UNIT 6: MOORE: A DEFENCE OF COMMON SENSE

UNIT STRUCTURE

6.1 Learning Objectives

6.2 Introduction

6.3 Defence of Common sense

- 6.3.1 Common sense belief as truism
- 6.3.2 Physical facts independent from mental facts
- 6.3.3 Denial of the Existence of God and immortality of the soul
- 6.3.4 Analysing common sense belief
- 6.3.5 Other Mind

6.4 Criticism

6.5 Let us sum up

6.6 Answers to check your progress

6.7 Further Reading

6.8 Model questions

6.1. LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will be able to

- explain the concept of common sense
- explain common sense belief as truism
- describe how physical facts independent from mental facts
- discuss the denial of the existence of God and immortality of the soul
- analyse common sense belief
- explain the concept of other mind
- discuss the critical estimate of this theory.

6.2 INTRODUCTION

Moore appeal to common sense as a basic for solving philosophical problems. His defence of common sense is an important aspect of rejecting idealism, according to which our ordinary common-sense view of the world is largely correct. Moore first explicitly championed this position in his 1910-11 lectures *Some Main Problems of Philosophy, where he tries to establish his conception of analytic philosophy.* He however describes most explicitly his analytical philosophical position in his essay 'A Defence of Common Sense' in 1925 where **he proposed that there is no basis for the belief that physical reality relies on mental reality.**He also argued that the true function of philosophy lay in its analysis of reality, not its definition of it. For example, when it is said that the sky is blue, it is true that the sky is blue because common sense cannot deny the truth of this statement. Philosophy according to Moore is not to define but to analyse such true statements.Moore latter approach a new way of defending common sense in his most famous paper, "Proof of an External World" (Moore 1939). This essay was sets to provide a proof of the existence of 'external objects or rather address the question, "what counts as an "external object"'. In the essay Moore claims that these are things whose existence is not dependent upon our experience.He argued that if he can prove the existence of any such things then he will have proved the existence of an "external world". He maintains that he can do this and he does this by holding up his two hands and saying, "here is one hand", as I make a certain gesture with the right hand and adding as I make a certain gesture with the left and saying "here is another". Moore goes on to argue that this demonstration of his hands was a "perfectly rigorous proof of the existence of external objects". This is because its premises certainly entail its conclusion and they are things, which he then knows to be true. Moore's position is clearly a version of representational realism, with its attendant difficulties about the status of sense-data and their independence of individual acts of sensation.

6.3. "A DEFENCE OF COMMON SENSE"

The essay "A Defence of Common Sense" is an influential essay by G.E. Moore, originallypublished in 1925. In this essay he attempts to refute idealism and skepticism by arguing that some of our beliefs about the world are absolutely certain. These beliefs are common sense. He made two prescriptions: first, that truth of common sense statements is to be held beyond philosophical reproach and second, their proper analysis is to be conducted in terms of ordinary language. The essay is divided into five sections. Following is an elaboration of the each section.

6.3. 1. Common Sense Beliefs as Truism

The first section of the essay gave a list of propositions of common sense that are known with certainty to be true. For example Moore claims that propositions like, " My body has existed continuously on or near the earth…", " I am a human body", " My body existed yesterday" , are known with certainty to be true. He claims that *he knows* these and many other propositions to be *certainly and wholly true. He also claims to know with certainty that others* have also known the aforementioned propositions to be true of themselves, just as he knows them to be true of himself.

He argued that any philosophical position which maintains that any of these is neither untrue nor at least not known to be true is itself demonstrably false. Moore divided them into two groups. First, the idealist who denies the*truth* of the lists of beliefs. Second, the skeptic who denies that any of the propositions on the lists are *known* to be true. Moore by claiming that these propositions are *wholly* true,means to oppose the idealist, who would claim that no statement about some isolated object can be true *simpliciter*, since each object has its identity only as a part of the whole universe. And by claiming that these propositions of common sense are *certainly* true, Moore means

to oppose the skeptic who would deny that we know anything with certainty. The former is indefensible, self-defeating and never consistently held as a basis of ordinary life. The latter is not only self-defeating and impractical but also logically inconsistent. Thus, Moore concluded that we do really know all of these common-sense beliefs to be true.

6.3.2. Distinguishes physical facts from mental facts

In this section, Moore consider different specimens of mental facts and argued that every physical fact is neither logically nor causally dependent on mental facts.He classified three different kinds of "mental facts":

i) Facts which are like: "I am conscious now" and "I am seeing something now" in one of the two following respect :(*alpha*) in being the fact that some particular individual was conscious at some particular time (*beta*) in being a fact which involves or entails a fact of type (*alpha*), in the way that *seeing something* is a specific way of *being conscious*.

ii) Mental facts are experiences. For example, the experience of "being conscious now". Moore doubt that there are such facts, but admits that experiences, if there were any, would be mental facts.

iii) Mental facts are timeless experiences, for example. Being *timelessly* conscious.

Moore finally added a fourth kind of mental fact which asserts of any of the three kinds of mental fact mentioned above that there are mental facts of that kind. That is a kind of mental meta-fact. Moore argues that there is no good reason to suppose that every physical fact is logically dependent on some mental fact. He also argues that every physical facts is not causally dependent on some mental fact because for example, there is no good reason to suppose that the fact that the earth has existed for many years past is causally dependent on any mental fact.

6.3.3 Denial of the Existence of God and immortality of the soul

In the third section, Moore neither argued nor discusses but merely dissociates himself from those philosophers who have believed in the existence of God or the Immortality of the soul. He noted that not only does he think there are good reasons for believing that all material objects were created by God but neither does common sense gives reason to think that God exists at all or that there is life after death.

6.3.4 Analysing Common sense

The fourth section is concerned with the analysis of common sense propositions about perceived objects. He is certain that such propositions are ultimately about sense data which are not themselves identical with material objects. He cited the example, “Here is my hand” and gave three possibilities of how what we know in these cases is related to what we know about our sense data. That is what he sees when looking at his hand.

1. The sense datum itself is part of the surface of the human hand.
2. There is some relation R such that the surface of the hand has relation R to the sense datum.
3. A set of hypotheticals of the form “if condition them I would perceive a sense datum related to *this* sense datum in a particular way”. Here the condition and the particular relation vary, but the reference to the *this* sense datum is fixed.

The third alternative answer that Moore considers is based on Mill’s view that material things are “permanent possibilities of sensation”. For example, “ I am seeing a dice”. This has to be interpreted as, if I were to move my body in certain ways I should be directly apprehending certain sense data. For example, factual

ones which I should not be apprehending as a result of these movements of my body, if my present visual experience were illusory or imaginary experience. Here first it is doubtful, whether we can think of the aforesaid conditioned of sense data without using some physical object terms. Secondly, it is doubtful, if there is any intrinsic-relation between the sense datum that I am apprehending at the moment and the sense data that I should apprehend when certain other conditions are fulfilled. And even if there is any intrinsic relation, we do not know so far, how to explain the ontological nature of the relation as well as our knowledge of it. Thirdly, on this view, properties of the object are attributed to it in a sense that outrages a strong propensity to believe in their reality in the usual cases.

According to the second view, sense datum is a manifestation or appearance of the material things and that the relation between the two is an ultimate and unanalysable relation. To this Moore objected that it cannot explain how we can possibly know with regard to any of our sense data that there is one thing and one thing only which has to them such a supposed ultimate relation and how, if we do, can we possibly know anything further about such things. For example of what size or shape they are.

The first alternative is the monistic views that sense datum is identical with a part of the surface of material object. If this is so, then it will follow that:

a) sense data really do not have the qualities which they appear to have or else

b) we would have to admit that incompatible qualities can belong to the same things at the same time.

However since different people experience different sense data, in a particular respect while seeing the same physical surface, if the above mentioned view is true, then all these different sense data directly perceived by different people would have to belong to the surface simultaneously, which seems unlikely.

In view of the objections to each of the plausible alternatives concerning the relation between sense data and material things, Moore confesses that he does not know what this relation could be. He has consistently maintained a clear distinction between physical objects and sense data. No sense datum or part of a sense datum or collection of sense data can possibly be a material object. In all his discussion he always maintains that physical objects are distinct from sense data and that we know of their existence. But it seems that he cannot be sure of the nature of the relation between sense data and physical objects. Moore suggests that there is a definite relation between sense data and material objects but we are not certain about the exact nature of the relation between the two. He sought out a strong possibility of finding out a correct analysis of the perceptual statements of common sense. He repeatedly explains that we do know for certain that material object exists and we also know for certain that sense data exist. And we further know that sense data are related to material object. Therefore, Moore position is clearly in opposition with that of the skeptics. Moore conclude that we are absolutely certain about the common sense belief but no analysis of the proposition has been offered that is even close to being certain.

6.3.5. Other Mind

In this section Moore was concern about the analysis of propositions about selves. While Moore believe that “there are other selves” and is convinced of the truth of such a statement as “I am now perceiving this sense data”, he had the gravest doubt about its correct analysis.

6.4. CRITICISM

A variety of problems surround the “Defence” of what Moore called common sense beliefs. The central question is whether he succeeds in

defending them against the attacks of metaphysics is linked with the question whether a philosophical defense of such propositions is possible. This in turn with the question whether the propositions Moore lists as generally known truism are commonsense belief or even common belief. Taken together this three questions give rise to the metaphysical question as to what Moore is doing when he purports to defend common sense.

The critic argued that Moore used the term “Defence” only in the title of his paper and not at all when commending the “common sense view of the world” at the end of section one. This is a fact of extreme importance. Evidently, therefore what Moore conceived himself to be doing in section one was not to defend the common sense view of the world against rival views, for he was unveiling to conclude that such an idea made any sense in the first place. Moore went on in analysing whatever propositions of common sense are known to be true. Moore profess without regard for the certainly in the existence of such things as mental facts, sense data and selves. Many who have followed Moore in taking the role of common sense as central in philosophy have gone on to demand that the very terms of analysis, the very facts disclosed must be those of the common sense view itself. The common sense view of the world does not include from the start any such belief that perceptual; judgments are ultimately about sense data. The truth about perceptual judgment do not openly reside in the common sense view but have to be discovered by analysing common sense truth.

According to Moore, the analysis of perceptual propositions in terms of sense data might take any of three but only three different forms, yet in each of these he finds at least one serious flaw. Therefore, what then is one to conclude about that method of analysis itself. Given the strong affirmation of section one followed by the tortuous dead end constructs in section four, one is infact prompted by the “Defence” to reverse direction in favour of a wholly new approach to philosophical analysis. His defence of common sense leaves completely undecided the questions as to how the truism propositions which make up the common sense view of the world are to be analysed.

As Preston noted neither Moore's defense of common sense nor his proof of an external world were universally convincing. Some misunderstood the latter as an attempt to disprove skepticism. Taken this way, it is clearly a miserable failure. However, as Moore himself later insisted, he never meant to *disprove*skepticism, but only to *prove* the existence of the external world.

CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 1: What is meant by common sense, according to Moore?

.....

Q 2: Who is the author of the essay- *A Defense of Common Sense*?

.....

Q 3: Moore attempted to refute the two concepts through his essay *A Defense of Common Sense.* What are they?

.....

Q 4: Give two examples of common sense

.....

Q 5: What is sense-data?

.....

Q 6: Write the implication of the essay *A Defense of Common Sense*

.....

Q 7: What are three kinds of mental facts?

.....

Q 8: Bring out a distinction between sense data and physical object.

.....

6.5. LET US SUM UP

- Moore's affirmation of a common sense realist position was an important aspect of his rejection of idealism. While Moore is convinced of the truth of such statement as "I am now perceiving

this sense-datum", he has the gravest doubt of what its correct analysis might be.

- Moore used the language of sense data theory to consider the analysis of his common sense proposition in the "Defence". Moore is making a dual perspective:

i) The truth of common sense statement is to be held beyond philosophical reproach and

ii) Their proper analysis is to be conducted in the terms of ordinary language and within the limits of its conventions.

- The "Defence" consists of five section of wholly unequal length, prefaced by a short paragraph in which Moore declare his aim of listing some major points of agreements with other philosophers.
- In the first and the longest section, he recites the propositions of common sense whose truth he claims to know with certainty. He then argues that any philosophical position which maintains that any of these is either untrue or not known to be true is demonstrably false.
- In section two, he consider different specimen of mental facts, then details his well-known view against supposing that every instance of a physical fact depends either logically or causally on the occurrence of some mental fact.
- The third section through transitionally related to the discussion of mental facts consists in itself neither argument nor discussion. Moore simply dissociates himself from those philosophers who have believed in the existence of God or the immortality of the soul.
- Section four involved a point of a very different order. That is the analyses of common sense propositions about perceived objects. Moore is certain that such propositions are ultimately about sense data which are not identical with material objects.
- He gives three different and unrelated method of ordinary language analysis of sense data namely: structural, lexical and thematic. However this analysis is far from satisfactory explanation. It fails to explain a significant problem, which rears its head and ultimately