

# Emotion and Satisfaction in the Philosophy of F.H.Bradley

## I

The philosophers of the self-styled 'revolution in philosophy' (Ayer et al., *The Revolution in Philosophy*) that went on to become the contemporary analytic tradition started a rumour about their British Idealist predecessors which has persisted to this day. Finding uncongenial to their modern taste, both the substance of the idealist case, and the style of idealistic writing, these Edwardians hinted that the very arguments of their Victorian forbears owed more to emotion than to reason. The idealist view that (as Bradley put it) 'Higher, truer, more beautiful, better and more real – these, on the whole count in the universe as they count for us' (AR 488)<sup>1</sup> seemed just 'wishful thinking' to its detractors like Bertrand Russell. And filled with admiration for their own 'rigour' and 'common sense,' they put down the attraction of monistic idealism to a sort of emotionally immature romanticism unable to face up to the bleak and sober challenges of modernity; be they religious, political or scientific.<sup>2</sup> Now, as everyone knows, rumours stick. And this one was no exception. Thus, at the opposite end of the same century, in his hostile study of British Idealism, we find the Australian philosopher David Stove repeating the accusation:

Stemming from the same emotion as religion stems from, there is a kind of belief which is more irrational, in fact very much more irrational, than ordinary religious beliefs are. I mean what in philosophy is called idealism. That idealism *is* a child of religion, needs no argument: it is obvious. An idealist is a person of a philosophical turn of mind, who can no longer stomach the raw barbarisms of popular religion... but... in whom, nevertheless, the religious determination to have the universe congenial is still sovereign. This is as much a description of Plotinus as it is of Berkeley, of Bradley as it is of Kant, of McTaggart as it is of Norris, of Green as it is of Hegel. *All* idealists are engaged, above everything else, in satisfying the religious demand for the universe to be reassuring or consoling, or at the very least *kindred*.  
(Stove, 'Idealism' 87)

No single paper could address, across the board, the charge that British Idealist philosophy was rooted in emotional weakness or other non-rational prejudice, and thus in this paper I shall focus on just one figure, F.H.Bradley; arguably the most famous member of the school. Specifically I wish to identify the role he allows to feeling or emotion in the determination of his metaphysical and moral

principles, and to ask whether his critics were right that there was something improper – even something ‘disgusting’ (Stove, ‘Idealism’ 131) – in this.

It may be admitted from the start that my key terms here, ‘feeling or emotion,’ are a little vague. But we will have to manage with that. While it is intuitive enough that we may make a distinction between, on the one hand, such factors as perception and reason and, on the other hand, such factors as emotion, pleasure/pain, and desire, attempts to fix accurately that difference in theoretical terms are so fraught and complex that, were we adequately to explore them, we would find ourselves wholly mired in preliminary issues before we ever reached our subject proper. Bradley himself suggests that at the very deepest level this dichotomy collapses, (ETR 75) but even prior to that point, defining criteria prove remarkably hard to isolate. Indeed, given the precise task of this paper, the attempt to reach a definition might well be thought question-begging; for surely the most obvious criteria to propose for fixing the distinction would be precisely ‘suitability or unsuitability for use in thinking’<sup>3</sup> – the very point at issue in our discussion. Be all that as it may, it is foolish, however, to allow the complexity of a final answer to prevent the formulation of an initial question. At a straightforward level we can all see the difference between thinking and feeling, and we can all understand that it is wrong to hold something true or valuable or valid because we *want* or *hope* or mystically *intuit* it to be so. The question is whether Bradley transgresses this rule.

## II

Did Bradley’s philosophy fall short of the standards of proper rationality? Many analytic commentators have taken the view that it did, complaining that in the end his position rests on a vague appeal to ‘feeling’ or to the ‘satisfaction’ of what is most ‘deep-seated’ in our being; a base whose very lack of theoretical grounding makes it a cover for all kinds emotional and non-rational prejudices.<sup>4</sup> To determine whether or not this is a fair charge, we must examine what he has to say in more detail, looking first at his metaphysics and then at his axiology.

We may begin with the notorious aphorism which Bradley includes in the Preface to his great metaphysical work, *Appearance and Reality*, that ‘metaphysics is the finding of bad reasons for what we believe on instinct, but to find these reasons is no less an instinct.’ (AR x) One might think he is being ironic here, but even if so, there is more than a grain of sincerity in his words as well, for he expresses very similar thoughts on several other occasions.<sup>5</sup> And looking for specific evidence of such metaphysical claims advanced on ‘instinctive’ grounds, one perhaps need search no further than the celebrated ending to *The Principles of Logic* in which he advances his unorthodox or ‘heretical’ opposition to any ‘Hegelian’ identification of thought and reality.

It may come from a failure in my metaphysics, or from a weakness of the flesh which continues to blind me, but the notion that existence could be the same as understanding strikes as cold and ghost-like as the dreariest materialism. That the glory of this world in the end is appearance leaves the world more glorious, if we feel it is a show of some fuller splendour; but the sensuous curtain is a deception and a cheat, if it hides some colourless movement of atoms, some spectral woof of impalpable abstractions, or unearthly ballet of bloodless categories. Though dragged to such conclusions, we can not embrace them. . . . They no more make that Whole which commands our devotion, than some shredded dissection of human tatters is that warm and breathing beauty of flesh which our hearts found delightful. (PL 590-1)

It would be hard to portray Bradley as a spokesperson for reason here in this most colourful of passages. This is a cry of the heart, not the head.

There is an important distinction which must not be overlooked, between arational conclusions and arational argumentation. In the passage just quoted Bradley might seem to offend on both scores, but the transgressions may be judged differently. The claim that ultimate reality lies beyond the reach of even our best thought is one that, from its nature, must be to us profoundly mysterious, but who is to say that the final truth about the universe is *not* a puzzling one?<sup>6</sup> Very much more concerning here is the fact that Bradley's *route* to that conclusion also seems to be a matter of brute feeling or intuition, highly charged with emotion. And here we might recall his description of doing philosophy 'as a satisfaction of what might be called the mystical side of our nature.' (AR 6) Mysticism would seem to infect the method as well as the upshot of philosophy.

We should not let such passages as these carry the day, however, for – no stranger to rigorous argumentation – elsewhere and more often Bradley offers what are without doubt carefully formulated *philosophical reasons* for this self-same mystical conclusion. His argument for the supra-rational nature of ultimate reality (or the Absolute) is rooted in the contradictory nature of relational thought – by which he means any attempt to deal conceptually with the classical puzzle of bringing together unity and difference – although, since it belongs to the very nature of thought to be relational, one could more simply speak of the contradictory nature of thought *simpliciter*. Bradley maintains that our drive for understanding cannot be satisfied unless unity and difference are brought together, but that no scheme of concepts involving distinct terms in relation with one another can ever effect this combination in a way that satisfies the intellect. 'The conclusion to which I am brought is that a relational way of thought — any one that moves by the machinery of

terms and relations — must give appearance, and not truth. It is a makeshift, a device, a mere practical compromise, most necessary, but in the end most indefensible.’ (AR 28)

But this is not the end of the matter, for since it is none other than our own relational thinking which convicts *itself* of thus failing in its own defining endeavour, Bradley holds that there is also a sense in which our cognition must be understood as pointing beyond itself to what it seeks but could not, without thereby destroying itself, ever attain. To fully correct the defects which thought identifies in its own operation would bring us beyond the very conditions of thinking itself, and such a self-dissolving consummation he refers to as ‘thought’s happy suicide.’ (AR 173)

Now, whether we accept this dialectic or not, the key thing to note about it is that the criterion which it invokes for adequate metaphysical thinking is something that Bradley explicitly identifies as *intellectual* satisfaction. Philosophy searches for ultimate truth, and truth is ‘that which satisfies the intellect.’ (ETR 1; cf. ETR 220, 311) In other words, the critique is an immanent one. It is our reasoning process itself, that from its very own standards, condemns its view of the world and thereby, ultimately, itself. Humans are engaged in many different kinds of pursuits, for human nature is multi-sided, and in consequence there are many different kinds of satisfaction in addition to the intellectual; animal, moral, religious, emotional, aesthetic, and so forth. Bradley insists that none of these demands may claim pre-eminence over any of the others. The final human consummation must take in all sides of our nature. But just as important is the converse point, that each drive may properly resist interference from the others, for each is sovereign in its own sphere. (ETR 1-17) And thus, while philosophy is governed by *satisfaction*, we must not be drawn in by the ordinary connotations of that term; for shorn of any emotional, instinctive or appetitive associations, what Bradley has in mind here is rather a specifically *intellectual* drive.

If this answer is to be more than verbal, we must inquire just what it is about relational thinking that makes it so unsatisfactory to our intellect. One answer which has suggested itself to many commentators is to invoke Bradley’s doctrine of *Immediate Experience*. (e.g. Sprigge, ‘Russell and Bradley on Relations’ 164-7) Antecedent to its conceptualization and interpretation – a processing treatment which brings about its thoroughgoing compartmentalization — Bradley maintains that reality is first given to us in a primitive intuition of unity and diversity in one, a felt variety unblemished by either division or distinction. This he refers to as ‘immediate experience.’ (One is perhaps reminded here of William James’ ‘blooming, buzzing confusion.’ James, *Principles of Psychology*, vol.I, 488) The everyday relational thinking which emerges from out of this original base is selective and analytical, but the price of its new-found articulacy is that it is unable to capture everything that lies before it, that it utterly distorts those elements which it does take hold of, and (consequently) that it finds itself unable to slot them back in their proper places. Thus these two

modes of experience – the immediate and the relational – mark each other out respectively as the harmonious or complete and the discordant or fragmentary. Again and again Bradley refers back to a ‘whole of feeling’ as the criterion against which matters are judged and found wanting, and in this sense we might hold that, somewhat as the attempt to describe profound beauty or deep feeling can leave us cursing the poverty of own language, so the intellect is forever left unsatisfied by its own efforts to describe immediate experience.<sup>7</sup>

Baldwin has noted that the scenario which Bradley outlines here, with its implication of a perfect state from which we have fallen and can never recapture, is akin to that of William Wordsworth’s famous Immortality Ode,<sup>8</sup> and the comparison is an apt one; for as with Wordsworth’s mythic point of origin we may well find ourselves doubting whether, beneath our ordinary experience, there really does exist any such more perfect harmony of feeling of the type which Bradley claims. To those used to thinking of their own experience in more prosaic fashion, the claim that we all enjoy a ‘felt intuition of unity’ will seem no more believable than any other claims to mystical experience, and if this is the root of ‘intellectual dissatisfaction’, it would indeed seem to be a less than properly rational criterion. But this picture of the matter misconstrues the structure of Bradley’s argument, for in truth immediate experience is not any sort of consciously accessible feeling we could draw upon to convict our reasoning. Rather, prior to all division – even to that between subject and object – it is a theoretical postulate. That is to say, it is the contradictory nature of thought that points to the existence of a deeper harmony of feeling, and not the deeper harmony of feeling that alerts us to the contradictions of thought. (See Mander, ‘Levels of Experience in F.H.Bradley’ 493-8)

But wherein, then, lies the nature of intellectual satisfaction or dissatisfaction? While Immediate Experience may not be necessary in order to understand intellectual *satisfaction*, it certainly is necessary in order to understand *intellect*, for the intellect is something which emerges from out of that deeper felt basis.<sup>9</sup> Only once distinct concepts become separated out from the felt mass can we be said to have intellect, for intellect is precisely mind in so far as it has commerce with such concepts. Now, if we ask whether such a way of encountering reality can satisfy the intellect, it must be remembered that what the intellect seeks is its own proper species of satisfaction, which is of course conceptual. That is to say, what is wanted is a *conceptual* solution to the problem of how *concepts* relate together. But thus throwing up at once both the problem and the method insisted upon for a solution, the intellect creates a demand which it is unable to satisfy. Intellect *abstracts out* from the given whole separable terms and properties, and then makes hopeless appeal to the equally abstract devices of relation and predication to stitch back together the tear which it has

made. It seeks an account governed by the law of identity and difference of how the law of identity and difference may be overcome.

It is this line of thinking which lies behind Bradley's claim that relational thought fails to satisfy the intellect because it is *contradictory*. The attempt to bring together distinct items is rejected by the understanding, not because of any *felt* inadequacy, but simply because it is a contradiction. Bradley argues that the endeavour to bring items together (either subjects and predicates, or related terms) without any point in common is the very same thing as the attempt to bring together one thing and its negation. (AR 505) This might seem an odd understanding of contrariety. However, it is relatively easy to motivate. First it must be noted that for Bradley negation is never 'bare' but only ever made the case by some positive alternative which excludes the original suggestion. If the leaf is 'not green,' for example, that is only because it has some other colour, say, brown. (PL ch.III) If to this theory of negative judgement we append the idea that differences which appear to exclude one another may be shown in fact to be perfectly compatible, by means of a wider analysis that finds some point in common which they both qualify,<sup>10</sup> then we readily reach the result that genuine incompatibility will occur only where we have pure and total difference which could never be thus circumvented or accommodated. In this way Bradley rejects any mere 'and' – any 'bare conjunction' (AR 502, 505; ETR 230, 329) – for to his way of thinking both P&Q and P&¬P commit the very same sin; that of attempting to bring things together in *the absence of a ground*. (Ferreira, *F.H.Bradley and the Structure of Knowledge*, 107) Always thought seeks to move 'in proprio motu,' drawing all of its motions from within itself and not looking to anything given or outside: 'Explanation by a merely given principle cannot be a satisfaction in full.' (CW IV:111)

While this answer does a good job of capturing the intellectual – as opposed to the merely felt – character of what is unsatisfactory about relational thinking, it fails to address all of our worries. Even if it is possible to develop an Hegelian logic which excludes all bare difference and bare identity, what compels us to adopt this over rival schemes which permit these things? Often Bradley presents the need as though it were grounded in some desiderata about understanding or explanation. 'To be satisfied, my intellect must understand, and it cannot understand by taking a congeries, if I may say so, in a lump.' (AR 509) Now, there is no need to deny that explanation is intellectual, but as was argued by Van Fraassen who called it a 'pragmatic virtue', that fact in itself does not necessarily make it truth-relevant. (*The Scientific Image*, ch.V) Why suppose that whatever is 'explanatory' or 'makes sense' is allied with whatever is true? We certainly *like* explanations, but that in itself is inadequate reason to deny that there might nonetheless obtain brute facts. Raising the same concern in a slightly different idiom, we elsewhere find Bradley appealing to what looks

like the principle of sufficient reason. 'Somewhere there must be a reason why this and that appear together. And this reason and reality must reside in the whole from which terms and relations are abstractions.' (AR 517) But as Kant complained of Leibniz, we can with confidence accord only subjective rather than objective validity to the principle of sufficient reason. (Kant, 'On a Discovery' 333 (*Works* 8:247-8)) It may govern how we can think, but it need not govern reality itself.

### III

Turning now to value theory, Santayana speaks for many critics when he complains that, since it binds value to social context or *sittlichkeit*, eschewing any more external or objective viewpoint, idealist axiology can ever only repeat the ethical prejudices of its own time.

What could ethics properly be to a philosopher who on principle might not trespass beyond the limits of consciousness? Only ethical sentiment. Bradley was satisfied to appeal to the moral consciousness of his day, without seeking to transform it. The most intentionally eloquent passage in his book describes war-fever unifying and carrying away a whole people: that was the summit of moral consciousness and of mystic virtue. His aim, even in ethics, was avowedly to describe that which exists, to describe moral experience, without proposing a different form for it. (Santayana, 'Fifty Years Of British Idealism' 53)

Over the years there has been no shortage of readers of 'My Station and its Duties' prepared to agree with Santayana. But closer reading of Bradley's *Ethical Studies* makes it perfectly clear that his was a properly *critical* system of ethics. It is true that for Bradley adequate moral vision must be something social rather than something purely private, but (contra Santayana) this stems from more than just conservative sentiment, for the moral standard is both intellectual and reflexive, and thus as applicable to our own or our own society's *feelings* as to any other target.

But what is the ethical criterion? For Bradley, ethical action should be understood as action which realises ourselves in a certain way. Yet *mere* self-realization cannot be the goal, for we all have within us the potential for both good and evil, and so what we must aim to realize is something more specific – our *true* or *ideal* self. But what is this? Bradley offers three criteria. Firstly, we aim not at a series of states but at a life as a whole. (ES 68-71) Now, the 'life of an oyster' has a certain integrated unity, but is no ideal for a human being, and so, secondly, we must 'widen our empire' and seek to fulfil ourselves in a host of different ways. In this of course we must not undermine our first goal, for the ideal life is not some heterogeneous mass of interests and pleasures, but perfect balance of unity and diversity. (ES 74) Thirdly, we seek a life which is self-determining, and not

limited from outside. The good life cannot be handed to us or prescribed for us, by others. This point Bradley expresses in Hegelian idiom as the requirement that we be *infinite*. (ES 74-9; AR 131)

The principal interest of Bradley's ethics, however, lies not in these generalities but in its more specific details; in following how the application of this general standard takes us from hedonism, through duty, 'my station and its duties', ideal morality and the religious life, until finally in the attempt to find a position that can really satisfy us we pass beyond ethics altogether. In the end just as the pursuit of truth took us beyond the distinction between knowing and being which defines thought itself, so the pursuit of the good takes us beyond the distinction between *is* and *ought* which is definitive of ethics proper.

What (we may ask) is the axiological import of such a consummation? Metaphysically it was demonstrated that the Absolute is a maximally comprehensive and coherent unity-in-diversity, and this makes it something metaphysically consistent and harmonious, but has it also evaluative as well as metaphysical perfection? Is it something good or desirable, or might it yet be some sort of ethical catastrophe? Bradley is in no doubt that his conclusion is one to be welcomed. The Absolute is a state which boasts a balance of pleasure over pain, (AR 138) and a state in which the main wants of our being – for truth, life, beauty and goodness – all find their satisfaction. (AR 140) But at this point the charge raises itself that once again Bradley is being driven more by his heart than his head. For with respect to determining the truth about the ultimate constitution of the universe, he confesses 'I could not rest tranquilly in a truth if I were compelled to regard it as hateful. While unable, that is, to deny it, I should, rightly or wrongly, insist that the inquiry was not yet closed, and that the result was but partial.' (AR 130)

As we have already seen, such apparently personal and emotive claims should not be taken to exclude the fact that Bradley *also* regards this as a matter suitable for rational argumentation, subject to the more objective standards of *intellectual* satisfaction. The most direct line of reasoning here would be a species of ontological argument, passing straight from the notion of perfection to its realization. But no such argument can work, maintains Bradley; for while it is absurd to think that reality might fail to satisfy logical prescriptions there is no parallel absurdity in thinking that it might fall short of axiological ones. However, he does believe that it is possible to construct an *indirect* argument to the same conclusion. There can be no guarantee that what is desirable is true, that what satisfies practical reason satisfies theoretical reason, (AR 135) but we can say that theoretical satisfaction would be impossible without satisfaction of the rest of our nature, including our practical reason. (AR 137) We know metaphysically that reality is a harmonious whole, and this precludes its containing any unresolved tension of conflict. Yet that is precisely what pain and



unsatisfied desire are. (AR 138) Thus Bradley takes the impossibility of its containing any sort of tension or contradiction to indicate the supreme value of the Absolute.

This may look like an objective result secured solely against the standard of intellectual satisfaction but, as with the metaphysical case above, on closer inspection the matter becomes more doubtful. Does metaphysical perfection from the point of the universe as a whole really entail the kind axiological perfection that *human beings* look for? It is tempting to think that a certain subjectivity has entered into Bradley's thinking here. Indeed, Bradley himself suspects as much, and in the final chapter of *Appearance and Reality* he pulls back slightly from this conclusion on the grounds that, although he cannot quite see how this might be so, it is not strictly *contradictory* to suppose that there might occur types of pain which did not involve any sort of tension or conflict, and hence which might coexist with a state of maximal harmony and system. (AR 474) To make the point more explicitly, it is conceivable that what seems evil, from a wider perspective may in fact be an essential fragment of some greater good; but if this were true of human suffering as a whole, we should have to allow that the harmonious perfection of the whole was perfectly compatible with what, from our limited point of view, was felt as misery and pain.

Bradley wishes to maintain that the case he is putting forward here is a properly *intellectual* one; that the intellect is satisfied only with a philosophy that satisfies our being across the board. 'A true philosophy must accept and justify every side of human nature' he tells us. (ETR 14)<sup>11</sup> But the generality of this conclusion sits ill with the specificity of the status which he claims for it and, in truth, it is doubtful whether exclusively intellectual satisfaction can ever be thus isolated and kept separate from other sorts of fulfilment. In the end the completion of our intellectual aspirations must be understood as continuous with the realization of our other goals. This fact should hardly surprise us. Not only do we know (from Bradley's own anti-relational arguments) that nothing can be finally distinguished from anything else, but Bradley also explains to us that ultimately mere intellectual satisfaction is unobtainable. It is only right and proper that as we seek to satisfy the demands of our intellect we should not be deflected from this pursuit by other concerns or other satisfactions, yet Bradley explains that even the intellect which thus stays on course must inevitably pass beyond just itself. Mere intellect can never be satisfied until it leaves behind all its distinctions — between terms, between thought and sense, even between subject and object — in short, until it leaves itself behind and ceases to be mere intellect. But the Absolute in which our intellectual aspirations find their consummation, echoes the condition of Immediate Experience from which they were born, in the sense that both are states (respectively) below and above the separation of thought from feeling, and thus states which cannot be understood as purely rational or intellectual.

Whatever isolation may be proper at the intermediate level, at the very last intellectual satisfaction cannot hold itself apart from other species of fulfilment.

As Bradley presents the matter, to try meet the demands of our intellect is to seek to realise but one side of our multifaceted human nature, whose various striving each define their own distinct good but none of which can legitimately claim to offer more than a 'partial satisfaction' of our nature as a whole. But Bradley's talk here of 'sides' of our nature, in so far as it is suggestive of separate and distinguishable 'parts', is potentially misleading, and we get a rather different picture if we think instead of different 'expressions' or 'manifestations' of a single underlying urge or drive. For in truth what is sought here is not the satisfaction of some abstract or disembodied *faculty*, but rather the realization of some concrete *self*, one and the same as it seeks its fulfilment throughout the whole of its nature. If we artificially abstract out any given side of that nature (such as the intellectual or the religious dimension), we see it at work there, but the impulse we see is not really different from those drives we see at work through the rest of its being.

Understood in this fashion, there is a sense in which to Bradley *all* of our impulses are practical, even those of the intellect. They are demands made by some part of our nature on the world. And viewed in this way, intellectual demands may claim no greater right to be met than any of the others, for they have no real distinction from those others. 'What in the end is the criterion? The criterion of truth, I should say, as of everything else, is in the end the satisfaction of a want of our nature.' (ETR 219; cf. AR 133-4) This can be seen explicitly in Bradley's discussion of pragmatism, where he is quite clear that at the ultimate level he recognises no distinction between theory and practice –in the end theory and practice are one, each is a one sided aspect of our nature. (ETR 75)<sup>12</sup>

The advantages of thus transcending the sphere of the merely intellectual are certainly not lost on Bradley. The contrast between cognitive and non-cognitive which grounds the distinction between fact and value loosens, and in the end we may break down 'the unnatural barrier between beauty and truth, between poetry and fact.' (ETR 444) There is no need to deny that this is wonderfully inspiring, but its claim to remain a wholly *intellectual* result seems hard to sustain.

#### IV

We have found Bradley able to defend himself from the crudest charges of 'wishful thinking' by insisting on the *intellectual* character of the satisfaction he seeks. And perhaps that was to be expected, for no one who has actually read such works as *Appearance and Reality*, *Principles of Logic* or *Ethical Studies* could fail but to be impressed by the wealth of careful argumentation that they contain. Bradley is no aphoristic prophet.<sup>13</sup> But suspicions remain. For it may be charged that at a deeper level the criteria of what for him makes an argument a 'good' one, or of what in his view

‘satisfies the intellect’ lack properly rational foundation. Why (we must ask) should reality satisfy our intellect, any more than it should satisfy our desire or emotion or instinct, or any other demand we might make? Moreover, it would seem that the demand is inevitably a subjective one, for satisfaction must be the satisfaction of some individual or creature. But why on earth should it be supposed that *personal* satisfaction, or even generically *human* satisfaction, is a relevant concern? Have I, or my species, some special place in the order of things?

Bradley is certainly sensitive to this objection, and holds that nothing specific to a species, a culture, or an individual, could ever be relied on in that way. Reality does not give you ‘all that you want and exactly as you want it.’ (ETR 242)<sup>14</sup> Indeed, that something should be wholly indifferent or unresponsive to merely personal concerns or opinions is a large part of what it *means* to think of it as real. As Bradley puts it, ‘forced agreement of my ideas with a nature other than my volition is, I presume, that which in general we understand by truth.’ (ETR 79)

Bradley admits that it is never easy to be sure whether or not the feelings we appeal to *are* merely personal or otherwise subjective. (ETR 445) But in so far as we can truly say that they are not, he defends their relevance on staunchly *metaphysical* grounds. He maintains that the relevance of my/our wants and needs rests in the end on a metaphysical belief in my/our oneness with the universe.

It is after all an enormous assumption that what satisfies us is real, and that the reality has got to satisfy us. It is an assumption tolerable, I think, only when we hold that the Universe is substantially one with each of us, and actually, as a whole, feels and wills and knows itself within us... apart from the belief that the ultimate and absolute Real is actually present and working within us, what are we to think of the claim that reality is in the end that which satisfies one or more of us? It seems a lunatic dream.... The ideas and wishes of ‘fellows such as I crawling between heaven and earth’ how much do they count in the march or the drift of the universe? (ETR 242-3)<sup>15</sup>

What Bradley is invoking here is his metaphysics of the Absolute, in both its idealist and its holist dress. Note has already been taken of his passionate rejection of the ‘Hegelian’ notion that reality consists in nothing more than abstract thinking, but the *metaphysical realism* involved in holding that the realm of being extends further than the realm of concepts must in no way be taken to imply that Bradley is anything other than fully signed-up to the doctrine of *philosophical idealism*. That is to say, he is as committed as his other idealist colleagues to denying that *experienced things* may be understood as in any way different from *the experiencing of them*. All that properly exists is

*experience itself*, and to ask whether there is some further subject or ego which ‘has’ the experience, or whether there is some further external object to which it ‘corresponds’ is to persistently misunderstand the sense in which this state is a simultaneous unity of subject and object; the common ground from which both of those aspects are partial or one-sided abstractions.<sup>16</sup> Taking as its root model for everything the curious phenomenon of self-conscious experience, in which awareness of something is simultaneously awareness of itself, idealism of this type – commonly called ‘objective’ – draws no distinction between what is inner and what is outer, be that the contrast between knowledge and what is known or the contrast between desire and what is desired. As well as reaching beyond the contrast between subject and object, the metaphysics of the Absolute transcends also the distinction between parts and whole. That is to say, it understands the finite components or ingredients of the infinite Absolute as determined to be what they are by their place within the wider whole every bit as much as they, at the self-same time, determine the nature of that whole. More than just an aggregate or composite of distinct individuals, the Absolute is a genuine unity which realises itself as a whole in and through all of its specific individual differences, each individual carrying with it the spirit of the whole, each pointing to the whole that alone completes it or makes it intelligible. In this way, when we think or feel we do not do so for *ourselves* or our *species* alone, but for *the whole universe*, which thinks or feels through us. (By way of analogy we might think of the way in which an artist through their work may express ‘the spirit of the age’ or the way in which an individual’s own desire to find a mate may be simultaneously an expression of its species impulse to perpetuate itself.) No doubt reality itself is almost entirely indifferent to most of the passing intellectual or emotional demands we make upon it, but putting together such idealism and holism, the concern that our deepest and most persistent demands may likewise be dismissed as ‘subjective’ is one that can be put to rest. If the metaphysics of Absolute Idealism are correct, the most fundamental aspirations of the part are a valid clue to the nature of the whole.

## V

We have seen that, by spelling out its properly *intellectual* nature, Bradley’s appeal to feeling or satisfaction can be rescued from the most obvious charges that it is grounded in some form of non-cognitive subjectivity, but that when those charges are pressed further, he finds himself pushed into making an essentially *metaphysical defence* of the relevance of such root intuitions.

To offer a metaphysical justification for the methodology by which we pursue metaphysics is certainly to invoke some sort of circularity in reasoning. The ideal of knowledge, for Bradley, is an all-inclusive integrated system in which there are no foundations but everything contributes its own measure of support to the whole in such a way that paths of explanation or justification, pursued far

enough, may loop back on themselves and become implicated in their own defence.<sup>17</sup> Such bootstrapping raises suspicions, but examples like reformed epistemology or the inductive defence of induction may make us pause before we condemn as completely without value all circularity, and even if we conclude that self-certifying manoeuvres like these offer us nothing more than an elaborately articulated fideism, fideism of *some* form seems essential to *any* attempt at knowledge. As we rest once we have reached our best thinking on any given matter, as we rely on our deepest and most indefeasible intuitions, in short, as we use our reason to think about reality, pragmatically (that is to say, at least as a working assumption) we just *have* to assume that that the object of our thinking is of such a nature that the correct use of our reason will uncover the truth about it. Otherwise the exercise of thinking would be nonsensical. It makes sense to question a suspect even if you fear that they may be lying, for equally they may be telling the truth. But in the absence of any independent way of determining whether they are, to continue the interrogation is *de facto* to assume that veracity. Similarly, we may not know for certain whether or not God exists, but so long as we choose to pray we must make a working assumption that he does. Even the general sceptic has to trust that his own pessimistic argumentation accurately captures the proper relation between knowledge and its objects. (As Bradley himself reminds us, even '[t]he man who is ready to prove that metaphysical knowledge is wholly impossible.... is a brother metaphysician with a rival theory of first principles.' AR 1) Some such metaphysical assumption of the fundamental alignment between our best thinking and the way things really are – be that correspondence, structural isomorphism, or even identity – is the inevitable presupposition of all philosophical thinking. It is also large part of what Bradley means when he says that philosophy rests on *faith*. (ETR 26) He insists that there is no absolutely certain datum or axiom from which philosophy may start. 'On the contrary, we may be said to depend on a principle of action. We seek, that is, a certain kind of satisfaction, and we proceed accordingly. In and for philosophy... truth in the end is true because I have a certain want and because I act in a certain manner.' (ETR 26) Or to put the matter slightly differently, 'I have assumed that the object of metaphysics is to find a general view which will satisfy the intellect, and I have assumed that whatever succeeds in doing this is real and true, and whatever fails is neither.' (AR 491) Such faith is necessary even to get the philosophical project moving, and can neither be proved nor questioned. (AR 491)

It might be objected that this is not really faith, because faith consists in the overcoming of doubt, and at this most fundamental level (we have argued) doubt cannot even be entertained; we *have* to make this assumption. But that is not quite correct. It is true that philosophical thinking is a sensible activity only so long as we hold a working faith in its efficacy, but paradoxically we have also the capacity to entertain at the very same time the strictly meaningless thought that perhaps, after

all, our very best efforts may yet fall short of the mark. (ETR 27) We have no choice but to trust our very best thought, but one of our very best thoughts is that in the end perhaps none of our thoughts are wholly trustworthy, and in this way our doubt keeps mischievously one step ahead of our very best reasoning. We can never wholly shake the fear that we are being deceived by some Cartesian demon, or that we are mad, but the very substance of these fears assumes at the same time that they have no basis.

But we have not quite got to the bottom of this question of faith, for in truth it is not so much this circularity of reasoning, as our failure to properly complete that circle which for Bradley condemns philosophy to rest on faith. He says, 'An attempt to reconstruct the world ideally might, and, we may even add, must begin in faith, but the process ceases to depend on faith so far as it visibly succeeds. And, if our theory ever became intelligible throughout, faith would have ceased wholly to exist in it, since no further doubt as to that theory's beginning or end would be possible. On the other hand, apart from such complete verification, faith must always remain.' (ETR 21) What Bradley is telling us here is that retrospective justification of one's starting point is not simply acceptable, but in fact the very ideal of intellectual justification. The perfect philosophy would be perfectly circular. However, given the way things actually stand, no philosophy could ever get that far, for the only philosophy there could be is relational and no scheme of thinking which moves by the machinery of relations could ever overcome the limitations inherent in such thinking. 'Philosophy in my judgement cannot verify its principle in detail and throughout. If it could do this, faith would be removed, and, so far as it does this, faith ceases. But, so far as philosophy is condemned to act on an unverified principle, it continues still to rest upon faith.' (ETR 27)

Notwithstanding his curious commitment here to the idealised possibility of circular self-justification, in general the kind of faith that Bradley has in mind at the root of all philosophical thinking is a necessary implication of philosophical investigation itself, and consequently the result that that philosophy rests on faith is one that he regards as 'of no great consequence.' (ETR 27) There is nothing untoward in it. All philosophers need such faith. That is how they work. It was of this basic faith in philosophy that Bradley wrote candidly in a letter of 1914.

I think I understand what you say as to the way in which you philosophize. I imagine that it is the right way and that its promises are never illusions, though they may not be kept to the letter. There is something perhaps in the whole of things that one feels is wanting when one considers the doctrines before one, and (as happens elsewhere) one feels that one knows what one wants and that what one wants is there — if only one could find it. And for my part I believe that one does find it more or less. And yet still I must believe that one never

does or can find the whole in all its aspects, and that there never, after all, will be a philosopher who did not reach this truth, after all, except by some partiality and one-sidedness — and that, far from mattering, this is the right and the only way. This is however only faith & I could not offer to prove it.<sup>18</sup>

And the irony of the matter is that the correspondent with who Bradley is here agreeing about philosophical method is *Bertrand Russell*, the very person who did so much to spread the rumour of Bradley's fundamental irrationality.

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<sup>1</sup> In this paper I use the following abbreviations to refer to works by Bradley: ES = *Ethical Studies*, PL = *The Principles of Logic*, AR = *Appearance and Reality*, ETR = *Essays on Truth and Reality*, CE = *Collected Essays*, CW = *Collected Works*

<sup>2</sup> The tendency to attribute what are our faults to our opponents is a universal human weakness, and that Russell's own adoption and abandonment of idealism had, in the last analysis, less to do with metaphysics and more to do with his own religious feelings is noted by Stewart Candlish. (*The Russell/Bradley Dispute and its Significance for Twentieth Century*, 175) That the significant difference between Bradley and Russell lay as much in their attitudes as in their arguments has been noted also by Timothy Sprigge. ('Russell and Bradley on Relations' 150) Although Russell had great respect for Bradley and his arguments, at root he saw Absolute Idealism as the product of a metaphysical optimism that in the last analysis owed more to religious and emotional impulses than to rational or scientific ones. It is notable that the very beginning of Russell's break with such idealism is marked by a paper given to the Apostles, focused not on logic, but on the inability of a philosophy such as Bradley's to make good on spiritual benefits which it seems to promise. ('Seems Madam? Nay, it is') While he went on to engage Bradley on more technical fronts, such as the reality of relations and the nature of truth, he regarded Bradley's faulty logic and metaphysics as the defective outworking of a deeper mysticism. ('Philosophy in the Twentieth Century' 65; 'Mysticism and logic') By contrast to what he regarded as the clear-eyed rigour of his own approach, the case for absolute idealism was at best just recklessly speculative and at worst deliberately obscurantist. In *On Our Knowledge of the External World*, Russell quotes the main statement of Bradley's anti-relational argument and then states, 'Most people will admit, I think, that it is calculated to produce bewilderment rather than conviction, because there is more likelihood of error in a very subtle, abstract, and difficult argument than in so patent a fact as the interrelatedness of the things in the world.' (17-18) Perhaps his early reverence prevented him from ever completely scorning Bradley, but with other Absolute Idealists, such as Bosanquet, the gloves came off. He wrote to Lady Ottoline Morrell: 'What is one to do with such a resolute confusion between what the world is and what one would like it to be? Bosanquet is typical among philosophers in having never felt the pure intellectual impulse, which merely wants to understand. The vice in philosophers is due to their determination to find religion.' (Quoted in Griffin, 'Bertrand Russell's Crisis of Faith' 113)

<sup>3</sup> Thus it is that the distinction is often thought of as that between 'cognitive' and 'non-cognitive' factors.

<sup>4</sup> Often the charge is made but loosely and in passing, for example, 'It appears that Bradley was impelled by a dissatisfaction, which he himself half admitted to be not wholly intellectual, with all common and current ways of thinking.' (Warnock, *English Philosophy*, 4) It also appears in a number of different guises. It is said that Bradley was some sort of 'supra-rationalist' (Campbell, *Scepticism & Construction*) or 'anti-intellectualist' (Wollheim, *F.H. Bradley*, 222), and similarly his philosophy has been described as 'mystical' (Inge, *Light, Life and Love*, lvi). For others the root of the problem has been the *holistic* nature of Bradley's thought, as against the piecemeal approach of the analytic philosophers. For example, Waismann argued that, 'arguments on a small scale, containing a few logical steps only, may be rigorous' but 'the conception of a whole philosophical view – from Heraclitus to Nietzsche or Bradley – is never a matter of logical steps. A *weltanschauung* like any of these... is never 'arrived at', in particular it is not deduced, and once found it can neither be proved nor refuted by strictly logical reasoning.' ('How I See Philosophy' 482) To a verificationist, like Ayer, 'the main contentions of such a work as Bradley's *Appearance and Reality* are literally nonsensical' ('A Defence of Empiricism' 49) and,

as nonsense, they could not possibly have resulted from any rational process. Wollheim traces the appeal of monism, as something which Bradley and others have found so 'satisfying', to developmental factors in the emotional life of the infant. (Wollheim, *F.H. Bradley*, 278-80) More generally, on the tendency of analytic philosophers to think that their opponents' fondness for metaphysics was a sign of neo-romantic immaturity and an emotionally insecure character, while they alone possessed the courage and the ability for genuine reason, see Anlehurst, *Cultural Politics of Analytic Philosophy*, 94-103.

<sup>5</sup> He criticises metaphysical theories 'which ignore the deepest instincts of our nature' (ETR 106) and says of his own position 'If I were not convinced of its truth on the ground of metaphysics, I should still believe it upon instinct. And, though I am willing to concede that my metaphysics may be wrong, there is, I think, nothing which could persuade me that my instinct is not right.' (ETR 268) He holds also that 'there is a desire deep-seated in our nature for what we call truth, and for the intelligent and rational justification of our best instincts' which, where it cannot be met by metaphysics, runs out into religion. (ETR446)

<sup>6</sup> 'Philosophy will always be hard. . . . But its certain reward is a continual evidence and heightened apprehension of the ineffable mystery of life.' (ETR 106) cf. McTaggart, 'All true philosophy must be mystical, not indeed in its methods, but in its final conclusions.' (*Hegelian Dialectic*, 255)

<sup>7</sup> For example Bradley insists that ultimate or bare conjunction is never, as such, given to us; for always there is a background, from which the conjunction is abstracted and upon which it depends. (AR 502-3) He urges that, 'the moment's felt immediacy remains forever outstanding,' (ETR 115) and that, 'In my general feeling at any moment there is more than the objects before me, and no perception of the objects will exhaust the sense of living emotion.' (ETR 159) [Note the term 'living emotion.']

<sup>8</sup> Baldwin, 'Thought's Happy Suicide' 78. Baldwin also objects to the emotionally charged rhetoric which Bradley employs; the 'beatification' of immediate Experience, as he puts it.

<sup>9</sup> Bradley accepts that 'in early soul-life' (by which he means both the individual and the species) we are wholly driven by practice. Appetite and passion drive everything, and only much later does the intellect emancipate itself, and acquire its own distinct end/goal. (PL 506-7)

<sup>10</sup> To take a simplistic example, one might think that nothing can be both present and absent until one deals with distracted teenagers or, more seriously, with bereavement.

<sup>11</sup> 'philosophy... seeks... the satisfaction of one side of our nature... On the other hand, as a man with a certain feeling & a certain faith, I should not be satisfied *if* the result of philosophy jarred with the rest of my nature' (CW V:23)

<sup>12</sup> In general Bradley's attitude to pragmatism is complex. Not only at the ultimate level, but equally at the everyday level of appearances (ETR 75) does he elide the cognitive and the practical. It is only at the level *intermediate* between these two — at the *metaphysical* level — that he insists on the distinction between what works or satisfies and what is true.

<sup>13</sup> Bradley *did* write a small book of *Aphorisms*, but these are not really part of his *philosophical* output. See Broomfield, 'Getting Real'

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<sup>14</sup> 'If my ideas and my will, or the will and the ideas of any man or set of men, are to be the measure of truth, then, so far as I see, the reality cannot lie beyond the private ends of individuals.' (ETR 81) The key is not 'arbitrary private liking.' (CE 671)

<sup>15</sup> 'My desire and my will to have truth is the will and the desire of the world to become truth in me. Truth is a mode of the self-realization of myself and of the Universe in one'. (ETR 121) He also says something very similar in a letter to William James: 'the want of the individual to satisfy himself *is* the want also of the Universe to realize itself in its various aspects.' (CW V:86) 'Nothing in the end therefore is simply private; the most intimate feeling and the simplest experience of a pleasure or pain is experienced by the whole Universe.' (ETR 248)

<sup>16</sup> It is 'a state as yet without either an object or subject.' (AR 465; ETR 194)

<sup>17</sup> As Edward Caird put it, neatly summarising the coherentist credo, there is no harm in thinking in a circle so long as the circle itself is wide enough. (Temple, *Studies in the Spirit and Truth of Christianity*, 43)

<sup>18</sup> CW V:182-3. Russell's own letter in which he speaks of his 'absolute' trust in his logical instinct, 'tho' it is blind & dumb' appears immediately previous 181-2.