

The Philosopher's Doom: Unreliable at Truth or Unreliable at Logic

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By considering the epistemology and relations among certain philosophical problems, I argue for a disjunctive thesis: either (1) it is highly probable that there are (i) several (ii) mutually independent philosophical reductios of highly commonsensical propositions that are successful—so several aspects of philosophy have succeeded at refuting common sense—or (2) there is enough hidden semantic structure in even simple sentences of natural language to make philosophers *highly* unreliable at spotting deductive validity in some of the simplest cases—so we are *much* worse at logic than we think and cannot, in general, know when our own philosophical arguments are valid. The untoward consequences of each disjunct are explained.¹

1. Introduction

Vaguely put, I will argue that it is highly probable that we philosophers are either highly unreliable at finding truth or highly unreliable at logic. I don't mean to say that we are merely (highly) unreliable at finding deep philosophical truths, or that we aren't good at spotting validity in complicated cases. Most of us who aren't fools already know that. I mean to argue for something more damning: that either in our acceptance of *commonsensical* claims we philosophers are very often mistaken, or we are highly unreliable in identifying validity *in even the simplest cases*—the ones we cover in teaching

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elementary logic applied to natural language. Either way, most (not all; flatter yourself that you are among the exceptions) philosophers are doomed.

2. Attempted philosophical reductios of common sense

By *commonsensical claims* I mean claims such as ‘There are trees on Earth’, ‘Some people are rich’, ‘My car has existed for years’, ‘Modus ponens is truth-preserving’, ‘Contradictions aren’t true’, and ‘There are no two entirely material objects occupying the same place at the same time made of the very same matter’. Roughly put, I use ‘commonsensical claim’ to pick out claims the (a) *clear* majority of (b) *philosophers* think are (c) *obviously* true. In the final section I’ll briefly explore the intuitive idea that some claims are more commonsensical than others.

An *attempted philosophical reductio of common sense*: an argument of the following form in which each C is a commonsensical claim, $\rightarrow\leftarrow$ is a contradiction, and it seems obvious that the argument is deductively valid: $C1; C2; C3; \text{thus, } \rightarrow\leftarrow$. Different reductios have different numbers of C claims. This is a mere subset of philosophical arguments against common sense: the ones with nothing but commonsensical premises. Roughly put, an attempted reductio is *successful* when at least one commonsensical claim involved in the reductio is untrue. I will define ‘success’ more rigorously later in this section.

The sorites paradox is a good example reductio. Here are the commonsensical C claims that appear to entail a contradiction:

1. Anyone with \$0 is not rich.
2. If anyone with \$0 isn’t rich, then anyone with \$1 isn’t rich.
3. If anyone with \$1 isn’t rich, then anyone with \$2 isn’t rich.
- ...
- $10^9 + 1$. If anyone with \$999,999,999 isn’t rich, then anyone with \$1,000,000,000 isn’t rich.
- $10^9 + 2$. There is someone rich with less than or equal to \$1,000,000,000.

There are exactly two responses to any given attempted reductio. To see this, note first that either at least one of the Cs is untrue or all of the Cs are true. If at least one of the Cs is untrue, then the reductio is successful, since each C is commonsensical. If the Cs are true and derivation of $\rightarrow\leftarrow$ is valid, then

$\rightarrow\leftarrow$ is true; so in that case the reductio is successful as well since it is commonsensical that $\rightarrow\leftarrow$ isn't true. If the Cs are true and derivation is invalid, then there are just two possibilities:

- Derivation is formed *correctly* according to the rules of inference, but those rules are not truth-preserving. Thus, it is a successful reductio, since it's commonsensical that elementary inference rules are truth-preserving.
- Derivation is formed *incorrectly* according to the rules of inference, which means at least one of the Cs has some hidden semantic structure so that the elementary inference rules don't apply in the obvious way to derive $\rightarrow\leftarrow$; thus, no successful reductio.

When the latter possibility applies we say the attempted reductio is *logically opaque*. Thus, with respect to any attempted reductio, there are exactly 2 options:

- **Successful reductio:** some commonsensical claim is untrue: one of the Cs, the claim that the derived contradiction is untrue, or the claim that such-and-such elementary logical principle is truth-preserving.
- **Logically opaque reductio:** at least one of the Cs has hidden semantic structure so that the elementary inference rules don't apply in the obvious way. This enables one to say the Cs are true, the contradiction is untrue, and the elementary rules of inference are truth-preserving: the Cs don't entail the contradiction, contrary to appearances.

In other words: *reject some part of common sense or accept logical opacity*. We figured this out without taking any position on the reductio; we used logic alone. There are no other possibilities.²

There are many philosophical problems that generate the same disjunctive choice, ones that find their origins in the Statue-Clay problem, the Problem of the Many, Curry's paradox, the Grelling-Nelson paradox, the Paradox of the Knower, the Liar paradox, and the Tibbles-Tib problem (the last two appear in section 4 below). The problems aren't always tied to so-called philosophical paradoxes; for instance, attempted reductios can be generated from the normative ethics of resource distribution. All we require is that we can use the philosophical issue in question to formulate an apparently

² Even if there are several kinds of truth, the members of the apparently inconsistent sets are usually similar enough in topic that they will have the same kind of truth. So I don't see how truth pluralism would ruin my argument.

straightforwardly valid derivation of a contradiction *from just commonsensical claims and using commonsensical rules of inference*. Again, some of the claims will be more commonsensical than others.

The logical opacity response says there is some subtle context dependency or other semantic complexity present in the commonsensical C claims in question, a semantic complexity that *retains the truth of the commonsensical claims plus the elementary logical principles* used in the derivation of the contradiction. For instance, when it comes to the sorites there are various contextualist approaches (Åkerman 2012 is an overview). For those not familiar with sorites issues: paradoxical sorites arguments need not employ terms with *obvious* context dependency such as predicates like 'is tall' or 'is rich' (e.g., what counts as tall for a 17-year-old girl isn't what counts as tall for a 17-year-old girl on a high school basketball team). It's well known that soritical arguments work just as well when employing predicates such as 'is a pumpkin', definite descriptions such as 'the person in the corner', and even proper names such as 'Bertrand Russell'! In order to embrace the opacity response for the sorites paradoxes the context dependency has to be *subtle* and *extremely pervasive*, something very far beyond the obvious contrast-class feature of 'is rich' and applying to virtually all natural language sentences. Anyone familiar with the sorites knows that it is patently inadequate to support the opacity response with the bland observation that 'is rich' is context dependent in the ordinary ways.

3. Why it is so likely that several mutually independent philosophical reductios are successful

Thus, we are faced with many attempted philosophical reductios of common sense. For each one: either the reductio is successful or opaque. Think of each reductio as a marble on a large bowl. How many marbles are there? And how diverse are they?

Recall that the main goal of this essay is to establish a disjunctive thesis: either (1) there is a high likelihood that there are (i) several (ii) mutually independent successful philosophical reductios, or (2) there is enough hidden semantic structure in even simple sentences of natural language to make us highly unreliable at spotting validity in our philosophical work. My argumentative strategy will be the following. I will formulate an assumption P; next, I will argue that if P is true, then (1) is true; and then I will argue that if P is false, then (2) is true. The disjunction of (1) and (2) follows.

For fun, and to warm up to the argument, suppose the odds are small that any given attempted reductio is successful: for each one there's only a 25% chance the success option is right. As for the

talk about ‘chance’, I have in mind our responses to questions such as ‘What do you think the odds are that the sample contains magnesium?’ (said in the context of a chemistry lab in college) or ‘What do you think the odds are that quarks really exist?’ (asked of a physicist). Suppose further that there are twenty mutually independent attempted reductios. Does that seem reasonable to you?

If so, then a simple calculation shows that there is a 99.7% chance that at least one of the reductios is successful, which means that there is a 99.7% chance that *there is a successful philosophical reductio of common sense*. Of course, if you think the 25% figure is too low, then the chance of a successful reductio goes much higher than 99.7%.

But are there twenty mutually independent attempted philosophical reductios?

On the one hand, philosophers are profoundly territorial. “Here is *my* explanatory gap argument against physicalism—and it relies on principles that are crucially different from those found in the works of others!” To a certain extent, they are right: the offered arguments use distinct premises, ones that are arguably not metaphysically equivalent (occasionally they aren’t even materially equivalent). For instance, it’s arguable that there are at least two importantly different brain-in-a-vat arguments for radical scepticism. And it would be a mistake to think that the BIV arguments aren’t importantly different from the dreaming arguments or the evil demon ones. Construed this way, there probably are not twenty but *hundreds* of attempted philosophical refutations of common sense. To get a sense of the numbers, if there were 100 of them, and they were mutually independent of one another, then even if the odds that any given one of them is successful was a measly 5%, then the odds that at least one is successful would be about 99%.

On the other hand, it’s a tempting thought that those arguments are not *really* independent of one another. For instance, it’s surely intuitive that the various arguments for radical scepticism, even if employing metaphysically inequivalent premises, are at some deep level “the same argument”. Similar thoughts apply to the pot of semantic paradoxes or at least some of the paradoxes of material composition (e.g., Statue-Clay and Tibbles-Tib). For the sake of making life difficult for my argument, I will accept this tempting intuition. On top of that, it’s hardly clear what ‘independent’ means for arguments.

At this point, make assumption P: we can accurately *model* the situation (of the multiple attempted reductios) with the assumption M that there are just a dozen mutually independent philosophical

reductios in all of philosophy (not just metaphysics and the philosophy of logic) and each is only about 25% likely to be successful—both figures being conservative in my opinion (only twelve in *all* of philosophy?). So, there are *two* assumptions here: P is an assumption about the accuracy of modeling assumption M. If you think the 25% figure is far too high, that's fine! Section 6 of this essay is for you. It simply does not matter what number we throw in for a probability, at least for the sake of establishing my disjunctive thesis. So even if you think it's impossible to offer an epistemically reasonable number, or that it's "subjective" or "relative" in some ways, that's fine too since it still won't hurt my argument.

With the 12 and 25% figures the results are as follows:

Chance of at least 1 success:	0.97
Chance of at least 2 successes:	0.84
Chance of at least 3 successes:	0.61
Chance of at least 4 successes:	0.35 ³

The argument thus far:

- Claim P: we can accurately model the situation with the assumption M that there are at least a dozen mutually independent attempted philosophical reductios of common sense, and for each the odds of success are at least 25%.
- Disjunct (1): hence, there is a high likelihood that there are (i) several (ii) mutually independent successful philosophical reductios.

Again, I don't care if P is true. If P is false, then we get disjunct (2), as we are about to see.

We don't know, with certainty, that any of the reductios are successful. All I am claiming, at this point in the argument for my first disjunct, this: it's *highly probable* that several mutually independent philosophical reductios of common sense are successful—on assumption P.

In order to understand the significance of the argument thus far we have to respond to two objections.

³ The numbers can be calculated here: <http://stattrek.com/online-calculator/binomial.aspx>. Thanks to Amirhossein Kiani for advice and direction.

The first objection says that even if there is a successful reductio, it targets a small portion of common sense, so the significance is minute. This is mistaken. For instance, if the compositional nihilist's argument refutes common sense it doesn't just show that 'There are trees and tables' is false: *virtually all* positive, first-order claims about macroscopic objects end up false. A similar point holds for the sorites and semantic paradoxes. The attempted reductios hardly have anything special to do with trees, rich people, or modus ponens. Some of those reductios target an infinity of commonsensical claims. In addition, the semantic paradoxes are not limited to bizarre sentences such as 'This very sentence is false'. As is well known in the philosophy of logic, the paradoxes also come from ordinary sentence tokens (or uses of such tokens) such as 'What Harry said about the baseball team just isn't true'. Hence, admitting the existence of a successful reductio often means admitting that an enormous class of commonsensical claims are false. Moreover, the reductios are mutually independent, so most of the time they target different classes of commonsensical claims.

The second objection comes from the philosopher who is happy to admit that such-and-such attempted reductio R_1 is successful but none of the others, R_2 - R_{12} are. However, as we saw above the odds are reasonably high, 0.61, that there are *at least three* successes—and they are mutually independent. Hence, it's probable that this philosopher has at least two sets of false commonsensical beliefs (those corresponding to the successful reductios she missed). One can happily accept my probabilistic argument only if one is happy to concede that a "good many"—yes, this has to be vague, given what we said earlier about argument independence and modeling—attempted reductios are successful.

4. What if assumption P and (1) are false?

Suppose the '25%' figure in assumption P of section 3 is wildly inflated, and P is false. So we are free to embrace common sense, at least apparently. What follows?

If the '25%' figure is wildly inflated, then opacity applies virtually every time (since those are the only two possibilities: successful or opaque reductio).

So in virtually all those reductios there were semantic complexities present that meant that the apparently valid derivation of a contradiction was merely apparent: in virtually all cases the commonsensical claims don't have the semantics they appear to have—even when they appear to be very simple sentences.

But if that's right, then the semantic complexities are *very* well hidden. For instance, there certainly doesn't appear to be any semantic hocus-pocus going on in the sorites claims (recall that such claims can involve terms such as 'is a pumpkin', 'the person in the corner' or 'Bertrand Russell', thereby losing the obvious contextual dependence of 'tall' or 'rich') or the claims that generate the Liar paradox, the Problem of the Many, the Statue-Clay problem, or the Tibbles-Tib problem, for just four examples. To see this fact in the flesh, here is the latter problem (Tib = all of the cat Tibbles except her tail; Tail = her tail; between 1pm and 2pm Tail is cut off and destroyed).

1. At 1pm Tibbles has Tail as a part.
2. At 1pm Tib does not have Tail as a part.
3. If at 1pm Tibbles and Tib don't have the very same parts, then Tibbles \neq Tib at 1pm.
4. If Tibbles \neq Tib at 1pm, then Tibbles \neq Tib at 2pm.
5. At 2pm Tibbles and Tib are made up of the exact same matter in the exact same place.
6. Tib and Tibbles are entirely material objects.
7. There are no two entirely material objects occupying the same place at the same time made of the very same matter.

We definitely know this with regard to the set of (1)-(7): either opacity applies or one of these is untrue:

- At least one of (1)-(7)
- Elementary logic is truth-preserving
- Law of noncontradiction

However, there certainly doesn't *appear* to be any context dependency here that saves the consistency of (1)-(7). Keep in mind that context dependency *doesn't matter here* unless it saves the consistency! I'm *not* saying that the appearances are accurate. All I'm doing is making the obvious point that *if* they aren't accurate, *then* the truth-conditional semantics of (1)-(7) is very subtly context dependent. And notice that it's not merely that we are wrong about *details* of logical form: we are so wrong that *the "obvious" inconsistency—the one that led us to focus on the problem in the first place—is no inconsistency at all.*

A similar point holds for the liar paradox, with the set of (1)-(4) appearing inconsistent:

1. S is a sentence and S is identical to 'S isn't true'.
2. If 'S isn't true' is true, then S isn't true. (Cf. if 'Dogs bark' is true, then dogs bark.)
3. If S isn't true, then 'S isn't true' is true. (Cf. if dogs bark, then 'Dogs bark' is true.)
4. No sentence is true and not true.

For this attempted reductio we know that either opacity applies or one of these is untrue:

- (1)
- Elementary logic is truth-preserving
- All instances of T-schema are true (that's (2) and (3))
- Law of noncontradiction

But then how do we know our philosophical arguments are valid? Suppose you work for years and come up with a beautiful argument for some interesting thesis. But you now have insufficient reason to think your argument is valid. Your clever opponent can always say in response to your beautiful argument 'Well, I admit that your argument against my position looks awfully good, as your premises are highly plausible, but given what we have discovered about the massive pervasiveness of hidden semantic complexity, I'll bet the premises are true and the conclusion is false despite the fact that it certainly looks as though your premises entail your conclusion'. What now? Keep in mind that you are unreliable at spotting validity *even in simple sentences* such as the sorites claims or the claims involved in Tibbles-Tib or the Liar—not difficult cases such as those involving belief sentences, intensional sentences, etc.

Notice that under the opacity option we are very probably *highly unreliable* about semantics. For instance, if we are wrong about the semantics of the Cs in the sorites, Tibbles-Tib, or Liar sentences, then we will be wrong about the semantics of a great many sentences we use in philosophical arguments, since so many are structurally similar to those.

And how do you propose to teach logic from now on, knowing that you are unreliable at figuring out the logical forms of simple sentences?

One response is the highly confident one: "I know what the semantic complexities are that ruin all the attempted philosophical refutations of common sense, and they don't ruin my arguments since I know

how to sidestep them”. It must be pleasant to live with such supreme confidence in one’s ability to discover what has eluded virtually everyone else.

But suppose you really are the exception. That’s nice for you, but it is implausible in the extreme to hold that the philosophical community as a whole has figured out what you discovered. After all, most philosophers think the apparently inconsistent sets really are inconsistent.

5. The consequences of the disjunctive conclusion

There are two options: either (1) is true, so the odds are high that there are several mutually independent successful philosophical reductios of utterly commonsensical claims such as ‘There are trees’, or (2) is true, and we are bad at spotting validity in even very simple cases of natural language—including the ones in our own philosophical arguments. I won’t pause to consider self-application (e.g., self-defeat) issues brought up by my argument.

One might think that if disjunct (2) is true, then disjunct (1) is true. After all, if an argument shows that we are bad at spotting validity and other logical notions in *simple* cases, as disjunct (2) has it, then that argument also shows that some of our commonsensical ideas about semantics are false. Hence, I have really argued that disjunct (1) is true: it’s highly probable that there are several mutually independent successful philosophical reductios of common sense, *whether or not* assumption P is true.⁴

The only reason I hesitate to endorse this argument is that I have doubts about how “commonsensical” judgments amongst philosophers are about truth-conditional semantics (in the sense articulated at the beginning of section 2 above). I won’t explore that empirical matter here.

The truth of the disjunctive thesis has interesting epistemic implications for philosophical practice.

A great many philosophers are so confident in the truth of certain claims that they will dismiss arguments against them even without any serious investigation of those arguments. If someone offers an argument that I don’t have a brain or that there are no prime numbers, well, so much for her argument: I can reasonably conclude it’s unsound—either invalid or including false premises—even before I evaluate it.

⁴ Thanks to Ted Poston, Henrik Sova, Amirhossein Kiani, and others for comments along this line.

Some of these philosophers have this attitude regardless of the kind of anti-commonsensual argument involved; others restrict their dismissal to *philosophical* arguments. The latter philosophers will not dismiss out of hand obviously empirical arguments coming from our best scientific investigations. But when it comes to philosophy, they make what we will call the *Moorean move*:

When you encounter what you know to be a *philosophical* argument that goes radically against common sense, an epistemically rational thing to do is retain your commonsensual belief and conclude that the argument is unsound—and this can be done independently of finding specific fault in the argument (which is not to say that you take yourself to have failed to find such fault).

G. E. Moore (1925), David Lewis (1973), Kit Fine (2001), Anil Gupta (2006), William Lycan (2001), Jonathan Schaffer (2009), and Thomas Kelly (2008) are representative philosophers who make the move and defend or assume its epistemic rationality; one also sees the move made a great many times in philosophical conversation.

The Moorean move often gets made with respect to arguments for external world scepticism. However, one cannot reasonably restrict the Moorean move to those arguments—and in practice it certainly isn't so restricted; contemporary metaphysics provides examples. It would be bizarre to be confident enough in 'He knows he has hands' to make the Moorean move but not confident enough to make the move for other commonsensual claims—such as 'He has hands'.

When it comes to the class of attempted philosophical reductios I'm focusing on, in order to save common sense *opacity must apply every time*. Since *each* member of $\{C1, C2, C3, \sim \rightarrow \leftarrow\}$ is commonsensual for our class of reductios, by definition, if one accepts the logical inconsistency—as Mooreans often do—then as we saw earlier one is forced to either give up the truth of one of those members, accept the truth of some contradictions, or reject the truth-preserving nature of some elementary logical principles (the ones used in the derivation of a contradiction from the set). Hence, if common sense is true, as the Mooreans think it is, then opacity has to apply to each of those attempted reductios.

Hence, if you are the type of philosopher who thinks that philosophy rarely, if ever, refutes common sense, then you are forced to posit pervasive logical opacity in our philosophical arguments.

There is an additional problem with the Moorean move, one that applies to anyone who admits that *at least some* anti-commonsensual philosophical arguments are sound, whether or not they use at least one premise that doesn't rise to the level of being commonsensual. If there are sound philosophical reductios of common sense, then the Moorean move is flawed, as it recommends rejecting the soundness of *all* those arguments. But how bad would the unreliability of the Moorean move be?

All we have thus far is the idea that *several* of the attempted reductios are successful. Suppose for the moment that you thought that there were only around a dozen of them in all of philosophy and *only two or three* were successful—clearly optimistic assumptions. Would making the Moorean move to retain common sense still be reasonable for you?

It may seem so: just because you think the move isn't *guaranteed* to avoid the dismissal of a successful reductio of common sense—because you think it fails twice, say—hardly means one should give up the move. After all, if an action type works 70-80% of the time, say, then for most action types that is a pretty good percentage and one should stick with it even knowing it is less than perfectly reliable.

However, things are otherwise for the action type under consideration, the Moorean move. To see this, suppose you came to believe that at least one of these utterly ordinary and familiar claims is untrue and the corresponding philosophical reductio against it is successful:

There are trees on Earth

There are people who are rich

If an ordinary sentence is true, then it's not false too

Modus ponens is truth-preserving

Under that supposition would you be at all comfortable continuing to make the Moorean move—even when applied to philosophical arguments that rely on premises that aren't commonsensual? I would think that a successful refutation of even *one* of those claims, or other comparable claims, would be incredibly damaging to the status of common sense. As pointed out earlier, many of the attempted reductios target a large class of commonsensual claims; the reductios hardly have anything special to do with trees, rich people, or modus ponens. If I can be wrong about the existence of trees, or rich people, or the truth-preservingness of modus ponens, then how can I be confident in just about

anything from common sense? If common sense is wrong about any *one* of those (and the millions of others just like them), it is no minor flaw.

That's why I think that once one has admitted that several philosophical reductios are successful—even a small number—we cannot reasonably continue making the Moorean move. However, this thesis is not as important as the disjunctive thesis or the thesis that the Moorean move requires opacity across the board and embraces (2).

(As a point of clarification, I'm not saying that if one continues to make the Moorean move, then one's *retained belief* in the commonsensical claim the argument targets is unreasonable. Instead, I'm saying that a certain *cognitive move*, the Moorean one, will no longer be reasonable. It *may* turn out that the retained belief in the commonsensical claim is unreasonable as well; in fact, that seems to me to be likely. But I am not focusing on that separate issue.)

In the remainder of this essay I will briefly consider the separate consequences of each disjunct of my thesis.

If (1) is true, then two things are probably true.

First, it means that common sense is not a reliable guide to truth. Hence, we would have to find another guide to truth or substitute something else for truth as a goal.

Second, much of the hand-wringing over semantics that one sees in metaontology and related areas of philosophy looks like a waste of time. The main reason behind the hand-wringing has been the idea that the debates over outlandish theses such as compositional nihilism can't really be debates over whether there are trees. When the nihilists say 'There are no trees' it is commonly thought we must slap on some non-straightforward interpretation—because, it is thought, no one reasonable could *really* be suggesting there are no trees. Nihilists and near-nihilists frequently encourage this move. Similarly, when anti-realists about numbers say 'There are no numbers', we should not interpret them straightforwardly, since no competent philosopher would reject either 'There are more than ten prime numbers between 1 and 100' or 'If there are more than ten prime numbers between 1 and 100, then there are numbers'. Another example: color eliminativists aren't *really* saying that tomatoes aren't red or any other color. But now that we know that *several* philosophical reductios, *that are mutually independent*, refute common sense, as disjunct (1) says, why bother with such semantic

complexities—especially when there has never been much in the way of decent independent linguistic evidence for the semantic shenanigans posited by metaontologists?

On the other hand, if (2) is true, as the Mooreans as well as others would have us believe, then we have something akin to a full-scale *emergency* on our hands: we now know that most of us are highly unreliable in spotting validity and related logical notions in ordinary, perfectly straightforward, and simple discourse. If that's true, then as mentioned earlier it's difficult to see how we are to continue arguing with one another when our conversational partners are often if not always free to accept all our premises while denying our conclusions even when the argument seems as straightforwardly valid as they come. The right response to this predicament seems to be that the philosophical community should make a colossal shift to the philosophy of language so we can learn more about truth-conditionally relevant semantic complexities that are so well hidden.

As I foreshadowed earlier, I see just one way around the significance of this disjunctive conclusion, assuming it's true.⁵ Notice that claims such as 'There are trees in my backyard' are *more* commonsensical than 'There are no two entirely material objects occupying the same place at the same time made of the very same matter' or 'If the sentence 'The sentence in room 101 isn't true' is true, then the sentence in room 101 isn't true' (the latter is a typical premise in liar-type arguments for contradictions, coming from one half of the T-schema). They are more commonsensical in two respects: a higher percentage of philosophers who understand them will accept them, and many more philosophers understand them. (I am not sure of the first respect, but never mind; let's give the objection a fighting chance.) Now suppose we discover that the false commonsensical claims are the ones that are, by a large margin, the *least* commonsensical; hence, the damage to common sense is only slight. With this discovery we would be in a position to conclude that although some philosophical reductios of common sense are sound, the false commonsensical claims are not terribly commonsensical. Furthermore, perhaps opacity is true only for sentences that we *already* had a pretty good idea were much more semantically complicated than we once thought (e.g., those of the form 'S knows that P').

I suppose this damage-control outcome is possible, but I know of no reason to be so optimistic.

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⁵ Thanks to Alex Davis for making this point as well.

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