Dean&Francis
ISSN 2959-6149

From the Flaw in Common-Sense Philosophy to the Essence of Real Truth

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Abstract:

This Essay starts with the rebuttal argument toward the common-sense philosophy claiming that common-sense knowledge is always overthrown by science. Then, this argument results in a better definition of the common-sense knowledge that makes up the flaw that leads to the previous conflict. By clearing up the definition of common-sense knowledge, this essay also discusses the approach of how people understand this world, which leads the discussion to the essence of "real truth" compared to the truth that society chooses to believe in. While discovering the essence of "real truth", the common-sense philosophy helps explain why we cannot reach a real truth, and Darwin's Theory of Evolution contributes to the pattern of the eternal changing of the species, which ends in a conclusion that there might be no real truth at all, and we cannot approach one, but it is still valuable for us to involve in the process of keep seeking for truth.

Keywords: Common-sense philosophy; real truth; Darwin's Theory

1. Introduction

In the field of epistemology, a central question since ancient times has been: What is the true nature of the world, and how do we access its reality through our cognition? Since ancient Greek philosophy, when we first began to explore the world, many philosophers have used the question of "how this world is constituted" as a starting point to propose different hypotheses about the external world. Meanwhile, while some focus on uncovering the truths of the external world, others dedicate themselves to understanding the cognitive abilities that arise within human beings. Combining these perspectives naturally leads to a more complex question: How do we interpret and assess the existence of external objects through our inner perceptions? Common sense, as a foundational yet highly contentious domain underlying numerous other questions, deserves serious attention. With the advent of new, more complex, and open-minded philosophies and more advanced areas of inquiry, this becomes even more pertinent.

In this paper, I will start by presenting a counterpoint to the reliability of common-sense knowledge, arguing that much of what was once accepted as common-sense has later been disproven by scientific discoveries. By examining this tension between common sense and its critics, I aim to highlight neglected characteristics that should be given more weight in defining common-sense knowledge. Drawing on the

perspectives of Thomas Reid and Immanuel Kant, I will refine and elevate the concept of common sense, explaining why my revised definition can resolve longstanding debates and contradictions that previous definitions, such as that of G.E. Moore, failed to address (section 1).

Next, while I will advocate for a version of common sense that includes beliefs we can reasonably accept without requiring additional evidence or proof, I am not claiming that these beliefs represent the "absolute truth" of the world. Instead, one of the reasons we seek "truths" we can agree upon, such as common-sense knowledge, is to progressively approach and uncover the "absolute truth" of the world. I argue that the truth we ought to accept is shaped by society and the times, rather than being equivalent to an ultimate, real truth. By distinguishing between these two types of truths, I will conclude that, although they differ, both are valuable pursuits and can enhance each other's advancement (section 2).

Finally, I will use Darwin's theory of evolution to suggest that it may be impossible for us to ever attain the "ultimate real truth" of this world. However, this is not necessarily a negative outcome. Instead, as I have argued previously, this pursuit is worthwhile and may even serve as a key goal as our species continues on its evolutionary path (section 3).

2. Science and Common-Sense Knowledge

The claim that "many of the common-sense beliefs that people once held to be true has been discovered to be false by later scientific discoveries" is a rebuttal that many common-sense opponents had raised. However, I think that on this point of contradiction between science and common-sense, the supporters and opponents of common sense do not have such a big conflict of views. It is just that they are vague about the actual reference to common sense. Therefore, in this section, I will reiterate and improve the true meaning of common sense by arguing that there are not so many contradictions between common-sense and science as common-sense opponents originally thought.

Noah Lemos emphasized in his article that "common-sense beliefs constitute knowledge" (a view also mentioned by G.E. Moore and agreed by Thomas Reid) and introduced the idea that "common-sense knowledge" is knowledge, not mere guessing [1]. Unlike "true belief" or a "lucky guess," which is always unfounded, knowledge is based on many premises. Although G.E. Moore emphasized that common sense does not need to be proven by evidence to be believed, this is not in conflict with the idea that common sense is knowledge. While I have no direct and specific evidence to prove that "I have a hand," I can still say that "I have the knowledge that I have a hand." The claim "I have a hand" is a very simple common-sense knowledge that does not drive many conflicts between common-sense defenders and opponents. However, as propositions become more complex, people begin to doubt the correctness of some common-sense knowledge. This is where I would like to introduce some of the examples that opponents of common-sense knowledge use to argue that common-sense can conflict with later scientific discoveries and be proved to be wrong- "the Earth is flat", and "the sun orbits the Earth". These two beliefs are broadly held to be true in the past but later proved to be wrong. However, I would say that when people at that time said such ideas were "common-sense," it was simply said most people believed them with confidence without skeptics, but not equivalent to the "common-sense knowledge" in philosophical ideas. In other words, they are not common-sense knowledge. Before I reveal the real common-sense knowledge embedded under the two propositions, I will introduce Thomas Reid's idea of the "first principles" and Immanuel Kant's definition of the "a priori." By showing how the "first principles" and "a priori" are so similar to common-sense knowledge in the properties like they are all self-evident truth that does not require further proofs, I will conclude that some other characteristics that first principles and a priori hold is also suitable to be taken into account while we are defining common-sense. For example, it needs to be very fundamental, and it should be the basic knowledge for us to be able to further understand this world.

In the Inquiry and Essays by Thomas Reid, he raised the famous idea of the "first principles," which are immediate, self-evident truths that form the foundation for all human reasoning [2]. He listed the 12 first principles that he considered to be true without the need for evidence. I am not going to present what the 12 first principles are. However, they are all about the abstract characteristics or abilities humans have to interact with a deeper understanding of the outer world, for example, thoughts of mind, consciousness, memory, personal identity, qualities of bodies, the existence of others, future, and past, etc. In the Critique of Pure Reason, Immanuel Kant talked about the concept of the A Priori (mind) [3]. According to Kant, a priori knowledge refers to knowledge that is independent of experience, necessary for the possibility of experience itself (like space, time, and causality). We can see how the ideas of Reid and Kant are intercepted in many ways and rely on common-sense. First principles and a priori are both defined as "knowledge," and similar to the common-sense

ISSN 2959-6149

knowledge defined by Moore and Lemos, the first principles and a priori are also believed to be true without the need for further testimony. In addition, first principles and a priori both stress the importance of their necessity in making further coherent judgments and understanding about the world. In both systems, these foundational principles or structures must be assumed for knowledge to be possible at all. Moreover, this is something that I consider to be embedded in the concept of common-sense knowledge that has not been stressed as seriously as it should be in the initial definition. My subsequent arguments will be centered on this point of view.

Having noticed the point that common-sense should be a kind of knowledge so fundamental that it acts as the basis for all further understanding of the world, we can look back into the two examples given by the opponents of the common-sense beliefs mentioned earlier: "the Earth is flat", and "the sun orbits the Earth". These propositions are seemingly too complex to be considered as a "basis" for further knowledge. They are more like conclusions that are based on more fragmented premises, and among the premises that make up the argument that leads to the conclusion, one or some of the premises (or even all) can be common-sense knowledge. Moreover, following the rule of metalogic, it is fine for the conclusion to be false while some of the premises remain to be true.

P1: We have the basic ability to sense and judge the figure of things around us.

P2: We observe the land beneath me to be generally flat.

P3: It is reasonable to induce the frequently observed pattern to a bigger picture.

C: It is highly possible that the whole Earth is flat.

In this argument, the premises are correct, but the conclusion is not necessarily to be true. Because the induction is not always valid, it only accounts for the most possible conclusion, and we are missing some important premises that we only discover later through scientific studies, for example, "if we keep going one direction, we will return to where we started". In this sense, what P1 and P2 refer to as "we have the basic ability to sense, observe the figure outside of us," and the rule we used in P3 that "it is reasonable to induce a most possible conclusion from the facts and patterns we now have" can be considered as common-sense knowledge, while the conclusion "the Earth is flat" is not.

P1: We recognize the existence of the concepts of space and time.

P2: Every day we see the sunrise from one fixed side and set from another fixed side.

P3: The sun should be moving from where it set to return to the place it rises during the night at the other side of the earth at night.

C: It is highly likely that the sun orbits the Earth.

In this argument, P1 can be counted as a common-sense knowledge, or an a priori, while P2 is an observation, and P3 is a mere guessing or a brave inference. In neither of the arguments are the premises adequate, therefore, it is reasonable that these conclusions were subsequently overturned.

To sum up this section, most of the cases where opponents of the common-sense knowledge argue that common-sense is always proved to be wrong by scientific discoveries is due to the failure in completely breaking down the proposition into most fundamental fragments that are more similar to Reid's "first principles" and Kant's "a priori"

3. Real Truth and What People Believe to Be True

For philosophers like Reid, common sense beliefs are in harmony with real truth. The things we take for granted—like the existence of an external world or the reliability of our senses—are reflections of reality. These beliefs provide a trustworthy starting point for knowledge. The same idea applies to Kant's ideas on a priori, as they are all the basis for our discoveries toward a deeper understanding of the world. However, there are also famous philosophers in a traditional common-sense field that do not equate common-sense with "real truth". According to what Lemos wrote in "Morality and Common Sense" which was published in the book "The Cambridge Companion to Common-Sense Philosophy", the claims of common-sense beliefs are more reasonable to believe than any philosophical view that implies either that they are false or that we do not know them [4]. From his choice of words, we can see that his definition of common sense is more inclined to "reasonableness" rather than seeing it as an absolute truth. While this is a concept that makes much more sense than stating "common-sense" as absolute truths, the existence of "degree of reason" still leads to ambiguity, which is the reason I cleared out the definition of common-sense knowledge to limit it to the most fundamental level in the previous discussion to avoid too many conflicts on cases of common-sense knowledge that are so complicated that might easily find out flawed. And now, I will turn to discuss what's the difference between "real truth" and "what's reasonable to believe to be true".

To search for truth is what the subject of philosophy has long been devoted to. However, by noticing how widely believed knowledge (that some called common-sense but was refuted in the previous paragraphs) is later proved

to be wrong, we can see how difficult it is to be sure of something as a real truth. However, does that mean that we should not believe anything is true until all evidence is available, or it is confirmed? This is where I would raise the relationship between Real Truth and what people and society believe to be true.

In the framework of the entire social system, different types of participants have different identities, statuses, jobs, responsibilities, etc., and the division of different roles also creates differences in authority and power. Even with very complex relationships and different bargaining powers, society will still have a "rule of the game" that most people are willing to agree with and follow in every era. The composition of these game rules is very complex, and it consists of many parts, such as policies, laws, beliefs, and morals. If we look at the history of humankind in the past, we can easily realize that these game rules have been "improving." When using the word "progress," we have assumed that every change in the social operating system is more perfect than before. In other words, it is closer to the "correct truth of the world." I will save the problem of whether we are indeed approaching the real truth for later discussion. For this point, we will only focus on the fact that our behavior of constantly overturning the previous cognition and social rules represents a huge difference between social rules and real truth. In recognizing the existence of such differences, new questions come to the table- does this mean that the social rules we insist on are wrong or should be overturned? Moreover, if, at this moment, one specific real truth is suddenly discovered, should it be regarded as the Bible or as the highest priority above all other rules?

Let us imagine the process of constructing this society as the process of assembling a huge puzzle. In the beginning, when humans decided to break away from the simple jungle rules that other animals and nature have always followed and build a more intellectual social system, their puzzle was blank. They were lucky to get the first puzzle piece (how this first puzzle piece was obtained is related to the most fragmented common-sense knowledge, or first principles, or a priori that are self-evident and do not require experiences that I mentioned earlier. This argument will be discussed again later). Starting from this first puzzle piece, humans continue to look for puzzle pieces that can fit into this huge puzzle plate and connect them one by one with the puzzle pieces they already have. Of course, in the process of development, people often find that the puzzles that have been put together are full of problems. Although they seem to be barely working, they cannot connect with more reasonable ideas in the long run.

Therefore, in various evolutions, people overturn the old puzzles and replace them with new puzzle pieces in the enlightenment and awakening of thoughts. As time goes by and people continue to work hard and develop, this puzzle becomes bigger and bigger, and more high-rise buildings symbolizing people's wisdom, technology, culture, and innovation are built on the puzzle. People of different roles shuttle between these high-rise buildings, carrying out their own "life," and together, recognize the relative rationality of the puzzle pieces under their feet. At the same time, society is still slowly replacing individual inappropriate puzzles in reflection and progress and replacing and adding new puzzles. Nevertheless, at this time, if a real "real truth" is discovered, and it is incompatible with the whole society's already constructed plates, what should we do? I know this will confuse you because why do we think that the view we suddenly found is a "real truth"? I will mention why the real truth may never be achieved in the following discussion, but at the current stage, we first assume that it is an absolute real truth, by definition, for our experimental model.

In the case of suddenly discovering a real truth, we must admit that it is very likely to be completely different from the social rules we once adhered to, especially considering the fact that in history, we have had so many revolutions and enlightenment, big or small, that overturns our past beliefs, it's reasonable to induce that it is highly likely that we are still not holding the "real truth" now, or even far away from it if there is one. Moreover, it is very likely that if we want to implement this real truth, we need to overturn a lot of existing social norms. In other words, if this real truth puzzle is to be put into our framework, a lot of the original puzzles will be removed, and the high-rise buildings that have been built on the puzzles will collapse. In this case, I think everyone can agree that we cannot overthrow the social system that is working just due to the conceptual privilege of "real truth" because this real truth is too simple and angular, too independent, and incomplete to form a thorough system that can replace the old one. So, now I can summarize the conclusions I want to argue in this section. What society holds as a rule and what people choose to believe as correct is different from what the "real truth" is. However, such differences do not make either of them meaningless. Indeed, they have their independent meanings, and they also influence and blend with each other. We should maintain a certain skeptical attitude while continuing to operate the social system we have. However, such skepticism is not to overthrow our system and follow the so-called truth but to slowly, strategically, and relatively conservatively update and improve our social system and rules in the process of exploring the real truth.

ISSN 2959-6149

4. Accepting the Unreachability of the Real Truth

In the last section of the discussion, I aim to show the fact that the real truth is unreachable, but at the same time, it is not a bad thing. To achieve the goal, my argument will be divided into two parts that the previous section had given hints about. First, I will discuss the very origin of our way of starting to understand this world. Using the words from the previous section, how do we get the first few pieces of the puzzle? Second, I will show the inevitability of change by referring to Darwin's Theory of Evolution.

When I was discussing the definitions of common-sense knowledge, I focused on how such kinds of knowledge should be intuitive and fundamental, as they act as the media and tool for us to have any further knowledge of the world. For example, how Reid mentions that we have the ability to sense, memorize, control ourselves, realize the existence of self and others, etc. Moreover, how Kant expresses the idea that time and space are not actual existences but are concepts that only exist in the human mind as a prism that is necessary to reflect the world into a form that can be understood. Here, I would like to mention another thing that has been so influential in our approach to understanding the world since the very beginning of both the human species revolution and the growth of each person. Moreover, that is Language.

At the very beginning of human evolution, our ancestors began to invent language. Through the construction of language, they chose the most basic way to understand the world. When naming concrete things and behaviors, humans began to choose how to divide other things in the world and choose those "objects that need to be considered." Moreover, these choices vary across different areas and cultures. In some cultures, there was no "0" at the beginning, or there were other ways to divide and name numbers, which led to different understandings of "quantity" and "nothingness" in different cultures at the beginning; in some cultures, there was no relative direction of "up, down, left, right," only the absolute direction of "east, south, west, north," and in such tribes, people really could clearly distinguish the directions of east, south, west, north, and south in almost any situation; in cold areas, people invented dozens of different words to describe heavy snow and cold, and in areas with other special climates and environments, they also have their own unique words. More complicatedly, the grammatical structure and expression habits of different languages limit the way a child thinks when he or she first begins to understand the world. Some languages put adjectives before the things they describe, while others put them after them. This also determines which features a child will notice first when learning about the world. Some objectors may ask, how can I say that language forces us to think rather than that we freely use language as a tool for expression in independent thinking? I think that psychological research on the generation of memory in young children can be a good example. Psychologists have found that most young children cannot retain memories before the age of three, and this time point happens to be linked to the time when most young children begin to understand language. Before the age of three, children do not have the most basic language ability, which means that the things they see and the emotions they feel cannot be systematically integrated in a concrete way, which is why they cannot form memories. After the age of three, regardless of whether children can express and use language, they at least begin to have the basic ability to understand language and convert things around them into language. This allows the information they receive from the outer world to be converted into information that can be remembered by language. At the same time, we can also observe that children will begin to frequently name the toys and objects around them after they are able to express language. This is also a manifestation of humans exploring the outer world by inventing language at a micro level.

If we are talking about real truth, then it should be correct just by itself. It does not depend on the angle from which we look at the problem, the identity of the observer, and even less on time and space. However, suppose our understanding of the world at the most basic level has to rely on artificially invented prisms like "Language" and "Time and space" so that we can see through them to see the world that we originally could not understand. In that case, it means that everything we see is shrouded behind this filter. If there is this filter, what we see can never be true, but if there is no filter, we even lose the opportunity to peek. The appearance of the world is like a two-phase secret. The moment people try to observe it, it is no longer real.

After clearing out the inevitable influence of the media we created on ourselves to understand this world, which leads to a result of hindering us from the real truth, I would like to show that this is fine because we are meant to be changing from time to time, and never reaching an end. To show this idea, I will introduce Darwin's Theory of Evolution. Darwin's Theory of Evolution by Natural Selection proposes that species evolve due to variations in traits that enhance survival and reproduction. Organisms with favorable traits are more likely to survive, reproduce, and pass those traits to future generations.

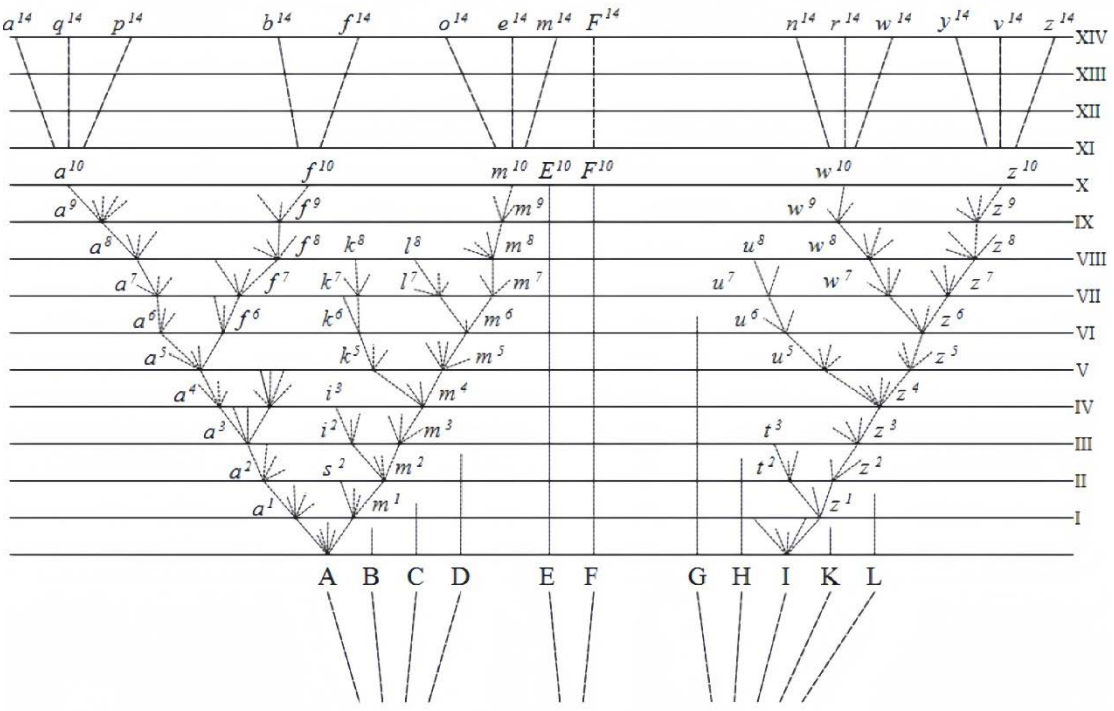

Fig. 1 Darwin's Tree of Life [5].

Fig. 1 is a picture of Darwin's Tree of Life. The species start the evolution from the bottom of the tree, which are species A, B, C, D, E, F, G, H, I, J, K, and L. Then, in each of their path of evolution, the characteristics split. The closer the tree branch is to the vertical top of the initial species, the more similar it is to the ancestor. In other words, the further the branch split, the more changes it made. From this picture, we can see that if the species changes only a little or completely follows the same characteristics of the ancestor, the branches end quickly, which means that if the species does not change, it will become extinct very soon. Moreover, the branches that made the most changes succeed in passing on, but they gradually become so different that they finally become new species shown at the top of the figure. What I am trying to conclude from this theory is that everything we are holding now is meant to disappear; we either have to keep changing until everything we have now is overturned, or we will become extinct or collapse from the unchanging.

If real truth is eternally true all by itself, not depending on anything aside from it, how can we possibly reach such a thing if we have to keep changing and transforming to go further? No matter there is a real truth out there or not, as participants in a constantly moving universe who must constantly change, we should not be able to touch something with the characteristics of real truth, whether it is because of the starting point and medium of our understanding of the world or the ever-changing laws that we have to follow to survive. Nevertheless, this also means that the inaccessibility of real truth does not have to become a problem on our path to survival. Instead, as I said in the second section, exploring the truth of the world is indeed a very valuable behavior because this process of continuous exploration actually drives the operation, iteration, and change of our society and constantly supports us to go further.

5. Conclusion

To sum up, this essay starts with the debate between common-sense defenders and opponents on the topic of common-sense knowledge's conflict with science. But falls on the idea that the real problem behind the debate is that the old common-sense definition is inadequate. By comparing common-sense knowledge with Kant's a priori and Reid's first principle, the essay highlighted the importance of knowledge being fully broken down to the most fundamental fragment for it to be counted as a common-sense, and that the common-sense knowledge should be basic enough to be the presupposition for us to gain any further knowledge and understanding toward this world. Then, the topic moves from common-sense as the knowledge that should be believed to be truth without the need for further proof, to the distinguishing of "the truth we believe in" and "the real truth", as seeking the truth is one of the biggest problems in the field of epistemology and common-sense philosophy. It is concluded that although

ISSN 2959-6149

what we and the society choose to believe in from time to time is not what the "real truth" of the universe is actually like (if there is such real truth), the process of enhancing both of them is worthy of doing. Finally, Darwin's Theory of Revolution is introduced to induce that it is highly likely that we might never be able to reach the real truth, even though we still need to go for it because that is the rule and effort which we devote to our species to survive and to thrive.

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