What we all know: Community in Moore's *A Defence of Common Sense*

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Abstract. I defend an account of Moore's conception of Common Sense – as it figures in "A Defence of Common Sense" – according to which it is based in a vision of the community of human beings as bound and unified by a settled common understanding of the meaning of our words and statements. This, for Moore, is our inalienable starting point in philosophy. When Moore invokes Common Sense against idealist (and skeptical) philosophers, he is reminding them that they too are bound by this common understanding, which cannot just be left behind, as they confusedly believe. On Moore's conception, Common Sense becomes nothing other than the affirmation that there is such a common understanding – that there is Common Sense – which yields a specific body of Common Sense knowledge. This yields a more principled account of Common Sense than a mere tallying of what contingently happens to be believed (or known) by all.

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1. Introduction

In the first part[i] of his notorious 1925 article "A Defence of Common Sense", G.E. Moore aims to show that idealist (and skeptical[ii]) views can be dismissed by appealing to a core set of propositions that we all know to be true, which he calls *Common Sense beliefs* ("Defence", 119)[iii]. For instance, idealism entails that there are no material objects. But we all have human bodies, and bodies are material objects. Therefore, idealism is false. Ever since, Moore's article has generated a lot of discussion, in a somewhat peculiar way. Peculiar, because Moore's appeal to Common Sense has appeared to many to be overly naive and thereby philosophically impotent. At the same time, however, it is precisely this apparent naivety that has prompted philosophers to revisit it again and again[iv]. Such discussions often involve two interrelated motivations. The first is to get clear about exactly how Moore's appeal to Common Sense is supposed to work[v]. Because Moore was not an idiot, it would be desirable to develop a more sophisticated account of what he is trying to do[vi]. The second motivation is to let Moore's provocative discussion stimulate us in discussing certain philosophical issues in their own right[vii].

In this paper, I start from the first motivation. I provide an account of Moore's conception of Common Sense – as it figures in "Defence" – that, to my mind, better captures Moore's position than existing interpretations. Usually, Moore's invocation of Common Sense is seen as operating in dialectical opposition to the idealist: Moore knows to be true certain Common Sense beliefs that the idealist takes to be false. But this is not what Moore is doing. He insists that the idealists themselves *also* know the Common Sense beliefs to be true. Only, they have lost sight of this. Common Sense, then, is really *common* sense, shared by all members of the community, including the idealist. This point – which is often overlooked[viii] –

is crucial to understanding Moore's position. The idealist, as Moore sees it, is a philosopher who has lost touch with their own position as a member of the community of human beings.

I start by laying bare the communal nature of Moore's conception of Common Sense, against Malcolm's critique in his paper "Defending Common Sense". Next, I show that we cannot be satisfied with what I call a sociological conception of Common Sense, according to which Common Sense consists in what is universally believed. On such a conception, it remains a mystery why the Common Sense beliefs would also be universally known to be true. We need a conception of Common Sense such that the beliefs of Common Sense are such that they are *ipso facto* known by all to be true. It is such a conception, I claim, that Moore attempts to articulate in "Defence". It starts from what Moore takes to be an inalienable starting point in all our philosophizing: the fact that we form a community of human beings with a settled common understanding of the meaning of our words and statements. This is what binds the community, and it is what the idealists mistakenly believe they can leave behind. I show that, on this conception, Common Sense becomes nothing other than the confirmation *that* there is Common Sense, i.e. that we do indeed from a community of human beings with a common understanding. I show how this account escapes the problems with the sociological conception. Finally, I investigate the status of our Common Sense knowledge *qua* knowledge. Moore is torn between his internalist predilections and his recognition that Common Sense knowledge has a different status than other knowledge, bringing him to characterize that knowledge as knowledge for which we possess evidence without being in a position to present that evidence. Although this characterization is confused, it reveals two further important aspects of Moore's account. First, knowledge is not, for Moore, an introspectable mental state. Second, the Common Sense truths, on Moore's view, acquire a liminal status between being analytic and synthetic, conceptual and empirical.

In my presentation, I am building up the dialectic between Moore and the idealist in a way that differs from Moore's own presentation. Roughly, my presentation proceeds through three stages. First, there is our shared commitment to the truth of the Common Sense beliefs. Next, there is their actual truth. Finally, there is our knowing them to be true. Moore, however, immediately opens his discussion with the claim that he (and all of us) *know* the Common Sense beliefs to be true. His exposition does not neatly separate these aspects of Common Sense in the way I do. Nevertheless, as will become clear throughout my presentation, I do believe that these stages are present in Moore's own account, and that distinguishing them more clearly than Moore did helps to make better sense of his position. At the same time, it is important to emphasize that these three aspects of Common Sense always come together for Moore: we possess Common Sense *knowledge*, never merely Common Sense belief (or true belief). The analytical separation I make in my attempt to clarify Moore's position should therefore not be taken to suggest that Moore ever invokes anything less than full-blown Common Sense knowledge against the idealist[ix].

I should say something about that other notorious piece by Moore: "Proof of An External World". Much literature tends to focus on that later article[x]. Moreover, when "Defence" is mentioned, this is often under the assumption that it can be treated along similar lines. In this paper, my focus is squarely on "Defence". I take one upshot of my discussion to be, moreover, that we should not be too quick in assimilating these two papers. Investigating how exactly my reading of "Defence" impacts our understanding of "Proof", is a task for further research.

A final preliminary remark is in order. I am reading Moore in a way that makes his project appear more closely related to that of Wittgenstein's *On Certainty* than has usually been allowed. Am I, then, not simply reading Wittgenstein back into Moore? I think not, and I wish to say two things in reply. First, although my reading of Moore brings him closer to Wittgenstein, it is still a far cry from Wittgenstein himself. To give just one example: Moore's

conception of a settled stock of meanings of our words and statements – a conception that will be central to my reading of Moore – is entirely foreign to Wittgenstein's use-based approach to language. What makes my Moore come closer to Wittgenstein, is my emphasis on his invocation of the community. This does not, however, mean that there are no differences left, far from it. Indeed – and this is my second point – I would claim that my reading renders the dialectic between Moore and Wittgenstein more interesting. Because Moore was already invoking the community, Wittgenstein's criticisms of Moore should be read on that level. The problem is Moore's vision *of* the community, not his neglect of it. Let me just list three problems that Wittgenstein will articulate: (1) The notion of 'common knowledge' is ill-suited to characterize the status of Moore's Common Sense propositions; (2) Moore has neglected the importance of *ways of acting* in shaping the community; (3) We need to take seriously the question whether there could be communities beholden to what may be called alternative fabrics of Common Sense. In these and other ways, Wittgenstein's vision of the community is profoundly different from Moore's.

2. There is no 'I' in 'Common Sense'

Moore's argument in "Defence" is often read as revolving around two properties of the Common Sense beliefs: (1) Their truth is incompatible with idealism; (2) Moore knows them, with certainty, to be true. This standard picture is most clearly at work in Norman Malcolm's critique of Moore in his article "Defending Common Sense"[xi]. Although Malcolm focuses mainly on the notorious statement 'Here is a hand' from "Proof" – and similar statements such as 'That is a tree' – he explicitly frames his discussion as concerning both of Moore's essays ("Defending Common Sense", 201-202)[xii]. Malcolm claims that Moore's assertions such as 'I know with certainty that the Earth has existed for many years past' involve a misuse of the

concept of knowledge. According to Malcolm, the ordinary and correct use of that concept always involves circumstances in which the following features are present: (1) There is a question at issue and a doubt to be removed; (2) The person who claims to possess knowledge can provide reasons for what he or she claims to know; (3) There is available an investigation that would settle the issue. Because these features are not present in the circumstances in which Moore uses the concept of knowledge, he falls into nonsensical discourse ("Defending Common Sense", 202-203)[xiii]. Thus, Malcolm takes Moore's argument to revolve essentially around his first-personal knowledge claims[xiv], which are pitted against the idealist in the all too familiar *modus tollens* move: because Moore knows that the Earth has existed for many years past, he also knows idealism to be false.

This misconstrues Moore's argument. It is true, of course, that Moore takes himself to know, with certainty, that the Common Sense propositions are true. But it is not *Moore's* knowing this that he invokes against the idealist[xv]. What is crucial about the notion of Common Sense beliefs, is that they are *Common* Sense beliefs, i.e. that they are shared by the community, which includes idealist philosophers. The following passage articulates the core of Moore's position:

> I am one of those philosophers who have held that the 'Common Sense view of the world' is, in certain fundamental features, *wholly* true. But it must be remembered that, according to me, *all* philosophers, *without exception*, have agreed with me in holding this: and that the real difference, which is commonly expressed in this way, is only a difference between those philosophers, who have *also* held views inconsistent with these features in 'the Common Sense view of the world', and those who have not. ("Defence", 118-119, third emphasis mine)

As far as I can tell, this passage remains more or less completely unmentioned in the literature. Presumably, it is because interpreters have a hard time dealing with it, since they mostly adhere to an adversarial model of the dialectic, according to which Moore's primary focus is on his *disagreement* with the idealist[xvi]. I aim to show that it is Moore's proclaimed *agreement* with the idealist that is crucial if we wish to understand his philosophical project. The problem with idealists is not merely that they believe what is false (for example that no human body has ever inhabited the Earth), but that they believe what is false *in the face of* what they themselves know to be true: "The strange thing is that philosophers should have been able to hold sincerely, as part of their philosophical creed, propositions inconsistent with what they themselves *knew* to be true; and yet, so far as I can make out, this has really frequently happened" ("Defence", 115, Moore's emphasis)[xvii]. Note that this is not conceived as the sort of case where unearthing the inconsistency between one's views involves complex reasoning processes. As Moore sees it, the idealist views are *blatantly* in contradiction with the Common Sense propositions which the idealist themselves know to be true[xviii]. Part of our task, then, is to investigate how Moore takes such a situation to arise.

All of this is completely ignored by Malcolm. One immediate consequence is that the relevant knowledge claims invoked by Moore should not be construed as being of the form 'I know that p', but instead of the form 'we all know that p'[xix]. Since these have a different use, this already renders Malcolm's critique mostly beside the point[xx]. This does not mean, however, that we should now embark on an exploration of the ordinary use of statements of the form 'we all know that p'[xxi]. In doing so, we would again pass over the deeper philosophical issues underlying Moore's argument[xxii].

What we should do instead, is attempt to attain further clarity about Moore's specific philosophical project in his paper. "Defence" fits into Moore's lifelong project of trying to find a way to deal with idealism, and introduces a novel approach that cannot be understood in terms

of the sort of flat-footed first-personal knowledge claims that Malcolm puts at the center of Moore's argument. We need to take seriously Moore's invocation of *common* knowledge, which reveals that he cannot be trying to *convince* the idealists of anything, since they already possess the requisite knowledge. The issue is not one of generating epistemic justification or warrant for certain conclusions[xxiii]. Rather, Moore is trying to *remind* the idealists of what they already know[xxiv]. What Moore is trying to invoke against the idealist, are not facts about himself *per se*, but rather the fact that Moore and the idealist belong to the same community of human beings. Moore is convinced that an adequate account of what unites us as a community of human beings will reveal idealism to be untenable[xxv]. The idealist, for Moore, is a member of the community gone rogue, looking to occupy a philosophical point of view that is no longer bound by the community. For Moore, no such point of view is to be had, and the idealist must be reminded that she cannot just sever herself from the community. One does not *choose* whether one belongs to the 'we'.

3. The sociological conception of Common Sense

We now possess an initial grasp of the basic shape of Moore's argument from "Defence", so that we can start investigating it in more detail. To further delineate our task, it is helpful to start by looking at an important precedent to "Defence": the first lecture "What is Philosophy?" from Moore's *Some Main Problems of Philosophy*, delivered in 1910. In this lecture, Moore is concerned to classify philosophical views according to how they relate to what he calls *the views of Common Sense*. Already here, we see him fascinated by the fact that philosophers wish to overrule Common Sense: "It seems to me that what is most amazing and most interesting about the views of many philosophers, is the way in which they go beyond or positively contradict the views of Common Sense" (*Main Problems*, 2).

What is most important for our purposes is that Moore characterizes Common Sense as consisting of those views that "are held, now-a-days, by almost everybody" (*Main Problems*, 2). These are views that "we all commonly assume to be true about the Universe, and which we are sure that we know to be true about it" (*Main Problems*, 2). What does the work here, is simply the sociological fact that (almost) all of us hold these views. As a consequence, the views of Common Sense are taken by Moore to change: there are views that used to belong to Common Sense, but about which we would now say that "we *know* that they were wrong: we have *discovered* that they were wrong" (*Main Problems*, 3, Moore's emphases).

This sort of sociological conception of Common Sense runs into serious problems. As one would expect, Moore claims – not only that we are sure that we know them to be true – but that we *do* know the Common Sense views to be true (*Main Problems*, 12). But if Common Sense merely consists in what is universally believed, Moore seems to be committed to the position that the fact that a belief is universally held *itself* constitutes a reason for taking it to be true. Fratantaro, for instance, does read Moore – including "Defence" – as relying on the principle that "universal acceptance of a belief furnishes us with a reason for holding a belief to be true"[xxvi].

It is not clear what Moore himself had in mind at the time of *Main Problems*. What should be clear, however, is that such a position is philosophically highly problematic and could not even begin to provide adequate support for Moore's position in "Defence". If Moore is merely invoking the community as a vehicle for generally held beliefs, there is no good reason to accept that those generally held beliefs are also known to be true. Moreover, on such a conception, it remains open to the idealists to simply deny that they share the Common Sense beliefs, since no principled reason is advanced why they are themselves committed to them. Thus, if Moore's argument in "Defence" is to have any force, he must have moved beyond such a sociological conception of Common Sense.

That this is indeed the case, is what I aim to show. Indeed, Moore would seem to be the last philosopher who would conflate 'p is universally held' with 'p is true'. A conception of Common Sense that is philosophically fruitful must work the other way around. Rather than inferring that a belief belongs to Common Sense from the fact that it is universally held, and then being left with the intractable task of showing that it is also universally known to be true, the very nature of Common Sense must be such that whichever beliefs belong to it are *thereby* universally known to be true. "Defence" constitutes Moore's attempt to articulate such a conception of Common Sense.

4. Common understanding as our inalienable starting point

As discussed above, Moore takes the idealist to be confused about their own position as a member of the community of human beings. It is sometimes said that Moore presents no diagnosis of his target's confusion[xxvii]. This is mistaken, and a good way to start investigating Moore's mature conception of Common Sense is to depart from Moore's diagnosis. As Moore sees it, their philosophical reflections often bring idealists to believe that the meaning of statements such as 'The Earth has existed for many years past' is up for grabs, so that idealist claims such as 'Time is unreal' need not stand in contradiction to them. According to Moore, this is deeply confused. In what may be the most Moorean of all Moore passages – I indulge myself by quoting it in full – Moore replies:

> In what I have just said, I have assumed that there is some meaning which is *the* ordinary
> meaning or popular meaning of such expressions as 'The earth has existed for many
> years past'. And this, I am afraid, is an assumption which some philosophers are capable
> of disputing. They seem to think that the question 'Do you believe that the earth has

existed for many years past?' is not a plain question, such as should be met either by a plain 'Yes' or 'No', or by a plain 'I can't make up my mind', but is the sort of question which can be properly met by: 'It all depends on what you mean by 'the earth' and 'exists' and 'years': if you mean so and so, and so and so, and so and so, then I do; but if you mean so and so, and so and so, and so and so, or so and so, and so and so, and so and so, or so and so, and so and so, and so and so, then I don't, or at least I think it is extremely doubtful'. It seems to me that such a view is as profoundly mistaken as any view can be. Such an expression as 'The earth has existed for many years past' is the very type of an unambiguous expression, the meaning of which we all understand. ("Defence", 111, Moore's emphasis)[xxviii]

Moore is strongly committed to the idea that the meaning of our words and statements is more or less settled, and that we all unproblematically grasp that meaning. For Moore, this amounts to nothing else than the observation that we do – for the most part – effortlessly understand each other[xxix]. This constitutes the inalienable starting point of all philosophizing, on which all of Moore's arguments depend, as we will see. If there were no such common understanding of the settled meaning of our words and sentences, everything would plunge into chaos[xxx]. Denying that there is such a common understanding would amount to voluntarily embracing the unintelligibility of one's own statements – as well as those of any other – and this is not a coherent stance. Anyone who purports to take such a position, can only be confused ("Defence", 111)[xxxi].

From this vantage point, Moore construes the idealist as a philosopher who wishes to distance themselves from our common understanding of the meaning of our words and statements. As Moore understands them, the idealists claim that the settled meanings of our statements run afoul of the truth[xxxii]. Philosophical reflection, they claim, reveals that we must

revise the meaning of our words and statements, if we want to make true statements. For instance, rather than using 'The Earth has existed for many years past' to mean what we all commonly understand it to mean, we must use it to mean something like 'The Earth appears to us to have existed for many years past'[xxxiii].

Moore's way of dealing with such idealists is to remind them of the fact that they cannot just sever themselves from our common understanding of the meaning of our words and statements. Many of their own philosophical claims, Moore points out, can only be understood insofar as they are themselves using our words to mean what we all commonly understand them to mean. In this way, the idealists are committed to views that are inconsistent with their own idealist claims:

> One way in which they have betrayed this inconsistency, is by alluding to the existence of other philosophers. Another way is by alluding to the existence of the human race, and in particular by using 'we' in the sense in which I have already constantly used it, in which any philosopher who asserts that 'we' do so and so, e.g., that '*we* sometimes believe propositions that are not true', is asserting not only that he himself has done the thing in question, but that *very many other human beings, who have had bodies and lived upon the earth*, have done the same. ("Defence", 115, Moore's emphases)

The idealists wish to say, for instance, that most (or all) of our statements, as we commonly understand them, are false. In saying this, however, they are using 'our' and 'we' in the sense in which we all understand it, so that their statements are in fact about a community of human beings with human bodies etc. But it is precisely the existence of such a community that their idealism denies. Thus, in tapping into the settled meaning of our ordinary statements, they are *ipso facto* contradicting their own idealist position[xxxiv]. The Common Sense truths are such that,

in order to deny them, one must implicitly affirm them. The idealists lose sight of the fact that they are themselves, in articulating their views, beholden to our common understanding of the meaning of our words and statements.

What if the idealists double down and insist that they are using 'our' and 'we', not to mean what we all understand those words to mean, but with a more subtle idealist meaning, so that there is no contradiction? Moore's reply in this case is simple: if they are so detaching themselves from our common understanding, we no longer understand what they are saying. If they now say to us: 'you are wrong in assuming that we are human beings with human bodies living upon the Earth', it is no longer clear what they mean by 'you', 'being wrong', or 'we'. *We* understand these notions as involving a community of human beings with human bodies living upon the Earth, but this is exactly how we are *not* to understand them, according to the idealists. The result is that it becomes a mystery how we are to understand them at all. In their confused attempt to detach themselves from our common understanding of the meaning of our words and statements, the idealists have made themselves unintelligible[xxxv]. Of course, idealists may try to further explain the peculiar meaning of their statements. In doing so, however, they would fall into the same dilemma: in explaining their meaning, they will either use our words to mean what we all understand them to mean – so that we are back in the above scenario – or their explanations will themselves be unintelligible.

These points may be further illustrated by taking a closer look at a specific example of Moore engaging with such idealist views. In his paper "The Conception of Reality", Moore provides an in-depth discussion of Bradley's views that offer a good illustration of my discussion[xxxvi]. Moore's stated aim is to resolve a seeming contradiction in Bradley's views, which can be put by saying that Bradley claims both that Time is unreal and that Time exists ("Reality", 116). Part of Moore's inquiry consists in finding out what Bradley could have meant in claiming that Time is unreal. Tellingly, Moore writes: "Now, to begin with, I think I know

pretty well, in part at least, what Mr. Bradley means when he says that [Time] is unreal. I think that part at least of what he means is just what he *ought* to mean—just what anyone else would mean if he said that Time was unreal, and what any ordinary person would understand to be meant, if he heard those words" ("Reality", 110-111). Moore is invoking exactly the sort of common understanding discussed above. What Bradley *ought* to mean – and *does* mean, at least in part[xxxvii] – by 'Time is unreal' is exactly what we all understand it to mean. Moore is pointing out that Bradley himself is beholden to our common understanding of the meaning of our words and statements. On that common understanding, however, 'Time is unreal' and 'Time exists' contradict each other. The question about Bradley then becomes: "Is it possible to explain why he should have failed to perceive the inconsistency?" ("Reality", 116). To answer this question, Moore proceeds to set out how philosophical reflections could bring Bradley to believe that he could mean something by 'Time exists' that is not incompatible with 'Time is unreal' ("Reality", 116ff.). He shows how, in an attempt to imbue his statements with a subtle idealist sense that removes the contradiction, Bradley seeks to leave behind our common understanding. Moore, however, believes that such an attempt can only result in confusion, resulting from spurious philosophical arguments. He concludes: either Bradley still means (at least in part) what we all mean by 'Time exists' – so that his statements are indeed contradictory – or he ends up meaning *nothing at all* by it ("Reality", 120), so that we cannot understand him, exactly the dilemma I set out above.

Moore presents a picture of the community of human beings as bound by a common understanding of the meaning of our words and statements. When we use our words to make certain statements, we all understand what those statements mean. What is not possible for Moore, is this: using our words to mean all sorts of occult things that we do not commonly understand them to mean, while still pretending that one's claims can be unproblematically

understood. Moore himself demonstrates what he takes to be good philosophical practice in passages such as the following[xxxviii]:

> 'Mental fact', on the other hand, is a much more unusual expression, and I am using it in a specially limited sense, which, though I think it is a natural one, does need to be explained. There may be many other senses in which the term can be properly used, but I am only concerned with this one; and hence it is essential that I should explain what it is. ("Defence", 120)

One must use our words in senses that are 'natural' – in which they can be 'properly used' – and if there are multiple such senses available, one must explain clearly in what sense one is using the term, in terms that we do all understand. Idealists fail on all accounts: if their views are not to be straightforwardly contradictory, they must be using our words in a sense that is neither natural nor clearly explained[xxxix]. The result is that we are at a loss how to engage with them. Moore illustrates this for Kant:

> There is … according to him, *a* sense of 'external', a sense in which the word has been commonly used by philosophers – such that, if 'external' be used in that sense, then from the proposition 'Two dogs exist' it will *not* follow that there are some external things. What this supposed sense is I do not think that Kant himself ever succeeded in explaining clearly; nor do I know of any reason for supposing that philosophers ever have used 'external' in a sense, such that in *that* sense things that are to be met with in space are *not* external. ("Proof", 159, Moore's emphases)

Idealists say something like 'We falsely believe that human bodies exist', while pretending that there is no problem in understanding what they have said. But if there is no such problem, they must be using 'we' to mean what we all understand it to mean. If that is so, their statement commits them to the existence of human bodies, so that it becomes self-undermining. On the other hand, if they claim that they are using 'we' to mean something that comes with no such commitment, it is no longer clear *what* they mean by their statement. If the idealist is using our words to make statements in such a way that they never mean what we all understand those statements to mean, we no longer have any grasp on what they do mean. This is further illustrated in the following passage:

> If anybody really does take the view that, when he says 'Time is unreal,' absolutely all that he means is something which is in no way incompatible with what most people would mean by saying 'Time is real,' I do not know how to show that this view is wrong. I can only say that if this *had* been all that he meant, I cannot believe that he would have expressed his view in the form 'Time is unreal'. ("Reality", 111, Moore's emphasis)

Claiming that one is using our words with a wholly different meaning that carries none of the usual commitments, is not a way of overcoming our common understanding, it is rather a way of making it impossible for oneself to be understood. Moore is not saying 'I do not know how to show that this view is wrong' because he takes this to constitute a coherent view against which there are no good arguments. He is rather saying this because he is at a loss *what* view it is that he is supposed to be addressing[xl].

In a way, then, Moore's view is not that far removed from Malcolm. Both have a picture according to which idealist philosophers fall into nonsensical discourse because they attempt to leave behind our 'ordinary use' of our words and statements. What is important, however, if we

wish to talk about 'ordinary use' with regards to both Moore and Malcolm[xli], is that it acquires quite a different sense. As Malcolm sees it, ordinary use pertains to the presence of certain background circumstances wherein our words acquire meaning. Malcolm sees meaning and context as inseparable. The problem with idealists (and Moore) is that they use our words in unsuitable circumstances, so that those words lose their meaning. That is not Moore's view. According to him, our words possess their meaning independently of the context in which they are used. We can use 'I know that is a tree' to mean what we would commonly understand it to mean in any circumstances whatsoever[xlii]. The way in which the idealists leave behind our 'ordinary use' for Moore, is not by using words in unsuitable circumstances, but by confusedly attempting to use our words to mean something entirely different from what we commonly understand them to mean. While using the same words as we do, and producing the same statements as we do, they nevertheless wish to distance themselves completely from what we commonly understand by those words and statements. It is this that, according to Moore, can only result in confusion.

There is a salient objection to Moore's strategy. Moore is saying that, in using a word such as 'we' to mean what we all understand it to mean, the idealist is committing themselves to the existence of human beings with human bodies living upon the Earth etc. In other words: what we all understand 'we' to mean, is such that from the truth of statements about this 'we', it follows that there are human beings with human bodies etc. The suspicion, then, is that Moore is simply stipulating that the meaning of 'we' is such that it becomes analytic that the existence of the 'we' establishes the truth of such Common Sense beliefs[xliii]. But mere stipulation, of course, would cut no ice against idealists. This is an important concern which goes to the heart of Moore's position in "Defence". I return to it below.

5. Common Sense is that there is Common Sense

The idealist, just like any of us, is committed to the existence of the 'we'. But the 'we' does not merely involve human beings with human bodies living upon the Earth etc. As we saw, it involves a community of human beings with a common understanding of the meaning of our words and statements. First and foremost, the 'we' is a 'we' whose members understand each other. That there is such a 'we' is, as we saw, our inalienable starting point, the denial of which leaves only chaos. It is because this is so, that Moore can say things like: "For when I speak of 'philosophers' I mean, of course (*as we all do*), exclusively philosophers who have been human beings, with human bodies that have lived upon the earth, and who have at different times had many different experiences" ("Defence", 114, my emphasis)[xliv]. It is because this is so, that Moore can confidently claim that taking recourse to 'subtle idealist meanings' renders the idealist's claims unintelligible.

Still, it may be objected that the fact that we all are committed to the existence of the 'we', does not show that the 'we' does exist. This is a version of the problem that was posed to the sociological conception above: from the fact that we all believe that p, it does not follow that p is true. What is so ingenious about Moore's conception of Common Sense, is how it attempts to avoid this objection. In the case of certain propositions, the fact that we all believe them to be true *does* entail that they are true. But this is not because of some strange power of the community of human beings to render true what is universally believed. It is rather because it cannot be true that we all believe something – *whatever* it is – unless it is true that there *is* a 'we' to do the believing to begin with. The fact that *we* are committed to the existence of the 'we' renders it true that the 'we' exists, because it is this very 'we' that is so committed. As Moore puts it:

The [Common Sense beliefs] have this peculiar property – namely, that *if we know that they are features in the 'Common Sense view of the world', it follows that they are true*: it is self-contradictory to maintain that *we* know them to be features in the Common Sense view, and that yet they are not true; since to say that *we* know this, is to say that they are true. And many of them also have the further peculiar property that, *if they are features in the Common Sense view of the world (whether 'we' know this or not), it follows that they are true*, since to say that there is a 'Common Sense view of the world', is to say that they are true. ("Defence", 119, Moore's emphases)[xlv]

Some take Moore to have slipped here. Skirry claims that from 'we know that p is a feature in the 'Common Sense view of the world'', it only follows that p is a feature in the 'Common Sense view of the world', not that it is true[xlvi]. But this misses exactly Moore's point: it follows that p is true, because the truth of p is required for there to *be* a 'we' that knows something to be a feature of the 'Common Sense view of the world' at all. As soon as it is admitted that *we* know anything at all (note how Moore keeps emphasizing the word 'we'), the Common Sense beliefs follow, since their truth is required for the existence of the 'we'[xlvii]. The way Moore gets from our belief in the Common Sense truths to their actual truth is through the fact that, for there to *be* 'our belief in the Common Sense truths' at all, there must be an 'our' that 'believes' those truths, and the Common Sense truths are nothing else than those truths that are required for this[xlviii].

What, then, are those Common Sense truths? It is often claimed that Moore provides no characterization of them[xlix]. We now see that this is mistaken. The Common Sense beliefs are characterized as those beliefs the truth of which is required for the existence of the 'we', for the existence of a community of human beings with a common understanding of our words and statements[l]. Since Common Sense is whatever is required for there to be a community of human

beings with a common understanding, we can say that Common Sense is whatever is required for there to *be*, quite literally, *common sense*, that is shared meaning. In this way, Common Sense does nothing else than affirm its own existence. The one Common Sense proposition from which all others flow, is *that* there is Common Sense, *that* there is a 'we', a claim Moore himself does not forget to emphasize: "And that I do know that there is a 'we', that is to say, that many other human beings, with human beings, have lived upon the earth, it seems to me that I do know, for certain" ("Defence", 118). For Moore, this is nothing else than an articulation of what we saw to be our inalienable starting point.

This characterization of Common Sense, we could say, has both form and content. The form is this logic of self-affirmation: Common Sense affirms whatever is required for its own existence. By itself, this says nothing about *what* is so required, about what goes into Common Sense. That content, in turn, is determined by what goes into the notion of the 'we', and that is settled by our common understanding of that notion. When we assert that 'we know' something, we all commonly understand this 'we' as involving the existence of human beings with human bodies living upon the Earth[li]. In this way, the self-affirmation of Common Sense goes one step further: not only does Common Sense affirm its own existence, it also settles what its own existence involves, and this includes at least the existence of a community of human beings with a common understanding of our words and statements[lii]. If we deny the beliefs of Common Sense, we are *ipso facto* denying that there is a common understanding of our words and statements to rely upon[liii].

This again raises the spectre of stipulation. Moore insists that the existence of the 'we' requires – against the idealist – that there are human beings with human bodies living upon the Earth etc, but why would one accept this? If Moore said that the existence of the 'we' requires there being an almighty God, would we have to accept that as well? Is Moore not simply stipulating what goes into this notion of the 'we'?

We are now in a better position to address this concern. First of all, it is important to keep separate what I above called the formal aspect of Moore's argument. The current worry about what is involved in the existence of the 'we', does nothing to undermine Moore's point that the inalienable starting point in our philosophizing consists in the self-affirmation of Common Sense[liv]. The question at issue now is: why should we trust Moore in specifying what exactly is involved in that starting point? Why should we accept that, in affirming its own existence, Common Sense affirms – against the idealist – that we are human beings with human bodies living upon the Earth?

In reply, it must first be noted that it is very well possible that Moore made some mistakes in identifying the beliefs of Common Sense. Whether each of them is indeed such that its truth is required for the existence of Common Sense, of the 'we', is a claim that can be scrutinized. Perhaps Moore was too cavalier about stamping certain beliefs as beliefs of Common Sense. What is also important, however, is to see that for Moore, it is not a matter of freely stipulating what does and does not belong to Common Sense. Our common understanding of the meaning of our words and statements is not something we stipulate at will. It is rather something we find ourselves with, and which constrains our philosophical reflections[lv]. *Pace* the idealist, we do not *choose* how we commonly understand our words and statements, nor can we distance ourselves from that common understanding. We do not determine what goes into Common Sense.

Nor, it must be added, is Common Sense arbitrary. The common understanding that we find ourselves with, is itself constituted *in* the world in which we all live, and it would be an illusion to think that this happens independently of how the world – with us in it – happens to be. That the existence of the 'we' does not require the existence of an almighty God is just as much due to how the world – with us in it – is[lvi]. Below, we will see that the very distinction

between matters of fact and conceptual matters (synthetic/analytic) itself becomes problematic at the level of Common Sense.

6. Common knowledge

We are now ready for the final step in Moore's argument. We have seen that the Common Sense beliefs are exactly those beliefs the truth of which is required for the existence of the 'we', and that this existence constitutes an inalienable starting point in our philosophizing. We *do* find ourselves with Common Sense, and this shows that the Common Sense beliefs are true, since their truth is required for our so finding ourselves. What remains to be addressed, is Moore's claim that we *know* the Common Sense beliefs to be true. Perhaps we merely believe them to be true? To address such a view, Moore makes two points.

Say that a sceptic claims that we merely believe the Common Sense views to be true without knowing them to be true. In response to this, Moore again points out that, in making statements about 'human knowledge', such a philosopher commits themselves to the existence of the 'we' ("Defence", 117). Second, Moore claims that, in asserting with confidence that the Common Sense views are indeed believed by all of us to be true, the sceptics betray the fact that they take themselves to *know* that they are so believed ("Defence", 117-118)[lvii]. But this means that they take themselves to *know* that the 'we' exists, so that their view becomes self-undermining.

Of course, such philosophers could respond that they do not take themselves to know these things, but that they merely believe them. Moore's position seems to be: in sincerely judging that p, one is committed to knowing that p. I cannot investigate the merits of such a view here[lviii]. It should be noted, however, that Moore is not invoking it for *any* judgment, but specifically for the Common Sense beliefs, those beliefs the truth of which is required for there

to be a community of human beings with a common understanding to begin with. The question thus becomes: do we *know* that we form such a community, or do we merely believe it? Moore seems to think that, given the fundamental and inalienable nature of this commitment, it makes no sense to think of it as something we merely believe, rather than knowing. Indeed, it is not even clear what the claim that we merely believe that we possess a common understanding would amount to. As we saw, what is at stake here is the mutual intelligibility of our very statements. Can we say that we merely believe that we understand each other, but do not know it? To Moore, this is absurd: what belief could be more well established than this? Indeed, as we saw, we cannot even coherently doubt it, since a doubt here would drag everything into chaos[lix]. In this way, we find in Moore the sort of conception of Common Sense that I announced above. It is not because a believe is commonly held, that it belongs to Common Sense. Rather, the nature of Common Sense is such that the beliefs belonging to it are *thereby* known by all to be true, on pains of a complete unravelling of our mutual understanding.

Let us now proceed to the second point. Moore does acknowledge a further reason why the sceptic (or idealist, for that matter) may doubt whether we really know the Common Sense beliefs to be true, namely the fact that we are unable to advance any evidence for them. In reply, Moore makes the proto-externalist point that "we are all … in this strange position that we do *know* many things, with regards to which we *know* further that we must have had evidence for them, and yet we do not know *how* we know them, i.e. we do not know what the evidence was" ("Defence", 118, Moore's emphases)[lx].

It is tempting to read this remark as a cop-out: Moore is dogmatically claiming that he knows this and that, but he realizes that he cannot back-up this claim with evidence, so he just blatantly makes the *ad hoc* assertion that he does not need to provide evidence in these cases[lxi]. Such a reading is unfair to Moore. We must keep in mind the broader framework of his conception of Common Sense. Moore is trying to develop a conception of Common Sense as

grounded in the common understanding of our words and statements. The primary knowledge claim involved, then, is simply the claim that we know that we form a community of human beings with a common understanding of our words and statements, that there is a 'we'. It is no coincidence that Moore follows up the above remark with the already partly quoted statement: "If there is any 'we', and if we know that there is, this [namely that we can know things without knowing what our evidence was] must be so: for that there is a 'we', is one of the things in question [is one of the things that we know in this way, if we know them at all]. And that I do know that there is a 'we', that is to say, that many other human beings, with human bodies, have lived upon the earth, it seems to me that I do know, for certain" ("Defence", 118). This knowledge claim is not one that must be *established* by advancing suitable evidence, according to Moore. As we saw, it constitutes our inalienable starting point. We *cannot but* know that there is a 'we'. What Moore is trying to do then, is not to establish that we do know that there is a 'we', but rather to fit that knowledge into a broader epistemological framework, to specify its epistemic status.

It is true, of course, that Moore's account is problematic. Clearly, Moore does not think that it is just due to our forgetfulness, as it were, that we no longer have access to our evidence for our Common Sense beliefs. If that were the case, our Common Sense beliefs would not be justified, and we should try to recollect our evidence. Rather, the idea has to be that it is constitutive of the kind of knowledge that Common Sense knowledge is that it is such that we must have had evidence for it, yet we are no longer in a position to provide that evidence. Thus, Moore's account involves a notion of constitutively inaccessible evidence, and it is unclear how to make sense of that. In effect, Moore is struggling to apply his internalist preconceptions to his account of Common Sense knowledge[lxii]. He is operating with an epistemological framework according to which all knowledge is based on internalist evidence, and he is struggling to fit our Common Sense knowledge into that framework[lxiii]. Moore's position is

unstable, but its very instability reveals that Moore was very much aware of the fact that Common Sense knowledge cannot be straightforwardly accounted for in the same way as other knowledge, contrary to what has sometimes been suggested[lxiv].

Moore's account contains the seeds of a more fruitful position. What constitutes Common Sense knowledge, is not evidence, but one's being a member of the community of human beings. Solely by being a member of the community of human beings, one knows that one is a human being with a human body living upon the Earth etc. It is Moore's way of invoking the community that is so important, and that would pique Wittgenstein's interest. That Moore feels the need to draw this knowledge into the sphere of internalist evidence, is due to the fact that this is the only notion of knowledge he had to work with.

Still, even though Moore's articulation of the status of our Common Sense knowledge *qua* knowledge is problematic, it nevertheless helps to bring out some further important aspects of his position. First, it has been claimed that Moore wrongly conceived of knowledge as a mental state the obtaining of which is introspectively discernible, which makes it akin to a merely subjective sense of certainty[lxv]. By now, it should be clear that this yields a distorted picture of Moore's account of Common Sense knowledge. At no point in "Defence" does Moore invoke introspection as a basis on which to establish that he, or anyone else, knows the Common Sense beliefs to be true. Indeed, on such a picture, how could Moore be as confident as he is that we *all* possess this knowledge[lxvi]? Instead of looking inward to his mental states, Moore looks outward to the community, to our common understanding of the meaning of our words and statements. That common understanding is not revealed through introspection, but by the fact that we form a community of human beings who understand each other. It follows that the sense in which we all possess this knowledge, is not aggregative, in the sense that you could possess it while I do not[lxvii]. Rather, it is imparted to all of us equally through our belonging to the 'we'. It is inherently *communal* knowledge.

What can generate the impression that Moore relies on introspection, are his repeated, seemingly dogmatic assertions that he *does* know that the Common Sense beliefs are true[lxviii]. Moore's apparent dogmatism is not based on introspection, however, but on a deferral to our inalienable common understanding. Moore does not mean to point us towards a particular internal state of mind of his, but rather to his belonging to the 'we', and he is reminding us that we too belong to this 'we'. Malcolm writes: "When Moore responds to the skeptic his attention is not focused outwardly on evidence, but inwardly on his own mental state" (Malcolm, *Thought and Knowledge*, 191). From Moore's point of view, this is a false dilemma: we can know things our knowledge of which is confirmed neither by evidence nor through introspection. Moore's third option is a conception of inalienable Common Sense knowledge with which we are endowed through our belonging to a community human beings with a common understanding.

The second aspect of Moore's position that I wish to discuss brings us back to the question whether Moore is not merely stipulating that the meaning of 'we' such that it becomes analytic that the existence of the 'we' entails that we are human beings with human bodies inhabiting the Earth etc. It is true that, in putting the point in terms of what we *mean* by talking about 'us', 'philosophers', and so on, Moore suggests a reading according to which he is dogmatically stipulating what goes into the meaning of 'we'. We have already seen, however, that this is a misleading picture, and Moore's peculiar notion of constitutively inaccessible evidence further confirms this. We know that Common Sense exists, and the question is: what do we thereby know? Moore claims that this involves, amongst other things, knowing that we are human beings with human bodies inhabiting the Earth etc. But that we know this, is not a matter of mere stipulation. Rather, it is a matter involving the world, and that is why Moore is adamant that we must have had evidence for it, whatever it was. At the same time, of course, it is not a straightforwardly synthetic claim, and this is in turn revealed by the fact that we are not in a position to present our evidence. We know that we have human bodies, but this is not

something we *discover*, as we can discover, for instance, that the milk has gone sour. On Moore's account, the Common Sense truths acquire a sort of liminal status between being purely conceptual and being straightforwardly empirical. We cannot but know the Common Sense beliefs to be true, but they are not merely conceptual truths[lxix]. The fabric of Common Sense, those truths that are required for Common Sense to exist, is a fabric woven of a cloth that involves both our common understanding of our words and statements and the world wherein we find ourselves with such an understanding. We can understand this inalienable knowledge neither on the model of analytic stipulation, nor can we understand it on the model of empirical discovery. With an eye on Wittgenstein's reflections in *On Certainty*, one could say that it constitutes the stable background against which analytic stipulation and empirical discovery themselves are so much as possible.

7. Conclusion

In this paper, I have presented a reading of Moore's conception of Common Sense in his article "Defence" which revolves around the community of human beings as possessing a shared common understanding of our words and statements. As I read Moore, the fact that we do form a community with such a shared understanding constitutes an inalienable starting point in all philosophizing, because – as Moore sees things – it comes down to nothing else than the recognition that we do, for the most part, unproblematically understand each other. On this conception, the Common Sense beliefs which we all know to be true are precisely those truths that are required for there to *be* a 'we' that forms a community of human beings possessing a common understanding to begin with. It is because we all know that there is a 'we', that we all know the Common Sense beliefs to be true.

The problem with the idealists is that they mistakenly believe that they can leave behind this common understanding that unites the community of human beings. In advancing their peculiar philosophical claims, they purport to rise above the commitments that come with this common understanding, while still pretending that their statements are perfectly intelligible. As I have shown, Moore believes that there is a deep tension here, a tension the idealists persistently fails to resolve. Philosophers, just like everyone else, are bound to our common understanding in using our words. They too – whether they like it or not – belong to the 'we'.

There are at least two main challenges that can be advanced against Moore's view. The first is to challenge his claim that we *do* know that there is a 'we', in the sense of a community of human beings possessing a common understanding. As Moore sees it, the alternative is complete mutual intelligibility. But it is not evident that a commitment to mutual intelligibility must take the shape of a commitment to a shared stock of meanings in the way Moore conceives it, and it is an aspect of his view that Moore does little to defend. As indicated before, exploring this avenue of criticism – and exploring how it impacts Moore's arguments against idealism – would be a topic for further research. One place to look is, again, Wittgenstein, who advances a use-based approach to language that does not depend on a fixed stock of shared meanings, but who also wishes to hold onto to Moore's claim that there is something philosophically confused about idealism.

The second challenge is to question Moore's account of what our knowing that there is a 'we' entails, to question what exactly the Common Sense truths *are* that are required for the existence of the 'we'. As Moore sees it, the existence of the 'we' entails – among other things – the existence of human beings with human bodies living upon the Earth. I have tried to defend Moore as best as I can against the accusation that he is doing nothing more than *stipulating* what goes into the 'we' – a defense that involves pointing out that our common understanding is decidedly not, for Moore, a matter of stipulation. That is why I believe that it is crucial to see

that the Common Sense truths acquire – on Moore's conception – a liminal status between being conceptual and being empirical. At the same time, I acknowledge that there is room for further debate here, and that it is not because Moore believed that he was not stipulating what goes into the 'we', that he was not unknowingly doing just that after all[lxx].

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[i] As is customary, I will focus on this first part, which can be seen as a self-standing discussion.

[ii] As we will see, idealist views figure most prominently. The crucial difference is that the idealist still takes themselves to know many things, only not those things that – according to Moore – we commonly take ourselves to know. At the same time, I should emphasize that I

will be talking about the idealist solely as Moore construes them. To what extent Moore's construal is faithful to actual idealist positions, is a question I cannot address here.

[iii] Moore's list is quite extensive. Two examples are: 'We are human beings with human bodies living upon the Earth' and 'The Earth has existed for many years past' ("Defence", 107-108).

[iv] A canonical example is Stroud, *The Significance of Philosophical Scepticism*. The first pages of Burgess, "G.E. Moore on Common Sense and the External World" also offer a good illustration.

[v] This motivation is clearly driving Malcolm, "Moore and Ordinary Language". For contemporary examples, see Lycan, "Moore's Anti-Skeptical Strategies"; Coliva, *Moore and Wittgenstein*; Weatherall, "On G.E. Moore's 'Proof of an External World'". Compare also Baumann's conclusion – after some discussion of Moore's approach to scepticism – that "the question remains open what exactly the arguments were Moore had in mind and how strong they are" (Baumann, "Was Moore a Moorean? On Moore and Scepticism", 193).

[vi] Note that there is always a thin line between 'how Moore intended his arguments to work' and 'Moore was onto something which he could not clearly articulate'. Compare Burgess's claim that "Perhaps more than any other philosopher, Moore's work seems to cry out for a distinction between what he *explicitly* said and what he *implicitly* believed; the latter being in many ways more interesting than the former" (Burgess, "G.E. Moore on Common Sense and the External World, 9). I leave it to the reader to apply that distinction to my discussion.

[vii] Pryor, "What's Wrong with Moore's Argument?"; Wright, "The Perils of Dogmatism"; Coliva, "Moore's *Proof*, Liberals, and Conservatives" are primarily driven by the second motivation.

[viii] Readers who acknowledge the point include Stroll, *Moore and Wittgenstein on Certainty*, 39; Baldwin, *G.E. Moore*, 296; Fratantaro, *The Methodology of G.E. Moore*, 47; Coliva, *Moore*

and Wittgenstein, 14. As will become clear, I think that they nevertheless fail to take the full measure of its importance for Moore's project.

ix I am grateful to an anonymous referee for pressing me on the need to clarify these matters.

x This is true for some of the sources already mentioned. In fact, little has been written on Moore that takes "Defence" as its primary focus. Two exceptions are Murphy, "Moore's "Defence of Common Sense""; Skirry, "Three Kinds of Certainty".

xi Malcolm's exegesis of Moore itself has a history. In a nutshell: Malcolm initially read Moore as trying to show that idealist statements "go against ordinary language" (Malcolm, "Moore and Ordinary Language", 349), thereby taking the issue to revolve around the question of what constitutes "more correct language" (ibid., 350). After Moore explicitly denied this (Moore, "A Reply to My Critics", 673ff.), Malcolm reverted to the more critical account that is my focus here. Interestingly, Moore aims his denial at Ambrose and Lazerowitz, although it clearly applies to Malcolm as well, as also noted by (Baldwin, *G.E. Moore*, 282). Later still, Malcolm presents an attempt to synthesize his earlier accounts, and to take into account some aspects of *On Certainty* (Malcolm, *Thought and Knowledge*).

xii Malcolm is thus a good example of someone who feels no need to distinguish between "Defence" and "Proof".

xiii Similar remarks, as is well known, occur in *On Certainty*, e.g. §18, §23, §91, §243, §260, §504. Citations from *On Certainty* are according to paragraph number. Williams, "Wittgenstein's Refutation of Idealism" is another good example.

xiv This focus on the first person is also evident in the title of Malcolm's piece "Moore and Wittgenstein on the sense of 'I know'".

xv *Pace* Malcolm, *Thought and Knowledge*, 196; Stroll, *Moore and Wittgenstein on Certianty*, 181; Williams, "Wittgenstein's Refutation of Idealism", 78ff., 83; Coleman, "G.E. Moore and

Bad Faith", 359; Pritchard, "Wittgenstein on Scepticism", 524; Pritchard, "Wittgenstein on Scepticism", 563-564.

xvi To give just two examples: Burgess's list of five of Moore's views from "Defence" focuses on the fact that idealists contradict Moore, and leaves unmentioned Moore's claim that they agree with him (Burgess, "G.E. Moore on Common Sense and the External World", 9). Similarly, Fratantaro reads Moore as taking himself to *differ* from other philosophers in holding the Common Sense view of the world to be true (Fratantaro, *The Methodology of G.E. Moore*, 46), whereas this is precisely what Moore takes himself to have *in common* with other philosophers.

xvii Similarly, Moore elsewhere talks about philosophers who "held sincerely views which they knew to be false" (Moore, "A Reply to My Critics", 675), adding that "there is no reason whatever to suppose that this is impossible" (ibid., 675). Thus, Moore seems to reject the KK-principle, which reveals an externalist strand in his thought. That there are externalist strands in Moore's thought – *pace* (Nuccetelli & Seay, "Introduction", 8) – has been noted by Baldwin, *G.E. Moore*, 303ff.; Coliva, "Scepticism and Knowledge: Moore's Proof of an External World, 993ff.; Leonardi, "Wittgenstein and Moore", 51, footnote 1. Compare also Neta, "Fixing the Transmission: The New Mooreans, 80.

xviii Lycan writes: "Moore is wasting the idealist's time. The idealist has taken a position and given an argument in its support. Taking that position and not being an idiot, the idealist obviously rejects either 'There really are hands' or 'Hands are material things'" (Lycan, "Moore's Anti-Skeptical Strategies, 90). Moore, we see, would claim that they do not.

xix Wittgenstein is also guilty of this in *On Certainty*, e.g. §6, §21, §24, §137, §178, §488, §§520-521. At other places, however, he is more careful, e.g. §84, §100, §325. In effect, there are several strands running through Wittenstein's reflections, some of which are more faithful to Moore's position than others.

[xx] To give one example: as we saw, Malcolm says that when someone ordinarily says 'I know that p' in certain circumstances, there is, in those circumstances, "a question at hand and a doubt to be removed" (Malcolm, "Defending Common Sense", 203). Not so for statements of the form 'We all know that p'. Consider, for instance, a teacher starting a class by saying 'Since last week, we all know that p, so I will assume this from now on'. What is crucial to such uses, is precisely that there is *no* question or doubt with regards to p in the circumstances at hand, which accords well with Moore's statements about his Common Sense beliefs.

[xxi] Which, to be sure, is still apt to reveal problems with Moore's statements, as seen from a Malcolmian point of view.

[xxii] To anticipate an objection: in his letter in which he replies to Malcolm's critique, Moore does not chide him for focussing on statements of the form 'I know that p' rather than 'We all know that p'. There are some reasons for this. First, Moore seems to adopt a focus on "Proof", to which the status of statements of the form 'I know that p' is more to the point. Second, whatever the role of such statements in Moore's broader philosophical strategy, Moore does believe that one *can* truly say 'I know that that is a tree' where Malcolm would see only misuse of language, and he feels a genuine need to defend this. Moreover, since Malcolm doesn't seem to be attacking statements of the form 'We all know that p' anyway, there is no immediate need to discuss those. It is typical of Moore that he focuses entirely on Malcolm's specific objection, rather than taking a broader view of the philosophical issues at hand, and seeing how Malcolm's criticism relates to those. None of this entails that Moore's argument from "Defence" is centred around the first person in the way Malcolm took it to be.

[xxiii] Contemporary discussions usually read "Proof" in such terms. See e.g. Pryor, "What's Wrong with Moore's Argument?"; Wright, "The Perils of Dogmatism"; Coliva, "Moore's *Proof*, Liberals, and Conservatives", but also Ambrose, "Moore's "Proof of an External World"", 404ff.. I suspect that they would approach "Defence" in a similar way.

xxiv Thus, I do not follow Baldwin in saying that "Moore would have to be very philosophically naïve, or obtuse, to suppose that one could refute the philosophical sceptic by reminders of this kind" (Baldwin, *G.E. Moore*, 291-292). It all depends, of course, on how the relevant notion of 'reminding' (and of 'refuting') is fleshed out. The crucial point is that what Moore is reminding idealists and skeptics of are not just some beliefs they contingently happen to have, but something much more fundamental, as will become clear.

xxv That Moore is attempting to address such complex philosophical issues, is something to which Malcolm remained entirely oblivious, leading him to say things like: "The role which Moore, the Great Refuter, has played in the history of philosophy has been mainly a destructive one" (Malcolm, "Moore and Ordinary Language", 365). I hope to show that Moore is a more interesting philosopher than remarks such as these make him out to be.

xxvi Fratantaro, *The Methodology of G.E. Moore*, 60.

xxvii E.g. Malcolm, "Moore and Ordinary Language", 367; Baldwin, *G.E. Moore*, 279; Coliva, *Moore and Wittgenstein*, 13-14.

xxviii Comparable remarks are found at "Defence", 110, 114; "Reality", 17.

xxix There is, of course, the question of how Moore would deal with differences between languages. We need not address that issue here, but I would expect Moore to say that all languages must, insofar as they can be understood, tap into roughly the same settled meanings. This may be compared to Frege's idea that "mankind has a common store of thoughts which is transmitted from one generation to another" (Frege, *Collected Papers on Mathematics, Logic, and Philosophy*, 160).

xxx In this way, Moorean Common Sense is directly opposed to the sort of meaning-skepticism that Kripke found in Wittgenstein (Kripke, *Wittgenstein on Rules and Private Language*). To what extend this renders Moore's position merely dogmatic against *such* skepticism, is a

question I cannot investigate here. It is a titillating possibility that Wittgenstein's remarks may have been inspired by Moore.

xxxi The confusion Moore has in mind is that between understanding the meaning of a statement and being able to give a correct analysis of its meaning ("Defence", 111). The question of what my reading of Moore's conception of Common Sense implies for his conception of philosophical analysis – a question that was forcefully put to me by an anonymous referee – is one which requires at least another paper to address. Here, I can only briefly indicate my views on the matter. As I read him, it is a central commitment of Moore's philosophy that we can understand the meaning of our ordinary statements prior to and independently of any subsequent philosophical analysis of that meaning. This is exactly the sort of common understanding Moore takes all of us to possess. For Moore, then, it is a constraint on an adequate conception of philosophical analysis that the analysis of the meaning of an ordinary statement – no matter how unclear and difficult it may be to find the correct analysis – cannot overturn or undermine the prior common understanding of that meaning. As we will see, Moore reads idealists as claiming that philosophical reflection does reveal that our common understanding of certain statements is confused or mistaken, so that they are committed to the idea that philosophical reflection provides a *corrective* on that common understanding. It is only after we have gone through adequate philosophical reflection – idealists are taken by Moore to claim – that we can fully understand what we are saying or what we are trying to say. It is this idea of philosophy providing a 'corrective on Common Sense' that is anathema to Moore, and that he argued against throughout his philosophical career. As he sees it, the idea of such a corrective illicitly projects back our unclarity about the analysis of the meaning of a statement into our prior common understanding of that statement, claiming that the latter is unclear and open to revision as well.

xxxii Compare Sosa, "Moore's Proof", 52.

xxxiii An anonymous referee pointed out that the idealists may claim that they are not challenging the truth of our Common Sense statements, so that they do not seem to be attacking Common Sense at all. As Moore sees things, however, they can only do so because they are implicitly committed to the need of a revision in our *understanding* of those statements in order to render them true. It is precisely this idea – that philosophical reflection provides a corrective on our common understanding of our statements – that Moore finds deeply problematic, as already indicated. For him, it is not only important that our Common Sense statements are true, but moreover that they are true *on our common understanding of their meaning*.

xxxiv Compare what Burgess describes as "the sceptic's apparent inability to do without proletarian uses of language" (Burgess, "G.E. Moore on Common Sense and the External World, 12).

xxxv This should satisfy Grice's demand – aimed at Moore – for "some account […] of the nature of the absurdity to which a philosophical paradox allegedly commits its propounder" (Grice, *Studies in the Way of Words*, 157). In this way, Moore's argument is meant to run deeper than Lycan's reconstrual of it as a superficial version of the Humean observation that "we are unable in practice to doubt the things we are theoretically obliged to doubt" (Lycan, "Moore's Anti-Skeptical Strategies, 88). Skirry's notion of "practical contradiction" (Skirry, "Three Kinds of Certainty", 397-398) also seems too light. Compare also (Fratantaro, *The Methodology of G.E. Moore*, 48). Anticipating Wittgenstein, Moore wishes to show that it is not even clear what it could *mean* to doubt our Common Sense knowledge. Coady presents what I read as an incipient version of these considerations, although he does not seem to think they can be ascribed to Moore himself (Coady, "Moore's Common Sense", 103-104). Compare also Coliva, "Moore's *Proof*, Liberals, and Conservatives", 338ff.; Leonardi, "Wittgenstein and Moore", 56-57.

xxxvi Let me point out again that I am interested in *Moore's* construal of Bradley. To what extent Moore is being faithful to Bradley's actual philosophical position, is an issue I cannot address here.

xxxvii I do not pretend to be clear about exactly how Moore understands such 'partial meaning'. This need not derail us here. What is important, is that from the fact that part of Bradley's meaning is what he ought to mean, it follows that Bradley's statements contradict Common Sense.

xxxviii Moore's *oeuvre* is overflowing with similar passages.

xxxix One could wonder whether Moore takes it to be impossible to use words in an unnatural sense *and* to provide an adequate explanation of that sense, or whether he merely means to make the contingent observation that no one has yet succeeded in doing so. Moore himself is unclear about this, although I expect he would waver towards the latter. Of course, this also depends on the criterion for 'naturalness', another point about which Moore is not very explicit. An in-depth investigation of this issue is work for further research.

xl To be sure: Moore would accept (whether rightly or wrongly, I leave as an open question) that one can explicitly stipulate that one is using 'Time is unreal' to mean whatever one pleases, e.g. that clocks sometimes tell the wrong time. Such a stipulation, however, does not result in anything that goes against Common Sense, let alone in an interesting philosophical view, so there is nothing that needs to be addressed here.

xli It is a notion that is much less prominent in Moore than it is in Malcolm. This paragraph is indebted to discussion with Jonathan Gombin.

xlii This becomes clear in his "Letter to Malcolm". See also Coliva, "Scepticism and Knowledge: Moore's Proof of an External World", 983).

xliii Compare Skirry's objection to Moore that "it is logically possible for someone to exist without being or having a human body" (Skirry, "Three Kinds of Certainty", 400). Compare

also Stroll, *Wittgenstein and Moore on Certainty*, 34ff.; Baumann, "Was Moore a Moorean? On Moore and Scepticism", 182-183.

xliv Compare also: "I am only asserting that there is *no good reason* to suppose the contrary; by which I mean, of course, that none of the human beings, who have had human bodies that lived upon the earth, have, during the lifetime of their bodies, had any good reason to suppose the contrary" ("Defence", 119-120). Here, Moore is connecting the notion of 'having reasons' to the community of human beings.

xlv See also "Defence", 117.

xlvi Skirry, "Three Kinds of Certainty", 406, endnote 15.

xlvii It is true that Moore makes a distinction between what follows from 'we know that p is a feature of the 'Common Sense view of the world'' and what follows from 'p is a feature of the 'Common Sense view of the world''. In the first, it is primarily the existence of the knowing 'we' that is operative, in the second it is the existence of a 'Common Sense view of the world' as such. Exploring this fine-grained distinction is a technical issue which need not detain us here. What is more important, is the nature of Moore's argument, which is the same in both instances.

xlviii Similarly for 'belief in the features of the Common Sense View of the World'. Why does our belief in the features of the Common Sense View of the World entail the truth of those features? This is because the very existence of 'our belief in the features of the Common Sense View of the World' already entails that there *is* a Common Sense View of the World the features of which we believe to be true. And it is from this that the truth of those features follows, because those features are precisely what is required *for* there to be a Common Sense View of the World. I am grateful to an anonymous referee for pressing me on the need to further clarify this point.

xlix E.g. Burgess, "G.E. Moore on Common Sense and the External World", 21; Stroll, *Moore and Wittgenstein on Certainty*, 152; Nuccetelli & Seay, "Introduction", 5; Coady, "Moore's Common Sense", 115.

l How exactly is this notion of being 'required' to be understood? I discuss this below, when I argue that the Common Sense beliefs acquire – on Moore's conception – a liminal status between being analytic and synthetic. The notion of being 'required' is neither straightforwardly that of conceptual entailment, nor of empirical fact.

li Again, this notion of 'involving' is neither straightforwardly that of conceptual entailment nor of empirical fact.

lii Here, one may be reminded of a joke: 'The brain is the most important part of the human body. At least, according to the brain'.

liii Thus, Moore is anticipating the Wittgensteinian point that "I am not more certain of the meaning of my words than I am of certain judgments" (OC, §126). See also §§80-81, §§369-370, §456. In Moore, we already find the idea that doubting whether we have bodies cannot be distinguished from doubting our very understanding of our statements.

liv I am not claiming that there is nothing to say here, only that the above concern does not engage with this aspect of Moore's position. Exploring how this aspect may in turn be criticized would take us too far afield.

lv This, I take it, is also why Moore takes it to be a Common Sense truth that the Earth has existed for many years past. Otherwise, the Common Sense that we find ourselves with could not have been put in place.

lvi I take my reading to cohere nicely with Baldwin's statement that "The thesis that we have this [Common Sense] knowledge coheres with our best understanding of the world and our place within it" (Baldwin, *G.E. Moore*, 298). Still, Baldwin does not elaborate on this statement, so I cannot be sure to what extent he would be sympathetic to my reading.

lvii Compare *Main Problems*, 19.

lviii For some critical remarks, see e.g. Baldwin, *G.E. Moore*, 274ff..

lix Another anticipation of *On Certainty*, e.g. §613.

lx This is echoed in "Proof": "I can know things, which I cannot prove" (170). This is another externalist strand in Moore's thought.

lxi Compare: "Moore does not offer up anything even remotely adequate in defense of his claim to know commonsense propositions" (Coleman, "G.E. Moore and Bad Faith, 353-354). See also McGinn, *Sense and Certainty*, 52; Baumann, "Was Moore a Moorean? On Moore and Scepticism", 185. I would say that Moore's defence lies precisely in the conception of Common Sense that he is trying to flesh out.

lxii Thus, the above mentioned externalist strands in his thought should not be taken to show that Moore was *deliberately* moving away from a conception of knowledge in terms of an internalist notion of evidence. This is a clear instance where Moore's own position was not fully transparent to him.

lxiii One may be surprised by Moore's claim that we have no evidence for our Common Sense beliefs. Do I not, after all, have overwhelming sensory and other evidence for the fact that I have a human body? Presumably, Moore is operating on a conception according to which our evidence for a claim must independently have a better epistemic standing than the claim itself, so that none of these straightforward pieces of evidence can be invoked. Thanks to Martin Gustafsson for raising this point. It is a point that is also familiar from *On Certainty*, e.g. §125, §307.

lxiv E.g. Murphy, "Moore's "Defence of Common Sense""; Stroll, *Moore and Wittgenstein on Certainty*, 102-103.

lxv See e.g. Murphy, "Moore's "Defence of Common Sense"", 308; Malcolm, *Thought and Knowledge*, 187ff.; Williams, "Wittgenstein's Refutation of Idealism", 81. Compare also

Coliva, *Moore and Wittgenstein*, 210. For Wittgenstein's version of this criticism, see e.g. OC, §12, §389, §490, §569. Leonardi briefly flags his disagreement with this criticism (Leonardi, "Wittgenstein and Moore", 51, footnote 1. Coleman also tries to avoid such a reading (Coleman, "G.E. Moore and Bad Faith", 360. Baldwin finds such a position in some of Moore's other papers (Baldwin, *G.E. Moore*, 271ff.), but also rejects it as a reading of "Defence" (ibid., 296). In "Certainty", we find Moore himself saying: "It is, of course, very obvious, and has been pointed out again and again, that […] 'I feel certain that p' may quite well be true in a case in which p is not true – in other words that from the mere fact that I feel certain that so-and-so is the case it never follows that so-and-so is in fact the case" (182). Someone who did seem to have such a view is Prichard, who claimed that, given adequate reflection, "we cannot mistake belief for knowledge or vice versa" (Prichard, *Knowledge and Perception*, 88).

[lxvi] Accordingly, this criticism often goes together with a neglect of the communal aspect of Moore's account.

[lxvii] It is true that, in "Certainty", Moore says that it never follows from his knowing something for certain that anyone else knows it for certain (184). In the same paper, however, he makes it clear that, with regards to the Common Sense beliefs, the alternative is between none of us ever knowing any of them to be true, and all of us knowing all of them to be true (188). The way to reconcile these remarks, is to see the former as making a purely logical point, and the latter as taking into account the communal nature of Common Sense knowledge, which Moore does not take to be a matter of logic (this is a seed of a Wittgensteinian critique of Moore). Compare also: "If I do *know* all these propositions to be true, then, I think, it is quite certain that other human beings also have known corresponding propositions" ("Defence", 118, Moore's emphasis).

[lxviii] Compare Malcolm, *Thought and Knowledge*, 191.

[lxix] Here we find further seeds of *On Certainty*. Compare §401, §651.