

## 5. Common logic

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### 5. 1 The 'common' mind

This concept brings us into full "commonsensicalism"; "common sense," or the common sense that can be found just about in everyone and is therefore common to all. A word of explanation about that.

Claude Buffier, S.J. (1661/1737; talks about it in his *Traité des premières vérités*, Paris, (1717). In it, this French Jesuit corrects the, in his opinion, too narrow position of R.

Descartes (1596/1650). A modern rationalist, Descartes assumed, including in *Discours de la methode* (1637), "le sens intime," or that which each of us perceives internally. To escape the nominalism and skepticism of his time, Descartes sought certainties. If he doubted everything, one thing that was certain was his doubt. Descartes forged from that doubt "an apodictic statement: 'What is absolutely certain is that I doubt.' Well, doubt is "thinking. And 'thinking' is being, actual existence. So it is apodictically certain that I exist, since I 'think,' because even when I doubt, I think." Hence his famous "Cogito, ergo sum ", the "Je pense, donc je suis" or "I think, therefore I exist".

This purely inner perception, however, had all the trouble in the world to "prove" e.g. the existence of "the outer world," in which the fellow man or "the alter ego" is situated. Indeed, how can one rationally, i.e. scientifically irrefutable, prove the existence of the outer world from the "sens intime" or merely proceeding from the inner life, consciousness? For the modern - rational thinking man, we are all, each and every one of us, radically locked in our inner world, in our "subjective consciousness," in the inwardness or "bubble" of modern (self) consciousness or self. Give us a contemporary testimony to this.

**Modern nominalism** For example, let us consider one type of nominalism that is typically modern. H. De Coninck, *Hours of admiration: Leo Apostel*, in Weekly: *Humo* 29.09.1983, 50/53. Leo Apostel (1925/1995; graduate of ULB) was an internationally recognized epistemologist. Behold his philosophical "confession. In a Q&A.

"The philosophy : that is almost religious. That is the desire for the unity of everything. Once God fell away, I must have something in its place. I'm actually still working on that. At the time I had a period when I thought, "If God doesn't exist, does the world exist? Do I even exist? Isn't it all a dream?". "Vida es sueno. When you live that existentially, it's a horrible experience. Especially for a boy from a not too cultured environment. What saved me is that I dared to say it. I still saw the table in front of me but I was no longer convinced that she was real. Had I said it out loud, people would probably have colloquialized me. After a while, that disappeared.

But from that still remained an intense interest in knowledge theory and logic: Can I prove that this table really exists? That has never been an "academic" (note.: life-altering) problem for me. God turns out not to be there: but then surely the world must be explained in some other way. Religious ethics then also falls away: but then you must be able to find precepts somewhere else. Besides: you simply do not have immediate access to extreme reality. In the history of literature you can still find examples of "loss of the sense of reality". "I can see you but maybe you are only décor! Is it all unreal!". When you are very tired, you often have this: it all seems like cardboard. Then you really have to convince yourself: "No, there is a real world and I even know a part of it. So this doctrine of knowledge is really the result of my need to get to the world, to get to people. Apostle confessed, still at the age of 58, that he "still hasn't solved" that problem, but that he has gained a lot of learning.

**A corrective.** Return to Claude Buffier and his his *Traité des premières vérités*. This claims that R. Descartes, with his emphasis on "le sens intime," i.e. the mental activities (thinking), exposes basic truths but that "le sens commun," the common or communal mind, also contains basic truths. Thus: apart from our inner - conscious world, there is an extramental world or "outside world" as existing "outside" our psychic life. In that outer world there are fellow human beings, among others. The common mind is "the disposition laid by nature in all men in such a way that all in common make uniform judgments." So says Buffier, adding a corrective to the too narrow point of view that starts from "le sens intime."

Pay close attention, with Ch. Lahr, *Cours*, 488/490, 230 (Bon sens): the terms "common sense" and "common sense" do not, strictly speaking, cover the same meaning.-- "Common sense" is, e.g., "the mind of man insofar as it judges something untransformed."

"Common (common) sense" is e.g., "the mind of some group insofar as it arrives at a small number of propositions accepted by the great majority of that group concerning some reality." Common sense is a matter of epistemology (theory of knowledge). Common sense is a sociological or community learning phenomenon.

The Scottish school, with its "commonsensism," sees in Buffier its pioneer. Thomas Reid's (1710/1796) *An Inquiry into Human Mind or the Principles of Common Sense* (1764) is the main figure of the Scottish school, which had some adherents. Its main thesis reads, "With the nature of human reason are certain - one took note of the term 'certain' insights given that form the basis of all knowledge and reasoning". These insights present themselves immediately, as an obviousness, and are given in life experiences of all kinds. They are presuppositions, and apply without proof. This common sense is latent or explicit in all human beings. In other words: common sense would, according to them, be a universal property. At least where common sense prevails over deviant forms of thought. One sees here the light of which light metaphysics speaks. We will return to this further on in the text.

**Dual truths.** The common mind contains a-priori and accidental truths.

- 1. A-prior truths. Thus: the reality of the existence of an outer world and fellow human beings. This outside world is to a very high degree independent of ourselves. Or still: that "2 + 2 = 4" is true is "self-evident. That red color differs from blue color is obvious, because the concept of difference, is an obviousness and has an application here.

- 2. Coincidental truths. The clearly perceived or the clearly remembered are experienced as real. The existence of one's own changing facts of consciousness (deeds, states) grounded in the abiding self, as well as the existence of fellow human beings whose inner life shows itself through external behavior, these are data of common consciousness.

What is striking since Buffier and Reid is that the Cartesian inner consciousness is "transgressed" in two directions, viz. there are evidences that are at home "outside" that consciousness, AND those evidences are not individual but "social," "common," "communal .

**Criticism.** There are critics who first caricature the common sense. St.-

Augustine would have said of them "Bene currunt sed extra viam," they run well, yet outside the racecourse. Enter below the criticism of Ch. Lahr, *Cours*, 710 s. As an example, Lahr gives the opinion, until before Copernicus (1473/1543; founder of heliocentrism) and others, that the sun revolves around the earth. Something that - purely phenomenological (phenomenological) - is correct! But which is based on facial deception, because - on closer inspection, i.e. assuming another small number of axiomata ( called "heliocentrism": it is not the earth that is at the center of the solar system, but the sun) - it appears that, standing on the earth, we have the are turning! Scientifically, then, "the common sense" includes a number of unthinking, unexamined, untested insights or impressions, which can be branded as "prejudices.

***Lahr continues his critique:***

- **1.** He believes that by common sense is meant any form of "general consent." This is incorrect because the content, outlined above, rules this out. It is indeed common consent but it concerns only a well-defined set of basic truths.

- **2.1.** Lahr says that confusion is possible between reason and its presuppositions as well as established truths on the one hand and, on the other, "ordinary prejudices which, though diffused are nevertheless false." As if a Buffier or a Reid would not distinguish ordinary prejudices from what they call common sense.

- **2.2.** Lahr asks how one can prove the distinction between "natural" and "acquired." Which is indeed a sensible question to ask commonsensicalists.

- **2.3.** Lahr accuses commonsensism of failing to distinguish between what is peculiar to all people and what is peculiar to some people (in a particular country or during a particular time period). This is something that is peculiar only to a misconceived commonsensism as the above shows.

- **2.4.** Lahr accuses the common sense of being incompetent on scientific problems. This is not so simple as this book will show. The common mind may well contain basic insights that continue to pervade our minds even in the scientific phase. That the common mind insofar as present in non-scientifically educated people is not expert concerning typically scientific questions is something that every correctly understood commonsensicalism confirms. For what

is peculiar to only scientifically formed people is, by definition, not peculiar to all people! This is what commonsensism is talking about.

Cardinal John Henry Newman's (1801/1890) *Grammar of Assent* (1870) attempts to 'vindicate' the judgment - among others of the ordinary man of all days - on the ground that, both in science and outside of it, we have at our disposal over time a series of probabilities all or at least in its majority pointing in the same direction. That confluence or 'convergence' of non-certain but nevertheless probable judgments allows us to attribute to the model in our minds some sound cognitive value. The Newman model amounts to a set of samples of reality that reinforce each other. Such a type of induction counts as sufficient reason for Newman.

## **5. 2 Logic in the common sense**

K. Döhmman, *Die sprachliche Darstellung logischer Funktoren*, in: A. Menne / G. Frey, Hrsg., *Logik und Sprache*, Bern / Munich, 1974, 29, cites M. Bréal (1832/1915), known for his *Essai de sémantique* (1897), - a seminal work. In his *Les idées latentes du langage* (1868), Bréal sets out to demonstrate the following. It lies in the nature of (running) language to express our ideas in a very incomplete way. If our mind did not uninterruptedly rush to the aid of our speaking and supplement the inadequacy of its interpreter which is our speaking by the insights it draws from its deeper being, the recitation of the simplest and most elementary thought would not succeed.( ... ). It is precisely because the use of language allows the intelligible to play an enormous role that it is able to place itself at the disposal of the progress of human thought. This has already been illustrated with the calendar humor (see 3.3) where it was about the parish shepherd and 'all the faithful' who 'all' could be in his little church or not.

**Economy principle.** Let us take a saying such as "Promising much and giving little makes the madmen live in joy." If you look at it logically, you will notice that the direct object (madmen) covers a conditional (expressing a reason) sentence. The proverb is in fact a logical derivation (conclusion): "Promising much and giving little, if done in relation to madmen, makes the madmen live in joy". Madmen" in the sense of "little thinking fellow men". All those who check "folk psychology" under point of view of logical thinking in everyday language are familiar with the applied logic in it. For most people who utter or hear the saying, it is not necessary to express the conditional sense that we have just expressed: with fewer words they understand the conditional. Indeed, it is 'under understood' and yet understood by our minds. Natural speech is "sparse" regarding expression but does not prevent the correct understanding.

The viewpoint of G. Bolland (1854/1922). In his *Hegel's kleine Logik*, Leiden, 1899, 252f, Bolland apparently shares Hegel's reservations regarding the then established formal and formalized logic but in a nuanced way. He begins with a model: "It is of recognized importance that we become familiar not only with the functions of our organic life, such as digestion, blood formation, respiration, etc., but also with the processes and forms of the nature that surrounds us. But here it will be unhesitatingly denied that, just as to digest our food or to breathe we must first study anatomy and physiology, so too (here follows the original) to reason validly we must first study logic."

Take the following syllogism: "This rose is red. Well, red is a color. So this rose is something colorful". Although such complete form of reasoning is usually pedantic and superfluous, yet that formal form is at work in our thought life uninterruptedly. Reasoning happens over and over again in our multiple and complicated situations. Immediately, it is not unimportant that we as thinking beings become explicitly aware of our daily mode of action.

**Logical diversion.** Bolland sees it this way. (1) One winter morning, upon awakening, someone hears a car grinding on the street. (2) Immediately the assumption comes to mind "It has frozen." From the "observation" winter morning with a grinding car - the hearer concludes to the "logical deduction": "It has frozen". Bolland states that logical reasoning is an operation of data: data (phenomena) provoke reasoning. With that comes our logical function (ability) with, in this example, our memories of the correlation "freezing weather / grinding traffic" in us. Available knowledge in this case is not spoken but under understood: the fact that we used to perceive freezing weather in its correlation with traffic noises is "unsaid" but present in our mind that exceeds language. Bréal is apparently correct when he argues that our minds continually supplement the inadequacy of natural language.

### 5.3 Logical rewriting

The basic form of all reasoning is, "If reason or condition, then valid inference." The if-sentence articulates the given or "phenomenon" (that which shows itself - directly); the then-sentence articulates the result (that which is demonstrated). The if-sentence is phenomenological, i.e. representing the phenomenon that is given; the then-sentence is logical, i.e. articulating derivation. Logical rewriting implies that what is unsaid but under understood in the common language is now explicitly said. One moves from implicit (unsaid) reasoning to explicit (said) reasoning. Thus: the good gardener. Expressed in the common language, "The good gardener pays attention to his plants," becomes, logically rewritten, "The gardener who is good (insofar as at good, if he is good), pays attention to his plants."

**Rule.** Natural language, owing to its principle of economy or parsimony, is rather austere in its use of words: if something can be said with fewer words, one certainly does not use more. Indeed, the context in which something is said clarifies much of what was not explicitly expressed. To rewrite the language logically implies precisely that this so-called 'unsaid' is also expressed explicitly. Let us give some models of this.

**Mathematical Model** The natural language simply states, " $2 + 2 = 4$ ." If there is reasoning anywhere, it is certainly when practicing mathematics. Logically rewritten, this expression becomes: "If 2 and 2, then 4". Let's already pay attention to what we will talk about later when we talk about the closing speech (syllogism), namely the general reason for that very singular - concrete reasoning, namely: "Individual sums are - as partial sums - summed up in a single sum (total sum)". That type of reasoning is called "summative or complete induction." It is "induction" because it sums up a series of cases (here sums). It is "summative" (literally, "making the summa or sum") because it summarizes the series. One sees it "A sum (here: 2) AND a sum (here: 2) is a total sum (here: 4)". The singular-concrete case " $2 + 2 = 4$ " is only one application of the general reason ("Sum + sum = total sum"). If one likes: the singular-concrete case is only one sample from the general reason.

**Physical model.** "Walking in the rain involves getting wet." This sentence leaves much unsaid. Logically rewritten it shows the unsaid: "If it rains and if one walks in that rain, one gets wet". Notice again the general reason: "For all cases of contact with a liquid, it causes getting wet." This is a causal or "causal" phrase: "If cause (applied here: contact with a liquid), then effect (applied here: getting wet).

The natural sciences especially are brimming with such causal phrases. One sees that "rain" is one possible "infill" (application, sample) of "liquid.

We hope that with such models it has become clear that natural language is brimming with reasoning but very often in unsaid form. This reasoning is not always intentional and occurs at a speed that can hardly be kept up with. Natural language is full of reasoning, but often in unsaid form. Only when in doubt do we consciously redo all our thinking and express the reasoning explicitly, possibly rewriting it logically. We then suddenly become aware of some concealed and "understated" thinking. Here the linguistic expressions become more voluminous, but the logic applied in them, on the other hand, becomes obvious. Our sentences may then seem to be a kind of reasoning game, yet in reality they are not this at all. They help the world of thought that is brought up in them to be understood clearly and thus logically, They probe the basic



reasoning concerning general coherence by logically defining in syllogisms the two propositional sentences over and over again a situation, a situation that either compels (deduction) or opens up possibilities (reduction). We will come back to this in detail further.

#### 5. 4 *Childish thinking*

Bibl. st. : Phil. Kohnstamm, *Keur uit het didactische werk*, Groningen / Djakarta, 19522, 88/91 (*The outcomes of Piaget*). Steller admires Jean Piaget (1896/1980) as a psychologist of thinking in its evolution in children but he replaces, at least in part, "the evolutionary hypothesis present on almost every page of Piaget's work" with the hypothesis of learnability of data in virtue of the peculiar nature of each child and of its cultural environment. After all, Piaget's "experimental" method creates unchildlike learning situations (with potentially inhibiting aspects for the children involved). Kohnstamm gives a place to spontaneous childlike thinking that one can 'catch' with luck without experimental testing intention and framework.

Kohnstamm cites Charlotte Bühler (*Kindheit und Jugend*). At 1.6 years old, Inge reasons as follows. Familiar people sit in a circle on chairs. Inge turns to them at some point, follows them one by one and says, "Inge 'toel' (= chair) sits. Dad 'toel' sits. Mom 'toel' sits". Then follows a small pause: "All 'toel sits". Remark. This is a clear case of summative or complete induction that reasons from each (person) individually to all (persons) collectively. Summative induction.

Kohnstamm himself experienced what follows. His four-year-old granddaughter enjoyed grandpa "who got lost in her little eyes," to escort her to his study house about a hundred yards away. "When she came to stay with us again shortly after her fourth birthday, I was in Geneva for a conference. At the first meal (. . . ) she asked: 'Where is Grandpa?' My wife: "Oh, very far away. All the way in Switzerland. ( ... )". Counter question: "All alone?". My wife's affirmative answer was followed by the conclusion, "Then I won't bring him to his cottage either, he can find it on his own". Kohnstamm: "He who can travel far away all alone can also find his way alone in his own garden." The conjunction 'then' (equivalent of 'so' and 'thud') with which, according to Piaget, many older children have so much trouble, is here ( ... ) aptly used correctly at a much earlier age."

**Remark.** Here is actually more than a mere 'then' because the child performs an afortiori reasoning (cf. 3.4) : "If someone (applied here: grandpa) can handle the further (applied here: Switzerland), then he (applied here: grandpa) can also handle the nearer (applied here: the garden house)". Such concrete situations act as a paradigm, i.e. a singular - concrete case in and



through which the child grasps a general rule and applies it logically validly. Immediately it is clear that some logicians who test the common sense in virtue of their logistic formulas and thereby find that ordinary people reason so little validly, may put this at least partly on account of non-childish and not - ordinary human, "experimental" situations that confound sound natural reasoning. Among others: such unnatural reasoning tests mountains axioms and rules unknown to ordinary people.

### **5.5 Folk wisdom**

One does not confuse common sense with folk wisdom. Dictionaries define "popular wisdom" as "wisdom of the people based on experience," where "wisdom" can be equated with "knowing" or "insight. One note: one understands "based on experience" not in the exclusive (reasoning excluding) but rather in the inclusive (reasoning including) sense.

Common sense is the logical core of folk wisdom but does not coincide with it, since "wisdom" in this case means a set of assertions based on common sense grown over the centuries. Folk wisdom shows what the common sense thus establishes over the ages.

**Scope.** Tear-off calendars e.g. give folk wisdom in time, - often in the form of humor or ironic or sarcastic statements. Some of it can certainly be approached with reservations, the weather sayings. And one does not forget that the anecdotal wording leaves room for many additions.

**The Bible's wisdom books.** At its best, folk wisdom shows itself in the Bible, in the "sapiential" or wisdom books of the Old Testament. We give samples.

Job. 5: 6. "Nay! Misery does not bubble up from the earth; disappointment does not germinate in the ground. It is precisely man who begets disappointment as the flight of eagles seeks the heights." What a healthy humanism in the sense of "Do not always seek the origin of evil outside humanity"!

Book of Psalms. Ps. 35 (34): 2. "Accuse ye, Yahweh, whom I accuse; take hold of whom I tackle." How often does such an exclamation respond to situations where one sees no defense emanating from fellow human beings as the accused!

Proverbs. 19: 4. "Being rich increases friends in number but he who is poor still loses his (only) friend." Who in the XXI century would dare to deny the dose of truth in that "proverb"?

Ecclesiastes (Qohelet). 1 : 2vv. "Vanity of vanities! Everything is vanity! What interest does man have in all the toil he toils under the sun? One generation goes; another comes: only the earth remains. The sun rises; the sun sets ( ... ). Restlessly wallowing the wind chases; on

its own wallowing it returns. ( ... )". The bitter experience of the repetitive rhythm of life with the impression or rather the question "To what end?".

Book of Wisdom. 1: 2. "The Lord makes Himself felt by those who do not challenge Him; He shows Himself to those who do not refuse Him their faith." This book of wisdom stands out for its experience of God.

Ecclesiasticus (Ben Sira). A book that testifies to the wisdom of the "hasidim" ("pious") in Israel. 5: 11. "Be hasty concerning listening; slow concerning answering." 11: 6. "Often the powerful are harshly humiliated and celebrities have fallen into the power of others." 11: 19. "On the day when those who say to themselves, 'I have come; I can now live off my possessions,' yet they do not know how long it will last. They will have to leave everything for others and die". 27: 1. "For the sake of profit, many behave unscrupulously; those who want to get rich act like a merciless one." 34:5. "Divination, divination and dreams: all vanities ... unless they are sent as visitors from the Lord". 35: 12. "The Lord is a judge who knows no regard for persons." The latter is the time-honored form of "politically correct."

**Conclusion.** Why do we dwell at such length on these samples from the Bible's folk wisdom? To make us feel what precisely folk wisdom is. It belongs to the achievements of the common sense, although it does not coincide with it. It shows the common sense at work in the midst of the humanity of every day. Although the above excerpts spring from Israel's common sense, it is clear that their truth - their 'reality' to put it in Hegelian terms - is universal, i.e. 'common' to all men. It is 'common' wisdom, sign of common sense.

**Reflection.** Traditional logic calls "reflection" the fact that a person reflects, i.e. is his thinking himself, the thinking that he is himself and what he thinks, conceives. - In this connection, the light metaphysics should be mentioned briefly. This puts forward what it calls "the light" which, among other things, enables our awareness (knowledge) of all that is real. If one will, the possibility condition or reason of our consciousness that throws a light on ourselves and our environment. The laws of identity belong to that light and are a formulation of it. That e.g. one can predicate the identity principle as the object of agreement is only possible because that principle is already predicated with that light. The same is true of the reason axiom: it is given with the light and appears in consciousness as an antecedent which one usually applies spontaneously to begin with. The basic rules of a language system are another part of the light that allows a child who has reached the years of discretion or reason to apply the grammatical rules of language with a high degree of correctness without ever having studied linguistics. In

other words, our reflection is the light that illuminates and shows itself through reflection. Natural logic bathes in that light of which light metaphysics speaks.

### **5.6. This chapter summarized:**

*The common mind, the mind peculiar to all, contains basic truths that persist even in scientific thought.*

*It argues that as a corrective to Descartes' "sens intime," there is also a "sens commun": the outside world and fellow human beings.*

*Although the common mind is not always precise in its use of language, yet much of what is under understood but remains concealed is clarified by the context in which it is said. To rewrite such language in a logical way implies that the imprecision of the common sense, that which was concealed yet remains under understood, is now explicitly articulated. What was implicitly thought is now explicitly articulated.*

*Even children prove capable of correct logical reasoning at an early age. Folk wisdom shows what insights the common mind possesses. Biblical wisdom books also contain a great deal of folk wisdom.*

*Light metaphysics postulates a kind of insight, a "light of the mind," . This light makes it possible for us to know something like consciousness. The laws of identity, as well as the basis of a language system, belong to that light and are a formulation of it.*