

## **Constructive-Referential-Alternatism vis-a-vis G. E Moore's Shift: A Case for a Direct Realist Ontological Account of Cognition**

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### **ABSTRACT**

What necessitate the birth of this paper was the critical thinking that, is it possible for human beings (rational beings) to garner objective-unmediated knowledge of the world in and around us? For the skeptic's objective-unmediated knowledge is subject to doubt. While for the idealist the real (Genuine) knowledge is of the universal as it exists in the world forms (ideas). The materialist holds that real (genuine) knowledge is of matter. Contrary to this view, a direct realist account of cognition holds that, it is possible for rational beings (humans) to garner objective-unmediated knowledge of the world in and around us. As such, the identity theory of truth is used by the 20th century analytic philosopher George Edward Moore to buttress his direct realist ontological account of cognition was used as a theoretical foundation for this work. Some findings of this paper are (1) There exists an external world (Physical world) (2) There exists a formal world where for example the principles of mathematics and physics exists (3) It is difficult to isomorphically reconcile the objective ontological statuses of both the external and formal world objects (4) That our claim to knowledge could either be a priori or a posteriori or both (5) That Moore's direct realism is inadequate to account for human's claim to know for certain all reality that exist. The research used documentary sources as its method of data collection. As such, the method adopted in this work is qualitative research design. However content analysis was used to analyze the data. Consequently, the paper made recommendations that;(1) there is need to embrace constructive-referential-alternatism in our knowledge claim,(2) there is need to also naturalize all epistemological account for the ontology of cognition in relation to a given consensual-contextual language domain. Hence, the role of language in the production and claim to knowledge cannot be overemphasized.

**Keywords:** Direct realism, philosophical analysis, neuroscience, quantum physics; shift

### **INTRODUCTION**

It is a truism that the world we find ourselves today (contemporary world), is geared towards the search for absolute truth, certainty, universality and objective in knowledge. It is further understood that, the human quest for absolute truth, certainty and objectivity in knowledge of say logic, mathematics, ethics to mention a few, can best be accounted for in terms of the operations of subjective, cognitive or psychological faculties (psychologism). However, it is pertinent to note that psychologism was a consequence of the doctrine of internal relations (Moore, 1958). As such, absolute idealism which is a brand of metaphysical monism is in line with the doctrine of internal relations which states that every object exists and is what it is, at least partly, in virtue of its relation it bears to other things that exists precisely, to all other things (Moore, 1958:4). On this view, everything that exists does so only in virtue of its relations to everything else, so, it is misleading to say of any one thing, for example, my bottle

of juice that existssimpliciter. The only thing that existssimpliciter is the whole-the entire network of necessary related objects. So, this meta-monistic world view (Weltanschauung) implies that the object of true knowledge must be stable and abiding, fixed, capable of being grasped in clear and scientific definition, which is of the universal. Hence, true knowledge is knowledge of the universal.

Consequently, if true knowledge is knowledge of universal, does it not follow that true knowledge is of the abstract and unreal? Plato's doctrine of ideas or forms helps to answer this question. Plato stated that, the universal concept is not an abstract form devoid of objective content or reference, but to each true universal concepts there corresponds an objective reality (Bradley, 1946). So, whenplato speaks of ideas or form he is referring to the objective essences, and it is to these objective essences thatplato speaks of Absolute Good or the ideaof the Good; he is referring to an objective essences, which is the source of goodness in all the particular things that are truly good and that theses objective essences, the idea, have transcendental existence of their own, apart from sensible things (objects).

## **METHOD**

This paper adopted the qualitative research design. As such, the source of data collection used in the paper is both primary and secondary. This includes data collected from books written by Moore himself, other related books and journals, internet and thesis. The paper employed the documentary analysis to describe and analyze data and information. The work is philosophical, expository, analytical, and descriptive; it critically analyzes and describes data. Therefore, content analysis as a tool for analysis was utilized in the critical examination and analysis of result; consequently, generalization and conclusion were made from such analysis.

## **RESULT AND DISCUSSION**

### **A Reflection on what we could possibly know (Criteriology or Epistemology) via Philosophical Analysis**

The assertion what we know in the sense of what we are justified in believing, is an epistemological one. In an attempt at establishing 'what we know', the Moorean shift was used to explain that which we can possibly know.

Now, let's consider a standard sort of skeptical argument as follows:

1. If I cannot tell the difference between waking and dreaming, then; cannot be sure that I have a body.
2. I cannot tell the difference between waking and dreaming.
3. Therefore, I cannot be sure that I have a body.

By employing the Moorean shift, the above argument of the skeptics can be rearranged thus:

1. If I cannot tell the difference between waking and dreaming, then; cannot be sure that I have a body.
2. I am sure that I have a body.
3. Therefore, I can tell the difference between waking and dreaming.

The strategy can be generalized as follows, where CS is any proposition of commonsense (such as “I am sure that I have a body”), and S is any skeptical proposition (such as “I cannot tell the difference between waking and dreaming”):

The Skeptics Argument

1. If S then not-CS
2. S
3. Therefore, Not-CS

Moore’s Responses (using “the shift”)

1. If S then not-CS
2. CS
3. Therefore, Not-S (Moore, 2012)

It is pertinent to note that, both arguments are valid, but only one can be sound, since both accept the condition (if) or (I). The question of soundness comes down to the question of whether S or CS is true. But in Moore’s suggestion we have more reason to believe any commonsense proposition than any skeptical proposition. This is due to the fact that, every skeptical proposition in its own right is going to rest on some speculative account of the ontology that puts a mental surrogate such as a proposition or a sense-datum in place of what we would normally say was the object of our experience. So for Moore, given the highly uncertain nature of theories in the ontology of cognition, posited that we are wise to treat them and claims based on them with suspicion, and to refuse to let them bear too much weight on our decisions about what to believe. Thus, we should always end up on the side of commonsense (Moore, 2012).

Moore, (1924: 647) tried to refute skeptical propositions such as the one put forth by Bertrand Russell that “I do not know for certain that this is a pencil”. Moore claims that such propositions rest upon several assumptions, one of which is the denial of direct realism. Though, Moore admits with Russell that direct realism is likely false, but, he however advocates rejecting skepticism, as such, posited that, of no one of these presuppositions of skeptics, do I feel as certain as that I do know for certain that this is a pencil (Moore, 1959:226).

At this juncture, it becomes imperative to note that Moore employing the G.E. Moore’s shift was a logical move to make an epistemological case for a direct realism (commonsense) position for the account of ontology of cognition. But what is not clear is what could be the possible source of justification for a commonsense proposition. Nevertheless, at least, the shift seems to involve an appeal to a criterion of justification and of rationality that is not affected by the fact that we lack an adequate account of cognition. Though, Moore never told us exactly what this criterion is. On this note, in the subsequent subsection I am going to attempt an explanation for the ontology of cognition, because it is getting to know about the process of cognition or perception that we are likely going to appreciate that which we cognize or perceive.

### **A Reflection on How We Could Possibly Know (Ontology Of Cognition) Via Neuroscience**

This is to say that, I am out to make an attempt at establishing the process and relationship that exist between our percept(s) and distal object (What we actually have on ground, our object(s) as they exist physically), using the knowledge of neuroscience (The Brain). Simply put, I am going to make an attempt at explaining how we know (i.e, the process of cognition);because it is when we understand how we know, that we may know that we claim to know. It is pertinent to note that the explanation to be made here about our cognitive process is perceptual (empirical or sensual).

The process of perception begins with an object in the real world (i.e, physical world) termed the distal stimulus or distal object (Bruce, 2011). By means of light, sound or another physical process. The object stimulates the body's sensory organs. These sensory organs transform the input energy into neural activity, a process called transduction (Bruce, 2011). This raw pattern of neural activity is called proximal stimulus (James, 2003). These neural signals are transmitted to the brain and processed. The resulting mental recreation of the distal stimulus is the percept (i.e. object perceived). On this ground, perception could be defined or described as the process of constructing mental representations of distal stimuli using the information available in proximal stimuli.

A good example of what am trying to say would be a man say, Maurice who is looking at a shoe. The shoe itself is the distal stimulus while, Maurice is the perceiver or observer of the shoe. When light from the shoe enters Maurice's eyes and stimulates his retina, that stimulation is the proximal stimulus as earlier mentioned. The image of the shoe reconstructed by the brain (mind) of Maurice is the percept (i.e. the resulting mental recreation of the distal stimulus). Another example as it regards to hearing, would be the sound of music, the sound of the music is the distal stimulus. The sound stimulating Maurice's auditory receptors is the proximal stimulus, and the brain's (minds') interpretation of this as melody of a music is the percept. It is imperative to not that the different kinds of sensation such as warmth, sound and taste are called sensory modalities (James, 2003).

Consequently, according to Gary J. (2011) in his development of the model or perception, people go through the following processes to form opinions.

1. When a perceiver encounters an unfamiliar target we are opened to different information cues and want to learn more about the target.
2. In the second step we try to collect more about the target. Gradually, we encounter some familiar cues which help us to categorize the target.
3. At this stage, the cues become less open and selective. We try to search for more cues that confirm the categorization of the target. At this stage, we also actively ignore and even distort cues that violate our initial perceptions. Our perception becomes more selective and finally paints a consistent picture of the target.

In the same vein, Alan Saks (2011) admits that there are "three components to perception, which are:

1. The perceiver, the person who becomes aware about something and comes to a final understanding. There are three factors that can influence his or her perceptions; experience, motivational state and finally emotional state. In different motivational or emotional states, the perceiver will react or perceive something in different ways. Also in different situations he or she might employ a perceptual defense where they tend to see what they want to see.
2. The target, this is the thing that is being perceived or judged. Ambiguity or lack of information about a target leads to a greater need for interpretation and addition.
3. The situation, this also greatly influence perceptions because different situations may call for additional information about the target.

At this juncture, I find it necessary to point out that there is a difference between stimulus and stimuli perception, stimulus perception involves just a single object say shoe while stimuli perception involves two or more object say shoes. As such, stimuli are not necessarily translated into a percept and rarely does a single stimulus translate into a percept. An ambiguous stimulus for example may be translate into multiple percepts(s), experienced randomly, one at a time, in what is called multi-stable perception (James, 2003). The same stimuli or absence of them may result in different percept(s) depending in a subject culture and previous experiences. In the case of visual perception, some people actually see the percept shift in their mind's eye. Others, who are not picture thinkers, may not necessarily perceive the shape shifting as their world changes. The esemplastic nature has been shown by experiment that an ambiguous image, has multiple interpretations on the perceptual level (Alexandra, 2003). This confusing the ambiguity of perception is important to human technologies such as camouflage and also in biological mimicry, for example the European Peacock butterflies, whose wings bear eye markings that birds respond to as though they were the eye's of a dangerous predator. It is important to note that, there is also evidence that the brain in some ways operates on a slight delay, to allow nerve impulses from distant parts of the body to be integrated into simultaneous signals (Banerjee, 1994). This sometimes may blur or affect our perception.

Now, we are going to look at some feature of perception which includes: grouping, constancy, contrast effects, experience effect, eEffect of motivation and expectation. The principle of grouping or Gestalt laws of grouping are a set of principles in psychology first proposed by gestalt psychologists to explain how human naturally perceive objects as organized patterns and object (Peter, 2006). As such the law of closure states that, the human brain tends to perceive complete shape even if those forms are incomplete. For example;

## **CONCLUSION**

The study uncovered that there exist a physical (visible) worldIt was further discovered that it is very difficult to isomorphically reconcile the relationship between the ontological statuses of both the physical and formal world objects. It was equally discovered that our claim to knowledge could either be a priori (analytical) or a posteriori (synthetic) or both. The study also uncovered that though Moore's logical move to establish a case for direct realism was quite

illuminating but was inadequate to account for human's claim to know for certain all reality that exist. It was discovered that since it is not possible to have faster than light entities (particles), such that, the principle of causality could be violated, it will be difficult to establish a case for direct realism. The study however, insisted that there is need to naturalize all the epistemological account of cognition in relation to a consensual-contextual language domain so as to better enhance our claim to knowledge.

**Recommendations** This study: (i) there is need to integrate rationality (reason) in our knowledge claim. The truth is that, it is important to establish objectively as to how we know so as to enable us appreciate what we justifiably believe that we know. On this note, there have been no one satisfactory theory of cognition that have been established objectively, that, what we know is direct (Unmediated) speaking from a realist point of view as propounded by Moore. But going by our claim to knowledge (which could be either a prior or a posteriori), Gaston Bachelard emphasized the basic role of reason amidst a priori and a posteriori forms of creating knowledge hence, he writes; by contrast with empiricism and idealism which emphasize the epistemologically privileged status of sense data (Empirical) and the primacy of reason (theoretical) respectively, modern rationalism adds a third system of thinking. This area holds that all three are equally important: the empirical, theoretical and abstract. Rationalism makes equal reference to all three system of thinking (Peter, 2004). (ii) There is need to embrace epistemic culture in our knowledge claim. This is to say that, whichever form our claim to knowledge takes it will certainly not be devoid of reason (rationality) on this note therefore, there is need to embrace the use of epistemic culture in our formulation and acceptance to knowledge claim. That is to say, epistemic culture distinguishes between various settings of knowledge production and emphasizes their contextual aspect. (iii) the need to apply 'constructive-referential-alternatism' in our knowledge claim cannot be overemphasized (Ogaba, 2015). This simply implies, making reference to mutually-exclusive possibilities to knowledge claim, which must be dependent on the mind's critical capacity to evaluate in relation to a given consensual-contextual language domain. Which is to say, all epistemological theories such as; Rationalism, Idealism, Empiricism, Phenomenalism, Realism (direct or indirect), Naturalism, Pragmatism to mention a few, are all good theories as to account for the nature, scope and sources of knowledge but, are enhanced when these (theories) are in congruence with the mind's capacity to reflect critically in relation to a given consensual-contextual language domain.

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