first they use a thought experiment to ask a question regarding a philosophical problem; then they set folk intuitions against philosophers' intuitions; finally they use the dispositions of the folk to criticise philosophers who thought otherwise.

They too believe that philosophers have misconceived the folk. A vast variety of experiments show exactly this: philosophers have supposed that a certain belief is intuitive (say, *incompatibilism*). However experimental studies show that it is not the case, for most folk are *compatibilists* and see no problem with ascribing blame or praise in a deterministic world.[16] Such philosophical misconceptions are the source of philosophical problems, together with philosophers peculiar reasoning strategies. Thus one should first focus on common sense. After all,

> … a theory … that accords with those intuitions relevant to things we care about, … , has, all else being equal, a theoretical advantage over a theory that demands revision or elimination of such intuitions.[17]

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[12] See J. Knobe and S. Nichols (eds), *Experimental Philosophy* (Oxford, 2008).

[13] See J. Alexander and J.M. Weinberg, 'Analytic Epistemology and Experimental Philosophy', *Philosophy Compass,* 2:1 (2007), 56–80.

[14] See also J.O. Urmson, 'J.L. Austin', in R. Richard (ed), *The linguistic Turn* (Chicago, 1967), 232–8.

[15] For the different aims of experimental philosophers, see: Knobe & Nichols 2008b; Alexander & Weinberg 2007. For some criticism of experimental philosophy see: Knobe & Nichols 2008a&b; Gasparatou 2010a; Gasparatou 2008. For their difference with Austin's project see Gasparatou 2010b.

[16] See for example Nahmias *et al* 2008.

[17] E. Nahmias, S. Morris, T. Nadelhoffer, and J. Turner, 'Is Incompatibilism Intuitive?', in J. Knobe and S. Nichols (eds), *Experimental Philosophy* (Oxford, 2008) , 81–105 at 85.

… if a philosophical theory *does* turn out to be privileged by the endorsement of the folk, that would seem to position the burden of proof on the shoulders of those who argue contrary to folk intuitions.[18]

For …

> When we come to be instructed by philosophers, we must bring the old light of common sense along with us, and by it judge of the new light that the philosopher communicates to us. But when we are required to put out the old light altogether, that we may follow the new, we have reason to be on our guard. (*EIPM*, 224)

Reid, Austin and many experimentalists seem to agree: when a theory accords with laypersons' intuitions, it is *privileged*. The burden of proof is always on the theory that contradicts common sense.[19] The ordinary, the folk or the vulgar, as Reid writes—that is *the pre-theoretical*—is the criterion by which to measure philosophy.

The philosophical burden of common sense

So far I have tried to show that Reid, Austin and many of today's experimental philosophers defend common sense as a norm; a norm that can keep philosophy on the right track. Oddly enough, none of the above writers defines *common sense* sufficiently. Following Wolterstorff, I suggest that they all defend *the vast variety of propositions, beliefs, practices & reasoning habits that normal adults take for granted*. Such an understanding of *common sense* justifies why it is impossible to give a clear definition of the term; or even a complete list of commonsensical truisms. Most of the time we hardly ever think about the things we take for granted; they are never explicitly taught; sometimes not even realised.[20] This also explains why the philosopher has to work hard to unravel

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[18] E. Nahmias, S. Morris, T. Nadelhoffer, and J. Turner, 'Surveying Freedom: Folk intuitions about free will and moral responsibility', *Philosophical Psychology,* 18:5 (2005), 561–584 at 564.

[19] See also Wolterstorff 2001, 247.

[20] Wolterstorff, *Thomas Reid and the Story of Epistemology*, 215–50: his account incorporates the insights of both Gregory and Somerville, who argue that common sense refers to *practical reasoning*, to an adequate handling of the everyday-life situations (see Gregory, 'Philosophy and Common Sense', *The Philosophical Review*, 29:6 (1920), 530–46), or to

them. Wolterstorff analyses Reid's account of common sense and compares it with Wittgenstein's but suggests two major differences between them: first, Wittgenstein seems to focus on everyday *practices* that are taken for granted, while hesitating to speak of *beliefs or propositions*; and second, Wittgenstein is very reluctant to evoke human *nature*. None of these reservations can one find in Austin or the experimentalists.

However, the question is *whether* philosophers' appeal *to common sense is* a true appeal to the pre-philosophical dispositions of the folk. Do philosophers just evoke the things we take for granted? I suggest that after all these centuries of evoking it, philosophers' *common sense* has become a technical term that carries certain meta-philosophical burden. Here I will limit myself to two very general meta-philosophical symptoms: pragmatism and naturalism.

Pragmatism

First, a pragmatistic element is apparent. *Pragmatism* holds that beliefs or theories are to be assessed by their functionality or their successful application within the existing social, historical and linguistic context. Any of these appeals to common sense involves a form of pragmatism. A philosophical theory should comply with the era's background. One cannot step outside of our dispositions and talk about truth, knowledge and so forth with absolute or general terms; such an endeavour would not even make sense. Thus, *context* becomes the yardstick. Whatever works within our current worldview is to be privileged.

The emphasis in the context is also apparent in Reid and Austin's view of language. Reid's *social acts* or Austin's *speech acts* associate language with our social practices.[21] Experimentalists imply a similar view. They do the fieldwork Austin proposed: they describe a hypothetical circumstance and then ask the folk *what they would say*. Putting Austin's proposal in practice shows they also share the theory behind it. Experimentalists (or at least some of them) suggest that folk reports have some kind of uniformity (at least within a certain cultural group);[22] they suppose then, that there are some (uniform) background

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sane comprehension and the *views of the plain man* as opposed to those of the scientist's or the philosopher's (see Somerville, 'Reid's Conception of Common Sense', *The Monist*, 70 (1987), 418–29).

[21] See A. Burkhardt, *Speech Acts, Meaning and Intentions* (Berlin, 1990), 29–31. According to him, Reid's *social acts* (some kinds of utterances such as promises, warnings etc) are the forefather of Austin's *speech acts*.

[22] S. Stich experiments in order to show that this is not the case for different cultural groups; different cultures share different norms. His attitude however, again shows

certainties involved. And that the story described puts those background certainties to work and prescribes what to say. All experimental studies depend on how sufficient the story is, which is why they try many versions of the same thought experiment. The outcome is that context is again the yardstick.

This view of language complies with the more general pragmatistic view that any theory or belief system fits its historical or cultural background. This is why common sense becomes a criterion in the first place.

Naturalism.

However, there is also a second metaphilosophical implication in common sense philosophies: naturalism. The first naturalistic element becomes apparent when we ask a question I've put off till now: *why* should we trust common sense? Where does its authority derive from? Reid will first answer: We trust common sense because it is the *natural* thing to do:

> Men need not be taught them [the principles of common sense] … the constitution of our nature leads us to believe them … (*EIPM,* 230)

> [the] Principles [of common sense] … irresistibly govern the belief and conduct of all mankind in the common concerns of life … Such principles are older and of more authority than philosophy: she rests upon them as her basis, not they upon her … (*EIPM,* 102)

Here Austin picks up:

> … our common stock of words embodies all the distinctions men have found worth drawing, and the connexions they have found worth marking, in the lifetimes of many generations: these surely are likely to be more numerous, more sound, since they have stood up to the long test of the survival of the fittest, and more subtle, at least in all ordinary and reasonably practical matters, than any that you or I are likely to think up in our armchairs of an afternoon—the most favoured alternative method. (*PP,* 181–2)

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confidence in the cultural context: within the same cultural context he expects some kind of uniformity. See S. Nichols, S. Stich and J. Weinberg, 'Metaskepticism: Meditations in ethno-Epistemology', in S. Luper (ed), *The Skeptics: Contemporary Essays* (Aldershot, 2003), 227–47.

These concepts will have evolved over a long time: that is, they will have faced the test of practical use, of continual hard cases better than their vanished rivals. (*PP,* 274)

So, it starts out as a *soft naturalism,* to use Strawson's term.[23] For Reid it is our *nature* that ties us down to certain beliefs; we cannot help it. But this soft naturalistic element gets much harder in Austin: in the quotes above he talks about *the long test of the survival of the fittest,* about *evolution* and *vanished rivals.* The terms Austin chooses clearly come from evolution theory.[24] Many naturalists today appeal to our nature; and they use an evolutionary argument to defend our cognitive powers. In fact, the appeal to evolution is a strong cue for naturalism. D. Dennett, R. Millikan, H. Kornblith (among many) use versions of this argument to justify our reasoning skills.[25] Roughly, they propose that our cognitive systems, sometimes including our linguistic capacities and usage, are the product of evolution, and, as such, they represent the world sufficiently, for we would not have survived if our representations were completely wrong.

In 1951 Austin produced a linguistic version of this argument. The commonsensical descriptions of ordinary language are adequate *because* they have survived the natural evolution test. Common sense is reliable; if it weren't reliable, it wouldn't have survived (and perhaps we too would have vanished together). This does not mean that common sense is incorrigible however; even Reid accepts we might be 'required to put out the old light altogether, that we may follow the new...' (*EIPM,* 224). So there is always a chance that some commonsensical disposition might need revision. Experimentalists too admit that the folk are not always right. In fact, some of our beliefs and intuitions may need modification or even elimination. They explain why their project can help here too. Knobe and Nichols in their 'Experimental

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[23] See P.F. Strawson, *Scepticism and Naturalism: Some Varieties* (London, 1985). Strawson ascribes *soft naturalism* to Hume and Wittgenstein. It however can also be ascribed to Reid (bringing him again close to Wittgenstein).

[24] K. Graham, *J. L. Austin: A Critique of Ordinary Language Philosophy* (New Jersey, 1977), 36–46, first emphasised that Austin uses a linguistic version of the argument from evolution. See also the dialogue between K. Graham, "A Note on Reading Austin". *Synthese,* 46 (1981), 143–7. and M. Furberg, 'Review on K. Graham's *J.L. Austin*', *Synthese,* 42 (1979), 465–73.

[25] See R. Millikan, *Language, Thought and other Biological Categories* (Cambridge, Mass., 1984); D. Dennett, *Consciousness Explained* (New York, 1991); H. Kornblith, *Knowledge and its Place in Nature* (Oxford, 2002). For "A Field Guide to Recent Species of Naturalism", see A. Rosenberg, *British Journal of Philosophy and Science,* 47 (1996), 1–29..

Philosophy Manifesto' propose that, in order to test or revise folk intuitions, one should get to know those intuitions first,[26] as do Nahmias *et al.*:

> … certain theories … may require us to revise some, but not all, of our current concepts, beliefs, and practices … But in order to know whether a particular theory demands revision (or even elimination) of our concepts, beliefs, or practices, *we have to know* what these are.[27]

> Certainly … ordinary language is *not* the last word: in principle it can everywhere be supplemented and improved upon and superseded. Only remember, it *is* the *first* word. (Austin, *PP,* 184)

Now accepting the fallibility of our knowledge claims can also be regarded as a naturalistic cue. Austin too struggles with it at length. In his work this struggle is also accompanied with explicit scepticism about the analytic-synthetic distinction. In his 1940 paper, "The meaning of a word" (*PP*, 55–76), he debates the definition of an analytic sentence: 'x is y' is said to be *analytic* if y is part of the meaning of x. This definition does not satisfy Austin:

> Clearly, we suppose, *y must* be *either* a part of the meaning of *x, or* not any part of it. And, if *y is* a part of the meaning of *x*, to say '*x* is not *y*' will be self-contradictory: while if it is *not* a part of the meaning of *x*, to say '*x* is not *y*' will present no difficulty – such a state of affairs will be readily 'conceivable'. This seems to be the merest common sense. And no doubt it *would* be the merest common sense *if* 'meanings' were things in some ordinary sense, which contained parts in some ordinary sense. But they are *not*. (*PP,* 61, Austin's italics)

Austin denies that this is a helpful definition. He goes on arguing that it is impossible to give *any* adequate definition of either *analytic* or *synthetic*. One cannot classify *any* sentence as true or false *based solely on its meaning* (*PP,* 62–69). When we talk about the analytic- synthetic distinction, we are, according to Austin, 'using an old working- model, which fails to fit the facts that we really wish to talk about' (*PP,* 63). A sentence makes sense or not, depending on its use in context (*PP,* 64–5). All other ways of classifying and evaluating sentences are bogus. What is more, any change in the world or in our theories

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[26] Knobe and Nichols, *Experimental Philosophy*, 10.
[27] Nahmias *et al.*, *Philosophical Psychology* , 18:5 (2005), 577.

about the world can change what it makes sense to say (*PP*, 67), meaning that nothing is exempt from revision.

Austin clearly has trouble with the analytic- synthetic distinction. And this would imply that Austin sees philosophy as continuous with science. Indeed he seems to believe that science can help address philosophical problems:

> In the history of human inquiry philosophy has the place of an initial central sun … from time to time it throws off some portion of itself to take station as a science … This happened long ago at the birth of mathematics and again at the birth of physics … only in the last century we have witnessed the same process once again … in the birth of the science of mathematical logic … Is it not possible that the next century may see the birth, through the joined labours of philosophers, grammarians and numerous other students of language, of a true and comprehensive *science of language*? Then we shall have rid ourselves of one more part of philosophy … in the only way we ever get rid of philosophy, by kicking it upstairs. (*PP*, 232, Austin's italics)

Science could take over and answer philosophical questions. Rather than sitting on our armchairs and fabricating principles then, we should go out and examine our common stock of words (*PP*, 182−3). We will find out more about our cognition if we study our current ways of understanding. Scientific methodology will help. With this in mind, Austin proposes his 'laboratory philosophy'. This is a term used by J.O. Urmson (1967) who informed us that Austin had suggested a semi-scientific way to study language. His laboratory team would include native language speakers from different parts of the world. They would focus on a topic, gather all relevant expressions and study them, suggesting examples, distinctions and so on. This is similar to what Austin himself does in many of his *Philosophical Papers*, such as 'A Plea for Excuses' or 'Ifs and Cans'. Hence he proposes a future *science of language* and he insists on actual 'field work in philosophy' (*PP*, 183).

Austin proposed a scientific methodology for philosophy; today experimentalists practice it. Such a methodological proposal only makes sense if one sees philosophy as the study of our current cognitive skills. Description then equals prescription. Austin and experimentalists share this view and in a way so did Reid. [28] Reid claimed that philosophy should describe common

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[28] See P. Rysiew, 'Reid and Epistemic Naturalism', in J. Haldane and S. Read (eds), *The Philosophy of Thomas Reid: A Collection of Essays* (Oxford, 2003), 24−44.

sense so that it does not fall into absurdity. Austin turns to language as a more adequate tool in order to collect commonsensical data. Today experimentalists use questionnaires and statistics for even harder data. Description is the key for the investigation and improvement of our cognition. We should not look for ideal epistemic principles; rather we should examine and refine of our everyday reasoning practices. This is one more naturalistic cue that we meet in the philosophies of common sense.

Conclusion

It seems then that philosophical theses have entered *common sense*. However, if common sense starts bringing philosophical connotations along with it, it cannot deliver what was bargained for. Common sense supposedly derives its authority from all kinds of propositions we take for granted. If we impose philosophical views on it, it loses such an authority.

One should admit that both *pragmatism* and *naturalism* are very vague terms. However, the ideas lying behind those appeals to common sense, whatever one may call them, are strong theoretical views about the accepted methods, the accepted questions and the accepted answers of philosophy. *The plea for common sense emphasises our natural reasoning capacities.* Such an idea is in line with the belief that *there cannot be any absolute or general view of the world. Our natural, historical, cultural, social background becomes the angle by which we see the world. Our worldview is reliable, yet fallible. We must describe it in order to refine it.* These are all philosophical claims. Here I have not tried to debate them. My only suggestion is this: the moment philosophy enters common sense, *common sense,* by definition, is no longer commonsensical. Common sense philosophies supposedly evoke the things common folk take for granted. *This commonsensical cortex of beliefs* is the privileged one; the natural one; the one that survived; the adequate, the subtle, the rich; the functional; the one that expresses our worldview; the one that puts the burden of proof to the opposing team. Thus we can set them against philosophy.

However, it is far from commonsensical to attach all these descriptions and all these expectations to the stuff we take for granted. When Reid chose common sense as a yardstick, certain metaphilosophical phantoms slipped in. And every such appeal made them stronger. At least some sort of pragmatism and some variety of naturalism is evident in Austin and the experimentalists and probably to most of today's appeals to common sense. After all theses

years, the term no longer refers to the everyday beliefs and dispositions of the folk. Thus it cannot be used as a criterion that could judge philosophy from the outside. None of the implications it brings are simply commonsensical; nor can they be justified by appealing to common sense. Reid's vulgar; Austin's plain man; experimentalists' folk; none of them would hardly care about the methods, the questions or the theories of philosophy whatsoever. In fact, the very idea of looking for a criterion can in any case only be a theoretical proposal. Philosophers' use of common sense as a philosophical norm was paradoxical from the beginning because it gave rise to a philosophical construction of *common sense*.

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