

THE EARLY MOORE AND RUSSELL

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G. E. Moore. *Early Philosophical Writings*. Edited and with an Introduction by Thomas Baldwin and Consuelo Preti. Cambridge and New York: Cambridge U. P., 2011. Pp. lxxxv, 251. ISBN: 978-0521190145. £68.00; US\$114.00.

Baldwin and Preti have put together a very nice book which gives us G. E. Moore's 1897 and 1898 Trinity College dissertations and an informative look at the historical context in which they were written. This story—including information about Moore's early life, the philosophical influences at Cambridge and a critical commentary on his dissertations and readers' reports—is clearly and carefully presented in their 78-page introduction.¹ The book is a valuable addition to the history of analytic philosophy and will be of special interest to Moore (and Russell) scholars and to historians generally who wish to know more about the genesis of the ideas shaping the new analytic philosophy at the end of the century.

Moore entered Trinity in 1892 to study classics. There he met Russell (who was in his third year) and took his advice to study philosophy in his last two years and take his final exams (Tripos, Part II) in both disciplines, which he did successfully in 1896. And like Russell—who had won a Trinity prize fellowship in 1895 (with a dissertation on the foundations of geometry²) only one year after his graduation—he submitted a dissertation (1897) in hopes of winning a prize fellowship. Moore's first attempt failed, but his 1898 version was successful. And not only did the success of the 1898 dissertation launch Moore's career as a professional philosopher, it also paved the way for the new analytic philosophy of the next century.

Moore's dissertations and his Trinity examiners' reports (by Caird, Sidgwick, Ward and Bosanquet³) are fascinating reading, and it's a great convenience to have them handy in a single volume. But the editors deserve special

¹ Hereafter I shall use the editors' convention of referring to the pagination of their introduction with roman numerals and to Moore's dissertations (plus examiners' reports) with arabic numerals.

² RUSSELL's dissertation was published in 1897 as *An Essay on the Foundations of Geometry*.

³ Edward Caird was an idealist and highly respected Kant scholar at Oxford. HENRY SIDGWICK was one of Moore's teachers at Cambridge and author of the influential

praise for not only giving the reader an astute critical summary of the dissertations, but also for their skillful reconstruction of Moore's surviving, but incomplete, 1898 manuscript from which parts of the early chapters had been removed. The editors make a good case (pp. lxxv–lxxix) that those pages became the basis of Moore's 1899 *Mind* article, "The Nature of Judgment". (Those familiar with Russell's early work may recall it as an article that Russell claimed as of paramount importance for his own early work.⁴ I'll return to the question of Russell and Moore and this article's significance.)

THE DISSERTATIONS, 1897 AND 1898

Moore's dissertations reveal a young Moore with remarkable powers of analysis and more than a hint of the careful, courageous scepticism and intellectual honesty for which he later became known. But as the editors make clear, their main importance is the record they reveal of the transition away from Kant and Hegel to the new philosophy, which put a premium on conceptual analysis and metaphysics without Kantian or neo-Hegelian idealism.

The 1897 dissertation ("The Metaphysical Basis of Ethics") is an analysis of the basic concepts of ethics with considerable critical discussion of Kant, especially concerning freedom and reason, and Moore's attempt to fashion his own good-based ethics utilizing a little from Kant and much from Bradley (p. 1). At this time both Moore and Russell were still under the influence of Kant and Hegel which they had acquired from the Cambridge (and Oxford) philosophical setting, especially from neo-Hegelians such as McTaggart, Caird, Bosanquet and Bradley (at Oxford). But although Moore had considerable respect for Kant and credits him with several original insights—including the "fallacy" of defining good empirically (p. 10)⁵ and for seeing that good is a "transcendental notion" (p. 12)—he does criticize Kant throughout for undue psychologism and for the dubious doctrine of the *Ding-an-Sich* and the related "metaphysical monstrosity" of contra-causal freedom (p. 39). In fact,

Methods of Ethics (1874), which integrated a utilitarian hedonist ethics with intuitionism. James Ward was also one of Moore's teachers at Cambridge who, along with Stout, was influenced by Brentano and interested in the "mental science" of psychology. Ward encouraged Moore to do his dissertation on Kant's ethics. Bernard Bosanquet was part of the British neo-Hegelian movement. He briefly held a post at Oxford but left to do public service work. He and Sidgwick founded the London School of Ethics and Social Philosophy where Moore lectured on ethics in 1898 and 1899.

⁴ See RUSSELL's *Principles of Mathematics*, p. xviii.

⁵ The term "naturalistic fallacy" does not occur in either of Moore's dissertations. But it does occur, apparently for the first time, in his 1898 autumn lectures ("The Elements of Ethics") at the London School of Ethics and Social Philosophy. See his *Elements of Ethics*, Lecture I.

in his own Platonic good-based ethics, Moore reinterprets Kant's noumenal grounding of appearance in terms of what is essentially Bradley's neo-Hegelian Absolute (pp. xxvi, 35).

Moore's 1897 dissertation failed to win a fellowship no doubt in part because it was incomplete. Besides a preface and introduction (thirteen pages), it consists here of merely one long chapter on freedom (70 pages) and an appendix on Sidgwick's hedonism (eight pages). In his preface Moore says he had intended to add a chapter on Kant's practical ethics and appendices on T. H. Green and F. H. Bradley, but was prevented by "lack of time" (p. 4).⁶

The dissertation was received with some misgivings by his readers (Sidgwick and Caird), although both gave high praise for his originality and philosophical acumen. Edward Caird, a highly respected Kant scholar, did find Moore sometimes "very difficult to understand" and with a tendency to conflate Kant's ideas with his own. And he faulted Moore for failing to take proper account of Kant's central insight, viz. the unifying power of self-consciousness in terms of which all experience, including moral experience, must be understood (p. 105).

Henry Sidgwick, in the interests of objectivity, chose to say little about Moore's appendix (on Sidgwick's hedonism). Moore's critique of Sidgwick's hedonism is powerful and original and reappears in his 1898 dissertation⁷ with additional arguments later propounded in *Principia Ethica*, e.g. his famous "two worlds argument" for the intrinsic value of unperceived beauty (pp. 88–9) and his principle of organic unities (pp. 54, 226). Sidgwick focused on Moore's critique of Kant and criticized him for failure to take account of Kant's modifications of position in the several works chosen, and also for "obscurity from brevity" in his final arguments ("owing, I gather, from pressure of time"). Overall Sidgwick judged the dissertation "very promising," but its chief merit "seems to ... lie in promise rather than performance" (p. 98). Nonetheless, sections of Moore's long chapter on freedom were published the next year in *Mind* as his article by the same name (p. xii).

The 1898 dissertation (also titled "The Metaphysical Basis of Ethics") was an expanded and restructured version of the 1897 dissertation, but more carefully written, and with five chapters, several with radically new material. It is 125 pages in length with preface and introduction, plus appendices on the

⁶ This complaint is not intended as a pun, I'm sure, even though Moore seems committed (in both dissertations) to the unreality of time (pp. 13, 127). He tells an amusing story in his "Autobiography" (pp. 13–14) about his first meeting with McTaggart (1893) at Trinity (in Russell's rooms) and encountering his well-known view that time is unreal: "This must have seemed to me then (as it still does) a perfectly monstrous proposition...." But apparently not during his neo-Hegelian years (1894–98).

⁷ The 1898 dissertation also included an appendix on Sidgwick's hedonism, which the editors omitted since the only copy they could find was that of 1897.

chronology of Kant's ethical writings and on Sidgwick's hedonism.

But most significantly, it reflects important changes in Moore's philosophical outlook—changes that both he and Russell were undergoing throughout 1898—and which accelerated their break from neo-Hegelianism. These changes are largely reflected in Chapters 1 and 2 in a radically new theory of judgment—really a new metaphysical system—which allowed Moore to develop his Platonic moral objectivism and ideal utilitarianism without a Kantian subjective theory of the *a priori* and without appeal to Bradley's Absolute as a grounding for appearances (pp. 162–5). According to Moore, truth is an inherent property of propositions⁸—not a relation to a timeless Reality—and like good, is independent of knowledge and consciousness. Propositions, like all entities (including existents), are complexes of concepts standing in certain relations (pp. 165–9).

The dissertation was read by Bosanquet and Ward. Ward's report seems to have been lost, but we do know that he didn't like it.⁹ Bosanquet's report was negative largely owing to Moore's new theory of judgment and its anti-idealist implications. It was, he said, “beyond the limits of paradox which is permissible in philosophy” (p. 246), and “... I feel a difficulty in regarding it as serious” (p. 247). Despite Bosanquet's negative report, Moore did get his prize fellowship. (And, as noted above, the first two chapters became the basis of an important article, “The Nature of Judgment”, published the next year in *Mind*.)

The editors sum up the value of the dissertations for Moore scholars and historians of philosophy, I think quite nicely, by pointing out (p. xxii) that it's not so much in its foreshadowing of Moore's later common-sense philosophy,

Instead, the value ... lies in the ways in which, starting from the idealist standpoint of the 1897 dissertation, he thinks his way, via the 1898 dissertation, to the analytical realism of *Principia Ethica* and “The Refutation of Idealism”. Moore himself, once immersed in his distinctive analysis of common sense, did not recognize his own achievement; but in the context of contemporary inquiries into the origins of analytic philosophy, the contribution made by Moore's early work is obvious.¹⁰

⁸ See note 16 below.

⁹ See MOORE, “Autobiography”, p. 22. But we also know that Ward's influence (and Sidgwick's) was crucial in getting Moore his prize fellowship (*ibid.*, p. 21).

¹⁰ By “did not recognize” the editors no doubt mean that Moore was a very humble fellow who was reluctant to take credit for any special accomplishments. An illustrative example is their reference to Moore's first contribution at an Apostles' meeting (Feb. 1894) posing the question for discussion: “What ought Cambridge to give?” Russell had argued that Cambridge made graduates unfit for practical life by infusing them with scepticism. Moore disagreed, insisting that “we should ... spread scepticism until at last everybody knows that we can know absolutely nothing.” Russell wrote to his wife Alys saying that Moore had “electrified” the group who

THE 1898 DISSERTATION, THE “NEW PHILOSOPHY” AND RUSSELL

Apparently, British higher education didn't award a PHD degree until 1917; the Prize Fellowship (with dissertation) was the route to an academic career. But oddly, it was not the practice of Trinity's Wren Library at this time to save dissertation copies (p. lxxii). Fortunately, Moore did keep his draft manuscripts although, as noted above, that of the 1898 dissertation was missing sizable sections from Chapters 1 and 2. By the editors' account, shortly after Moore had submitted a typed version to his readers, he removed these pages from the manuscript in order to prepare a paper to read to the Aristotelian Society on 9 December, as he had informed Russell in a letter of September 11 (p. xxxv).¹¹ That paper would be published in *Mind* (1899) as “The Nature of Judgment”.¹²

The *Mind* paper is, or ought to be, of special interest to Russell scholars because of its acknowledged influence on Russell at the end of the century and for the new analytic directions that British philosophy would take. Here is Russell's acknowledgement from the Preface of his 1903 *Principles of Mathematics*:

On fundamental questions of philosophy, my position ... is derived from Mr. G. E. Moore. I have accepted from him the non-existential nature of propositions ... and their independence of any knowing mind; also the pluralism which regards the world, both that of existents and that of entities, as composed of an infinite number of mutually independent entities, with relations which are ultimate, and not reducible to adjectives of their terms or of the whole which these compose. Before learning these views from him, I found myself completely unable to construct any philosophy of arithmetic....¹³

had “never realized what fearless intellect pure and unadulterated really means.” But Moore, at least as he recalled many years later, had a quite different perception: “I felt (and was) extremely crude compared to them; and did not feel able to make any contributions ... which would bear comparison with those which they were making. I felt ... rather surprised that they seemed think me worthy of associating with them” (p. xvi).

¹¹ The editors do not mention that Moore gave an earlier reading of the paper (21 Oct. 1898) to the Cambridge Moral Sciences Club. Russell was away in Italy at the time. See GRIFFIN, *Russell's Idealist Apprenticeship*, p. 301.

¹² The editors believe the missing pages to be very close verbally to the 1899 *Mind* article, based on several matching fragments and Moore's construction of his 1898 *Mind* article (“Freedom”) from the 1897 dissertation (p. lxxv). Its manuscript has survived intact. Nick GRIFFIN in his important work on Russell's idealist phase speculates that Moore “probably did a fair amount of detailed rewriting of ch. 2”, although without having “radically to alter its contents” (p. 301 n.39). But this may not be a significant difference with Baldwin and Preti.

¹³ *Principles*, p. xviii (also cited by Baldwin and Preti, p. xxiii). Russell wrote his Preface

It's true that Russell doesn't explicitly mention Moore's "The Nature of Judgment" in his Preface, but he does repeatedly cite it (and Moore's paper on "Identity" in the *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*, 1900–01) throughout the text.¹⁴ It's clear from Russell's description that he's referring to specific elements in Moore's earlier work which allowed him to drop the Hegelian and Kantian perspective, which he (and Moore) had embraced from roughly 1894 to mid-1898, and to be able to move ahead with a new philosophy of logic grounded in a new metaphysical theory of judgment.

Russell's acknowledgement of such substantial help from Moore is quite surprising and, I think, not widely recognized. It's confirmed in his philosophical autobiography (*MPD*). There he says the "revolt into pluralism" and away from Kant and Hegel was led by Moore but with Russell "following closely in his footsteps". This rebellion, he says, took place "towards the end of 1898", and he specifically mentions Moore's 1899 *Mind* article as the "first published account of the new philosophy".¹⁵

Moore's letter to Russell of 11 September 1898 also confirms his account. After telling him that his recently submitted dissertation is philosophically "more correct" than his last year's work—although he fears it's "much more paradoxical" and "will deprive me completely of Caird's sympathy"—he goes on to describe his "chief discovery", neatly summarizing the new metaphysical ideas that so attracted Russell:

in December 1902.

¹⁴ See e.g. p. 24 (Moore's influence re a "different formal treatment of relations" not tied to class or subject-predicate analysis; p. 44 (re the notion of "term" as similar to Moore's "concept"); p. 448 (re the "eternal self-identity of all terms" and the externality of relations).

See also RUSSELL's 1901 *Mind* article "On the Notion of Order" where he credits Moore's 1899 paper with leading him to abandon his earlier (1897) view on relations (*Papers* 3: 299 n.12). And in this connection there is an interesting report that Russell gave to Alys regarding a long meeting with Moore on 6 April 1897, the night Russell had read a paper ("On the Relations of Number and Quantity") to the Aristotelian Society. He laments that "Moore despised it ... saying I was so muddled it was impossible to show I was wrong, because no one could discover what I meant. We had a long argument ... in which he completely vanquished me as usual." He adds: "I couldn't find out how he proved his own view, so I don't see how to amend my paper" (*Papers* 2: 68).

Regarding MOORE's 1900–01 paper on identity, HERBERT HOCHBERG points out that Russell's arguments for particulars in "On the Relations of Universals and Particulars" (1912), "essentially reproduce Moore's" in the identity paper. See KLEMKE, p. 188.

¹⁵ *MPD*, p. 54. Baldwin and Preti (p. xxxiv) quote these same words from Russell's obituary notice for Moore (*Papers* 11: 209), which includes verbatim the first three sentences of *MPD*, p. 54. In the obituary notice (but not in *MPD*), RUSSELL also says: "I still think this article gave conclusive proof of philosophical genius."

My chief discovery ... is expressed in the form that an existent is a proposition.... Of course by an existent must be understood an existent-existent—not what exists but that + its existence. I carefully state that a proposition is not to be understood as any thought or words, but the concepts + their relation *of* which we think. It is only propositions in this sense, which can be true, and from which inference can be made. Truth therefore does not depend on any relation between ideas and reality, but is an inherent property of the whole formed by certain concepts and their relations; falsehood similarly.¹⁶ True existential propositions are those in which certain concepts stand in a specific relation to the concept existence; and I see no way of distinguishing such from what are commonly called “existents,” i.e. what exists + its existence.¹⁷ ... Existents are in reality only one kind of proposition. The ultimate elements of everything that is are concepts, and a part of these, when compounded in a special way, form the existent world. With regard to the special method of composition I said nothing.... (I shall read on this to the Aristotelian [Society] on Dec 9th.) (P. xxxiv¹⁸)

The editors do bring Moore's influence on Russell to light in their excellent introduction, although their discussion is understandably brief (pp. xxiii–iv, xxxiv–v).¹⁹ But they do fail to mention Russell's letter in response two days later essentially agreeing with Moore's paradoxical “discovery” and with what he says about relations among concepts.²⁰ No reference is made to Volume 2 of Russell's *Collected Papers (Philosophical Papers, 1896–99)* which has important material bearing on the issue of Moore's influence. Nor is there a reference to Klemke's excellent collection, which contains some valuable essays on Moore's early writings, including his 1899 *Mind* article.²¹ They do reference (and often cite) Griffin's book which carefully examines Russell's claims about Moore's influence and concludes that Russell was, in some respects, excessive and, perhaps on one or two points, misleading.²² Baldwin and Preti seem to agree “there may have been an element of exaggeration in Russell's account” (p. xxxiv).

¹⁶ This “inherent property” account of truth seems to have been adopted by Russell for several years until 1906 or so. See *PoM*, p. 48; “Meinong's Theory of Complexes and Assumptions” (1904) in *Papers* 4: 472–4; and his unpublished 1905 paper on truth in *ibid.*, pp. 492–4.

¹⁷ John Maynard Keynes tells of a nightmare that Moore once had in which he couldn't tell the difference between tables and propositions. Little wonder. See KEYNES, p. 444.

¹⁸ The letter is in the Russell Archives at McMaster.

¹⁹ The editors might profitably have included reference to Preti's well researched article on Moore's waning friendship with Russell from 1897 to 1901. Preti cites some little-known correspondence further confirming the significance of Moore's influence. See Preti, “‘He Was in Those Days Beautiful and Slim’”, especially pp. 105–15.

²⁰ See GRIFFIN, pp. 300–1.

But if Russell was excessive in his statements of Moore's influence, perhaps Moore was a bit excessive in his dismissal of Russell's statements. As he remarked in his autobiography (pp. 15–16), "I do not know that Russell has ever owed to me anything except mistakes; whereas I have owed to his published works ideas which were certainly not mistakes and which I think very important.... I should say that I have been more influenced by him than by any other single philosopher."

Perhaps there's some exaggeration on both sides. But there can be no doubt that there was considerable *mutual* influence, as Moore has said (see n. 22); nor that the seeds of some of the early ideas of the "new philosophy" that took shape in the first decade of the twentieth century can be found in Moore's dissertations. And there should be no doubt that Baldwin and Preti have made a solid contribution to our understanding of the early Moore and to the origins of analytic philosophy.

²¹ Two very important pieces, in the opinion of this reviewer, are HOCHBERG's "Ontology and Moore's Nonnatural Properties" and his "Moore and Russell on Particulars, Relations and Identity" (KLEMKE, essays 6 and 9). In both essays an elucidation of MOORE's 1899 *Mind* article figures as key, especially in the first, where Hochberg convincingly argues that Moore's perplexing account of good as a "non-natural property" in *Principia Ethica* is intimately tied to the new metaphysics set forth in "The Nature of Judgment".

²² See GRIFFIN, pp. 296–309. These pages contain a very informative look at the extent and nature of Moore's contribution to Russell's ideas, especially those of his *Principles*. A point of special interest here is that by mid-summer of 1898—well before he had seen Moore's dissertation and probably before Moore had finished it—Russell had completed his "Analysis of Mathematical Reasoning" which included ideas on propositions as composed of various relations among terms much like that of Moore's relational propositions "discovery" and in some ways more developed (p. 301; also *Papers* 2: 159). But it's also known that they had several long philosophical discussions that summer while Russell was working on his paper on mathematical reasoning. Although we don't know many details of the discussions, we do have Moore's general recollection ("Autobiography", p. 15) that he and Russell had many regular discussions during the years from 1894 to 1900, and "In these discussions there was ... mutual influence. It is to ideas which he thought he owed me as a result of them that Russell was referring in the Preface to his *Principles*."

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