

THE INTERACTION OF RUSSELL AND BRADLEY

During recent research into the controversy between Russell and Bradley concerning the nature of relations, points came to light which may be of interest to readers of this journal. The main conclusions concerning the controversy about relations cannot be given here, since they would require more space than is available; I shall limit myself to a consideration of the general historical question of the Russell - Bradley interaction, particularly considering the degree to which Bradley influenced Russell.

It seems to be thought today that Bradley had a rather humble place in Russell's development: Russell, it is said, could only begin his philosophical career in earnest when he had shaken off the stifling Hegelianism of Bradley, this being refuted when a logical error concerning the underlying theory of relations was displayed. Bradley's significance to Russell, it appears to be thought, was limited solely to giving Russell an exercise for his genius.

It is no surprise that contemporary philosophers should have this impression: Russell is known to be very free in acknowledging intellectual debts when they occur to him, and yet he almost never publicly acknowledged any debts to Bradley.¹ He also gives the impression that he thought very little of Bradley's system since his general histories of philosophy mention it very little. Though Wisdom of the West and An Outline of Philosophy make a few (highly critical) references to Bradley, the better known, and supposedly more comprehensive History of Western Philosophy does not expound his system at all, but only refers to it a few times in passing.

That Russell should not have thought it worth while acknowledging any significant intellectual debt to Bradley may come as a surprise to readers of their extensive correspondence, found in the Russell Archives.² Throughout their correspondence we find many cases of mutual praise; Mr. J. Pitt in Russell 2, p. 4, gives one example of Russell's praise for Bradley, quoting from a passage in which Russell claims to have learnt more from Bradley than from anybody else. We may try to argue that Russell was only being polite, and simply returning the compliments which Bradley had showered on him; the following, however, should show that Russell ought to have been entirely serious.

A. Positive influences. Before Bradley's time, empiricists did not carefully distinguish philosophy and psychology, as modern students of philosophy are urged to do. The basic tenet of empiricism was that, as a matter of contingent fact, all the ideas which a man can have are derived, ultimately, from his experience. Now this led them to consider the core of philosophy to be a descriptive science: the study of the contents of the mind. Bradley did not like this at all; he produced a bitter renunciation of "psychologism", a rejection which has had a profound and lasting effect on philosophy in general. It is Russell, moreover, perhaps more than any other philosopher, who has reaped the benefits of the attack on traditional empiricism.

Bradley argues, extremely successfully, that philosophy is not concerned with ideas qua psychological entities, but only with ideas inasmuch as they have "signification", or meaning. But meaning, he argues, is not to be equated with the actual contents of the mind. This, it may be noticed, has led to the fixation of contemporary philosophers with meanings; it was Bradley who first drew the attention of contemporary philosophers to the importance of meaning,³ and he deserves much credit for the fact. But the influence of this upon Russell was profound. His work centred around meanings; logical atomism was the working-out of a particular theory of meaning, and the theory of des -

criptions was concerned with meanings. And Russell also benefited from Bradley's teachings on this point by using the positive aspects of his work concerning meanings to rebuild the tarnished empiricism. D.F. Pears, in his Bertrand Russell and the British Tradition in Philosophy, has argued that Russell's greatest achievement was the reconstruction of empiricism within a logical, not a psychological, framework. In so doing, he was heavily dependent upon Bradley. First, he had to absorb Bradley's complaints concerning the psychological approach, these complaints being founded on its lack of interest in meanings, and then he made use of this new involvement with meaning to reconstruct empiricism. This was achieved simply by arguing that, regardless of what the contents of the mind as a matter of fact may be, meaning can only be attached to them by reference to that with which we can be acquainted. Meaning is only attached by reference to the world; a person can only understand the meaning of a word via this reference. This produced an empiricism which has been highly fecund, and is also more defensible than its psychological predecessor. Whereas the latter was based merely on an alleged contingent fact, which though probably true, is not at all easy to substantiate, the former was based solely on meanings of terms, and thus on a logical basis.

Bradley was also influential in the field of logic. He showed himself, in his Principles of Logic, to be a great opponent of traditional logic. He was certainly not prepared to admit that the logic of his day was a finished science, and he expressed his views on the subject very strongly indeed. His consideration of the view that all deductive inference is of the syllogistic form is full of the bitterest scorn, and we find him arguing successfully that it could cover only a few types of inference, and certainly does not cover relational inferences. This is certainly of historical interest in the development of Russell's views. We know that Russell did read the Logic with great care, since extensive notes on it are to be found in the Archives. The coruscating attack on traditional logic could not have failed to have had an effect on him. But we know also that Russell played a vital part in the reconstruction of logic. Bradley does not deserve to be overlooked in this.

One aspect of the invective against traditional logic was Bradley's rejection of the assumption that all propositions are of the subject-predicate form. What, he asks us, can this analysis make of such propositions as "A and B are equal" or "there is a sea-serpent"? Now Russell made a great deal of this point. He not only based a very fruitful logic of relations on it, but also grounded a rejection of the bulk of preceding metaphysical systems on it, including, ironically, Bradley's own system. It may well be that Bradley reintroduced the assumption that all propositions are of the subject-predicate form into his system in a new form, but the significant reasons for the rejection of it in its standard form, the form which really concerned Russell, can virtually all be found in Bradley's work.

Another important doctrine of the Principles of Logic was that the best way of analysing universal statements, i. e. statements such as "all men are mortal", is in terms of a hypothetical. Now Russell tells us in My Philosophical Development (M. P. D.) that he only made progress in logic when he realized that statements such as "Socrates is mortal" are very different from statements such as "all men are mortal", and that the latter is really a disguised hypothetical: this becomes fundamental in Russell's new logic. In M. P. D., however, he claims that his source of this was the Italian school of mathematics, in spite of the fact that it had been clearly stated in Bradley's Logic. Notes on it had been made by Russell in 1893 or so, long before he had come across the Italian school.

Allied to this is the point that Russell made a great deal of the fact that the logical form of a statement may be very different from its grammatical form, and may be disguised by it. It is this realization which is essential to the theory of descriptions, and which set the tone of analysis for Russell and his successors. But this very important point can be found clearly in Bradley's Logic. In the first chapter, he clearly differentiates the two, saying:

By the subject I mean here not the ultimate subject, to which the whole ideal content is referred, but the subject which lies within that content, in other words, the grammatical subject.

(2nd ed., p. 22)

The above-mentioned point, that all statements are "really" disguised hypotheticals, is a demonstration of the fact that Bradley differentiated between the logical and grammatical form of propositions, and so is the point that all propositions are elliptical, that "grass is green" is really a proposition of the form "the world is such that grass is green". It is finally emphasized, most clearly, in his discussion of the negative judgement. Having argued that all judgements are of the world as a whole, that all attribute something to the world as a whole, Bradley had some problems concerning negative judgements, because they do not seem to fit his analysis at all. Now in dealing with this, Bradley simply states that we are misled by the grammatical form of the proposition. The logical form, he tells us, is: "the world is such that it excludes the possibility of roundness and squareness being conjoined".

Now again, we may say that Russell derived this point from his reading of Frege, but it can once more be pointed out that Russell read, and seems to have understood, Bradley's point on it long before he read Frege. The fact that he absorbed the point is shown luminously by his notes on the Logic.

B. The negative influence. Not only is Bradley of importance to Russell in providing him with philosophical tools, and in positively influencing his philosophy, but he is also of importance inasmuch as it was the rebellion against Bradley which gave direction to Russell's work. Professor Passmore has argued in a recent paper⁴ that Logical Atomism is almost a direct product of Russell's reactions to Bradley. Now we know, from Russell's autobiographical works, that he detested monism; that he felt it to be intellectually suffocating. His early work has been presented, by Russell himself, as set up in conscious opposition to monism. Passmore explores the relations between the two philosophers briefly, and comes to the conclusion that "Logical Atomism ends up by being a kind of diffracted image of Bradley". He tells us that though Russell may have adopted a view which is prima facie at the opposite extreme to Bradley's monism, he nevertheless remained, in some respects, very close to Bradley. Passmore supports the view that Russell and Bradley are really closely allied, partly by mentioning a few of the shared logical insights discussed in the previous section. But his point is made more strongly when, in showing that Russell's viewpoint was ostensibly the polar opposite to that of Bradley, he shows that they have similar problems. That the positions were polar opposites is well supported in Passmore's paper. For instance, in Bradley's system, we find that the most general of judgements are the most satisfactory, since they are more comprehensive, are less of "abstractions" than more particular judgements. Russell provides the complete antithesis of this view. For him, an atomic judgement, such as "this is red" is the most satisfactory; the more general the judgement, the less satisfactory it is considered. An allied contrast between their views is that for Bradley, a judgement is most true when it points towards the whole cohering system into which it enters, when it is presented as closely knit with the whole. For Russell, on the other hand, the more

atomic the judgement, the more isolated the state of affairs to which it points, the better.

Now Bradley soon reached the conclusion that no judgements are ever quite general enough to adequately represent the Absolute. All judgements, he believed, must be guilty of abstraction, since even the most general of judgements must attribute a predicate to the Absolute, and yet in so doing, they cannot fail to mutilate the unity of the whole, since they differentiate the predicate from the subject. On the other hand, Russell had the problem that no judgements ever seemed to be quite atomic enough, since they always seemed to imply other propositions. For example, rejection of an apparently entirely atomic proposition, such as "this is red", will involve the rejection of other propositions, such as "this is the same colour as that object", which shows that it is really not so independent as was thought. Their views being extremes on this question, both met with the problems of extremity.

Passmore includes in his paper an attempt to understand why Russell should have required such a strange position as that of Logical Atomism. His conclusion is that Russell was so much in fear of monism that he only felt safe from it when he could point to absolutely independent particulars. If he could do this, then the world cannot be the type of unity which monism demands. Now if Passmore is right, then Bradley's system must have had a very strong influence on Russell indeed, inspiring as it did such a decisive reaction. Passmore's thesis would have been made a good deal stronger, also, had he provided Russell's motive for this reaction. The motive is not hard to find. Russell spent his life in the search for certainty; he seemed to want certainty above all else. His love of mathematics was one product of this desire. But monism denies this quest. To completely understand any element of the world, we must completely understand the whole world, and our failure to achieve this means that we fail to achieve any complete truths. Again, it has already been shown that for Bradley, even the most true of judgements is still not finally true, since it involves the abstraction of the predicate from the subject. It is no wonder that monism was poison to Russell!

Now Bradley and Russell were usually on very amiable terms. When Russell first met Bradley, in December 1902, he noted in his diary: "I loved the man warmly". Their correspondence is full of mutual esteem. But the relationship seemed to become somewhat strained in later years, and it seems that Russell's failure to make public any debts to Bradley may have been part of the cause. Bradley's last letter to Russell, written at a time when his reputation had been tarnished by Russell and Moore, is a very sad one for modern readers. Their long correspondence ends on a note of considerable pathos, with Bradley saying:

...I always have believed that in 1883 in the Logic I pointed out a number of inferences which fell outside the category of subject and attribute and pointed out again that there was nevertheless a form in every possible inference. I don't claim originality ever for anything because I have read various writers of various schools and my memory is so bad that I may recall something without remembering its source or that it had a source. Still I believe that these points are unquestionably in my book of 1883. You on the other hand appear to state that they came into the world through Peano and Frege - of course with very much more. Now even if this had happened in 1883 - I can't conceive how I could have been aware of it directly or indirectly - and surely no one could be more non-mathematical than myself. So why should I have no credit at all even if Peano and Frege were before me? However I probably have misunderstood you and in

any case it is only a small matter of history which is of no consequence.
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¹A very rare exception is to be found in "Logical Atomism" (Logic and Knowledge, p. 324): "At Cambridge I read...Mr. Bradley's Logic, which influenced me profoundly."

²The correspondence consists of 23 letters from Bradley, during 1901-1914, and 11 from Russell, during 1900-1922. We can also learn from the Archives when Russell first read Bradley's works. In Sept. 1893 he read the Logic; in May 1894, Ethical Studies; and in August 1894, Appearance and Reality.

³Note that Frege shared Bradley's honour of originally emphasizing meaning; but Frege was not read until the direction of philosophy had already been changed, whereas Bradley was read widely.

⁴"Russell and Bradley" in Robert Brown and C.D. Rollins, eds., Contemporary Philosophy in Australia (London: Allen & Unwin, 1969).
