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Russell and Bradley: Revisiting the Creation Narrative of Analytic Philosophy

Samuel Lebens

According to Stewart Candlish, Russell and Moore had misunderstood F. H. Bradley's monism. According to Jonathan Schaffer, they had misunderstood monism more generally. A key thread of the creation narrative of analytic philosophy, according to which Russell and Moore successfully undermined monism to give rise to a new movement is, therefore, in doubt. In this paper, I defend the standard narrative against those who seek to revise it.

Russell and Bradley: Revisiting the Creation Narrative of Analytic Philosophy

Samuel Lebens

1. Introduction

The birthdate of analytical philosophy isn't all that easy to pinpoint. Was Bernard Bolzano the first analytical philosopher (see [Künne, Siebel and Textor 1997](#))? Was Hermann Lotze?¹ These questions depend, in large part, upon how we might think to define 'analytic philosophy'. One thing, however, is clear. When G. E. Moore and Bertrand Russell rebelled against the dominant idealistic philosophy that they had been taught at Cambridge—their rebellion gave rise to the first flush of English-speaking analytic philosophy. Moreover, their enthusiasm, vigour, and ingenuity, coupled with Russell's sometimes dazzling rhetoric and polemical verve, gave the movement the momentum that would one day make it the dominant form of philosophy in the English-speaking world.

Russell and Moore subjected the tradition of British Idealism to a barrage of probing criticisms. Some of their criticisms focussed upon the *idealism* of the British idealists, and their related theories of meaning and content. Some of those criticisms focussed more squarely upon the *monism* of (some of) the British Idealists. Their attack, and its success, has become a central part of the story that analytic philosophers tell themselves about the rise to dominance of their intellectual tradition.

In recent years, questions have arisen as to how successful their critique of monism really was. Consequently, a central

¹It is sometimes argued that Lotze was of seminal importance in the birth of analytical philosophy, even if this influence was somewhat subconscious ([Sluga 1980](#); [Gabriel 2002](#); [Milkov 2000](#)).

strand of the creation narrative of analytic philosophy has come under threat. In this paper, I seek to respond to those questions and to defuse that threat.²

Russell and Moore's attack on monism focussed, in large part, upon the doctrine of internal relations. In §2, I will explain, in broad outline, how that doctrine has been understood. In §3, I will lay out Jonathan Schaffer's reasons for thinking that a *different* interpretation of the doctrine could give rise to a much more plausible form of monism.

Russell and Moore were fixated with what Schaffer calls 'existence monism', when they should have taken care to respond to the more *plausible* doctrine that Schaffer calls 'priority monism'. In §4, I lay out Schaffer's historical case for thinking that Russell and Moore had uncharitably misinterpreted the entire monistic school, which was—according to Schaffer—overwhelmingly dominated by priority monism over existence monism.

In §5, I leave Schaffer behind in order to focus on a more accurate picture of F. H. Bradley's monism. Bradley was the most

²No complete study of revisions to the standard account can omit Peter Hylton's majestic *Russell, Idealism and the Emergence of Analytic Philosophy* (1990). This paper doesn't claim to be a complete study. First of all, I'm interested here, specifically, in the detailed arguments that Moore and Russell levelled against Bradley. Hylton doesn't actually give these arguments much of a detailed treatment. Indeed, he excuses himself for this omission, writing that 'the reaction against [Bradley's] views by Moore and Russell does not at all depend on detailed difficulties of [Bradley's] view, but is rather a wholesale rejection of its most general outline' (1990, 7–8). This, I think, is a fair assessment, but Moore and Russell still went to the trouble of *formulating* detailed arguments (alongside their more wholesale rejection). This paper is *about* those arguments. Secondly, when Hylton is most critical of Moore and Russell's attack on Bradley, it has little to do with their attack on *monism*, but with Moore's rejection of Bradley's related theory of content and meaning (although see note 16, below). To Hylton's mind, Moore's rejection of Bradley's theory of meaning presupposes 'the essential point at stake between [Moore] and the Idealists' (1990, 133). I defend Moore against this accusation *elsewhere* ([Lebens 2017](#), chap. 2), but in *this* paper, I focus only on Russell and Moore's attack on Bradley's *monism*, and the way that that attack has been received. For these reasons, this paper doesn't involve very much critical engagement with Hylton's important book.

prominent British Idealist at the time of Russell and Moore's revolt. I present Stewart Candlish's reading of Bradley, according to which he never really asserted the doctrine of internal relations as true, but presented it as something of a pedagogic tool. Consequently, Candlish accuses Russell and Moore of attacking Bradley for commitment to a position he never really held.

By the time we reach §6, the traditional picture should be in tatters. Schaffer will have helped us to see that, fairly interpreted, the doctrine of internal relations *doesn't* lead to unsightly existence monism, but to a plausible priority monism. We will have seen that Russell and Moore failed even to *engage* with the dominant monistic tradition that they are standardly said to have vanquished. Furthermore, Candlish will have helped us to see that F. H. Bradley, their principal opponent, didn't even endorse a principle of internal relations to begin with.

In §§6, 7 and 8, we will begin to put the pieces back together. I first turn our attention to a closer reading of Russell's and Moore's *actual* criticisms of Bradley. We shall find that, in truth, if Candlish has got his Bradley right, then Moore and Russell didn't misunderstand him at all. Readers may notice that in §5, I present Bradley predominantly through the eyes of Candlish, with only a cursory effort to substantiate his reading. This is intentional. My argument could be phrased as follows: *if* Candlish got his Bradley right, then he is wrong to think that Moore and Russell had got him wrong! In order to bolster Russell's attack on Bradley's monism, I also spend some time responding to Bradley's own detailed defence.

In §9, we shall find that Candlish's understanding of Bradley undermines Schaffer's reading of historical monists. It raises the strong possibility that most of them, if not all of them were, as Russell and Moore took them to be, existence monists all along.

In short, this paper seeks to restore to health a key and standard thread within analytic philosophy's own understanding of its birth—a narrative that Schaffer calls a 'creation myth' (Schaf-

fer 2010b, 341). I defend that narrative with the claims that (a) Russell and Moore had understood Bradley's philosophy at least as well as their critics, (b) that they had correctly charted how, so understood, it gives rise to existence monism, (c) that they had diagnosed devastating weaknesses with the view, and that (d) they were probably right to think that existence monism (rather than priority monism) was the regnant school to be deposed.

2. The Doctrine of Internal Relations

According to the standard narrative, Bradley's monism, and the monism of the British Idealists in general, amounts to the claim that there exists only one thing. Following Jonathan Schaffer, I'll call this view 'existence monism'. Schaffer summarises the view as follows (Schaffer 2010b, 341): 'On such a view there are no particles, pebbles, planets, or any other proper parts to the world. There is only a seamless Parmenidean whole.'

This form of monism is said to have followed from the doctrine of internal relations. Schaffer criticises Russell and Moore for seizing upon the least charitable possible reading of what the idealists could have meant by 'internal relation.' This least charitable reading is what Schaffer calls the *internal_{essential}* conception of internal relations, according to which, 'an internal relation is essential to its relata' (2010b, 349). More formally, Schaffer defines an *internal_{essential}* relation as follows:

(*Internal_{essential}*)

$$R \text{ is internal} =_{\text{df}} (\forall x_1) \dots (\forall x_n) (\text{if } Rx_1 \dots x_n \text{ then necessarily } ((x_1 \text{ exists} \leftrightarrow Rx_1 \dots x_n) \& \dots \& (x_n \text{ exists} \leftrightarrow Rx_1 \dots x_n)))$$

In other words, a relation is an *internal_{essential}* relation if the relata it relates can't exist when not so related. This understanding of an 'internal relation' is the second of *ten* possible senses that A. C. Ewing (1933) uncovers for the term 'internal relation'.

Examine the following argument:

- (i) All things are related.
- (ii) All relations are internal_{essential} relations.
- (iii) Thus all things are internally_{essentially} related.

This argument is valid. Although there are grounds for hesitation, you might think that its conclusion leads us to existence monism. According to (iii), all things would be so heavily interdependent upon each other, that what really exists or fails to exist is the entire cosmos itself, whose existence is a package deal. The essential nature of each atom in this cosmos would be bound up with the essential nature of every other atom. Their natures would, so to speak, bleed into one another. The truth of (iii), on this line of thought, would be a strong reason to adopt existence monism. Of course, you might think that existence monism *can't* follow from (i)–(iii) because they imply that *many* things exist, rather than one thing, in order to be related by internal_{essential} relations. We'll come back to that point later.

The first premise, (i), seems trivially true. Find me any two entities and I'll find you a relation that relates them. (ii) is surely controversial. However, consider Bradley's argument against the existence of external_{essential} relations (1897, 32–34; 1910, 179). An external_{essential} relation would simply be a relation that is *inessential* to its relata. Take the following state of affairs:

Charles loves Camilla.

Let's assume, for the sake of argument, that *love* is an example of an external_{essential} relation. Accordingly, nothing about the essence of Charles or Camilla entails that the relation *should* hold between them. So why does it? We could posit a new relation: *glue 1*. This relation would stick Charles, *love* and Camilla together. But, if *glue 1* is an external_{essential} relation, then what is it about the essences of Charles and *love* and Camilla that makes it stick *them* together, when it could have stuck some

other collection together? We *could* posit another external_{essential} relation—*glue 2*—to stick *glue 1* to all of the other parts, but, because this new relation also has to be external_{essential}, we won't be able to give an account of what it is about the essences of *glue 1*, Charles, *love*, and Camilla that makes *glue 2* stick them together. As Bradley famously put it (1897, 33): '[W]e are hurried off into the eddy of a hopeless process, since we are forced to go on finding new relations without end.' This is Bradley's regress. It attempts to demonstrate that external_{essential} relations are unable to relate.³ All relations must therefore be internal_{essential}—and thus, we already have some reason to think that Bradley really did accept premise (ii).⁴ With the first two premises accepted, (iii) can be shown to follow.

Jonathan Schaffer makes the following four claims:

- (1) To understand internal relations in terms of internal_{essential} seems to lumber the monist with an unduly strong doctrine; a more plausible doctrine of internal relations might emerge from a more sophisticated conception of an internal relation.
- (2) Bradley himself, *didn't* have a doctrine of internal relations, because he was an existence monist.⁵ An existence monist *can't* believe in relations at all. There are not enough things in existence, if you're an existence monist, for one thing to

³You could run a similar argument against relations that are partially internal and partially external, relative to different argument places. Some entity *a* might necessarily be related by relation *R* but not necessarily to any particular *x*. The same regress would emerge when trying to stick any *x* into the externally relating argument position of *R*.

⁴I should note in passing: I'm far from convinced that external_{essential} relations generate this regress. The external relation's ability to relate might just be brute (see Lebens 2008 and van Inwagen 2002, 35). Indeed, Russell realises that Bradley's argument for monism seems to be motivated, at least in part, by the denial that there can be brute facts (Russell 1906, 40).

⁵See Schaffer (2010b, 361, 349 n 7), although he sometimes lumps Bradley together with the priority monists (Schaffer 2010a, 47 n 18, n 20), but that seems to me *completely* unwarranted, as we shall see.

stand related to another.

- (3) Notwithstanding Bradley's attack on external relations, the monist can secure her monism *without* denying the existence of external relations.
- (4) Monism doesn't always have to be existence monism—there is another variety of monism that many of the idealists conceivably held but that Russell and Moore ignore.

For all of these reasons, Schaffer claims that Russell and Moore had been unduly harsh to the monistic tradition. They had failed to engage with it, yet alone to vanquish it. In the next two sections, I explore Schaffer's candidate for a more plausible form of monism, and then its claim to being a true representation of the majority of the monistic school.

3. Schaffer's Priority Monism

Disregard internal_{essential} relations. Imagine some other notion of internality; let's just call it internality_x. Examine the following argument schema:

- (iv) All things are related by relation *R*.
- (v) *R* is an internal_x relation.
- (vi) Thus all things are internally_x related.

As Schaffer (2010b, 361) points out, 'Schema (iv)–(vi) yields the same conclusion as schema (i)–(iii) [if you ignore the subscripted text], but allows that there can be external relations. It only requires there to be at least one internal relation, pervasive enough to connect all things.'

Schaffer develops a form of monism that he calls *priority monism*. He thinks that priority monism is more plausible than existence monism, and thus that where possible, the principle of charity demands that we interpret monists as priority monists (Schaffer 2010a, 66).

Priority monism doesn't deny that many things exist; it merely insists that they are grounded by, and that their existence is explained by, the existence of the whole cosmos; the whole cosmos is the one and only fundamental concretum that grounds all other concreta. Priority pluralism, by contrast, holds that certain particles or atoms are fundamental and that metaphysical explanation snakes up from *them* (Schaffer 2010a, 31–32). Schaffer (2010b) examines a number of metaphysical doctrines, each of which has a certain appeal among a number of contemporary philosophers. He argues that each of those doctrines should give rise to priority monism, utilising the argument schema (iv)–(vi).

If, indeed, there is a plausible form of monism on offer, and if this form of monism had already been advanced by the time of Russell and Moore's revolt, then this might serve to undermine the standard account, according to which Russell and Moore effectively repudiated monism *tout court*. By way of example, let's examine one of the plausible metaphysical doctrines that could lead a person to priority monism:

- (A) the conjunction of causal essentialism (which is the doctrine that entities bear their causal powers and liabilities essentially) with determinism, and a single, causally interconnected cosmos

Assume, for instance, the truth of Big Bang cosmology:

For any two given actual concrete objects *a* and *b*, there will be a causal path running from an event in which *a* features back to the Big Bang, and then from the Big Bang forward to an event in which *b* features. In the Big Bang cosmology, *everything* is a fragment of one primordial explosion. (Schaffer 2010b, 362)

Given the doctrine of causal essentialism—*a* and *b* are essentially bound up in the exact place in the causal path that runs to them from the Big Bang. Accordingly, they can lay a claim to being internally related, not by an internal_{essential} relation, but by what Schaffer calls an internal_{constraining} relation.

Schaffer defines the notion of an internal_{constraining} relation in terms of modal freedom. A relation R can only be an internal_{constraining} relation if its holding between x and y entails that x and y are *not* modally free of one another. Schaffer doesn't define 'modal freedom', but provides us with a necessary condition, which is all that his argument requires (2010b, 352). He tells us that x and y are modally free of one another only if, 'for any way that x can be, and for any way that y can be, there is a metaphysically possible world w in which x and y are each these respective ways (barring co-location, and leaving the rest of the world as is).'

Given doctrine (A) and the assumption of a Big Bang cosmology, the argument schema (iv)–(vi) gets filled out as follows:

- (iv) All things are related by causal connection.
- (v) Causal connection is an internal_{constraining} relation.
- (vi) Thus all things are internally_{constraining} related.

The internal relatedness of all things (even by internal_{constraining} relations) could very well lead a person to priority monism. For example, take the somewhat plausible assumption that any two properly basic things ('basic' in the sense of not being grounded by anything more fundamental) will be modally free of one another if they have no overlapping parts. Then suppose, contra priority monism, that there's some concrete entity, a , that's a proper part of the universe but is basic. Since a is a proper part of the universe, it falls short of being coextensive with the entire universe. This means that there must be something (or some things) left over, in the universe, after we've discounted a . Call that thing (or the mereological sum of those things) b . We know that a and b are not overlapping. Given our assumption, this means that they are modally free of one another. But, this contradicts with the conclusion of (vi), that there are no two things in the cosmos that are modally free of one another.

All things in the universe are related by an internal_{constraining} relation. So, we can now conclude that there can be nothing

like a . In other words: there can be no proper part of the universe that is basic. But there must be *something* basic, otherwise the non-fundamental things of this world would have no ultimate foundation. Having ruled out proper parts of the universe to play the role of the universe's foundation, the only remaining contender is the universe itself. This is just what priority monism claims. So, we have an argument from (vi) to priority monism. Schaffer has other arguments, relying upon different assumptions, but we shan't explore them here. My purpose was merely to get the view, and some of its motivation, on the table.

For our purposes, Schaffer's point is that there is a more plausible form of monism than existence monism, in the shape of priority monism. Furthermore, the doctrine of internal relations doesn't have to be understood in terms of the second premise of the argument (i)–(iii). The doctrine of internal relations could be as tame as the conjunction of premises (iv) and (v) in the argument schema (iv)–(vi). That schema doesn't deny that external relations *exist*, and it doesn't contend that *all* relations are internal_{essential}.

According to Schaffer, Bradley—unlike most thinkers in the monistic tradition—was an existence monist (Schaffer 2010b, 361, 349 n 7).⁶ Consequently, he didn't subscribe to the doctrine of internal relations under *any* interpretation. Instead, he subscribed to the unreality of *all* relations, for there aren't enough entities in Bradley's ontology for relations of any sort to get going at all.

Indeed, Schaffer would probably question my earlier contention that (i)–(iii) leads us naturally to existence monism. Existence monism can't accept that there are multiple things to stand related by internal relations. Just because Bradley attacks

⁶Schaffer tells me, in personal correspondence, that now, his more considered view on Bradley is that he thinks reality must be unified and harmonious, and must somehow integrate all the many appearances, but that he is ultimately sceptical that the human mind can fathom how this is done.

external^{essential} relations, we shouldn't think him committed to the existence of internal^{essential} relations.⁷ This leads to one of Schaffer's central criticisms of Russell and Moore, a criticism that we'll also find in the work of Candlish: Bradley *didn't* subscribe to the doctrine of internal relations, even though Russell and Moore criticise him for doing so. Schaffer goes further. According to him, Bradley's idiosyncratic form of monism wasn't even representative of the monists in general, who may well have been priority monists inspired by an argument of the form (iv)–(vi). Furthermore, priority monism is plausible and far from repudiated by Russell and Moore.

4. Schaffer's History

Schaffer (2010a) argues that the main threads of the idealist-monistic tradition can only really be made sense of if they're *not* interpreted as existence monists.

From Proclus all the way down to the British Idealist, Joachim, one can find monists appealing to the priority of the whole to the parts. Schaffer concludes that this doctrine is incompatible with existence monism:

For *Existence Monism* denies that there are any parts to the whole. Hence it denies that there is anything for the whole to be prior to. Thus any historical monist who claims that the whole is prior to its parts is committed to the existence of the parts, as derivative entities. (Schaffer 2010a, 67)

Aristotle's notion of an organic unity has it that an organism is a *substantial whole* whose organs depend upon interrelations *within* the whole. Think of a human heart. It wouldn't long remain a human heart if it wasn't part of a functioning human body. Indeed, it would quickly decompose. Many monists from

⁷Indeed, Bradley labelled it 'ludicrous' and 'an obvious, if perhaps a natural mistake' to take his attack upon external relations to be the adoption of the doctrine of internal relations (Bradley 1935, 642–43).

Plato and Plotinus to Hegel speak of the organic unity of the cosmos as a whole. Schaffer concludes:

[O]rganic unity is incompatible with *Existence Monism*... [A]ny historical monist who speaks of organic unity is committed to the existence of parts to be the limbs and organs (as it were) of the cosmic body. But the notion of organic unity is a perfect fit for *Priority Monism*. Aristotle's view of the organism is that of a unified substantial whole, prior to its parts. (Schaffer 2010a, 68)

A related notion is that of *the world as an integrated system*, which can be found in the works of Spinoza, Royce, and Bosanquet. Schaffer concludes:

The idea of the cosmos as an integrated system is incompatible with *Existence Monism*. For *Existence Monism* denies that there is anything other than the cosmos. Hence it denies that there are any things to be integrated into the cosmos. Thus any historical monist who claims that the cosmos is an integrated system is committed to the existence of the parts, as what are integrated in the whole. (Schaffer 2010a, 69)

Bradley aside, the main threads of the monistic tradition from ancient times to the work of contemporaries of Bradley, like Joachim and Bosanquet, all point against existence monism and towards priority monism—so Schaffer argues. To the extent that Russell and Moore took Bradley to be representative of monism in general, they did a great disservice to the tradition (especially since priority monism is so much more plausible than existence monism).

5. Bradley's Monism

What we've established so far, with Schaffer's help, is that the doctrine of internal relations doesn't have to be absurd. It all depends upon the sort of internal relation you're talking about. Moreover, monism doesn't have to be existence monism. In most historical cases, it hasn't been. But Schaffer *is* willing to accept

that existence monism was adopted by F.H. Bradley. In this section, we turn to Bradley's monism (predominantly, for reasons explained in the introduction, through the eyes of Stewart Candlish).

Bradley could not accommodate the 'Humean dogma' that a given experience is discrete and disconnected from other mental items. Peter Hylton (1990, 50) explains Bradley's concern: 'The given experience which, according to the Humean picture, is discrete and self-contained is, presumably, the experience of a single moment.' But, what is a single moment? How long does a single moment last? There can be no answer to such a question, since we can't think of mental moments as periods of short duration whilst maintaining their *discrete* and self-contained nature. 'Nor can we try', Hylton explains, 'to avoid this conclusion by finding genuine instants, moments with no duration. No experience could occur in a durationless moment' (1990, 51). So the whole Humean notion of discrete mental items is absurd. This insight, as we shall see, at least in part, led Bradley to his existence monism.

Since given/immediate experiences fail to be discrete or self-contained, Bradley claimed that our minds are forced to ascend to the abstracted level of *relational experience*. In our relational experiences, we separate, or abstract, the phenomenological *content* of an experience from the experience itself. These abstracted contents—these 'floating adjectives'—form a representational framework, allowing us to connect past experiences with present experiences. I don't really experience the computer as something separate from the table, but this abstraction (of computer from table) allows me to join up past, present, and future experiences: I recognize the table from past experiences where there was no computer, and I recognize the computer in future experiences without the table. If we didn't ascend to the level of relational experience, our minds simply wouldn't be able to process the undifferentiated flux of immediate experience.

We shouldn't imagine that the world itself is anything like the world we create through our abstractions.⁸ On the one hand, Reality can't be as it appears to us in our immediate experiences, because our immediate experiences are incomplete—they fail to be self-contained, since they are, of their very nature, fleeting. Apparently, no independently existent thing could fail to be self-standing, or self-contained (more on this later).⁹ On the other hand, we shouldn't think that Reality is anything like it appears to us in our relational experiences either, since we're the ones who cut reality up, doing violence to it, in order to subject it to the scrutiny of thought.

Bradley's hostility to the distinctions and divisions of relational experience, which he called 'vicious abstraction' (Bradley 1897, 573), ensured that, at most, *one* proposition could be fully true: that which encapsulates Reality in its entirety. We are left with some sort of degree theory of truth: propositions instantiate a degree of truth according to how much of Reality they have managed to encapsulate.¹⁰ It turns out that any proposition whatsoever, in that it attempts to represent Reality and thus separates itself *from* Reality, will have to fall somewhat short of being completely true. Only if the proposition could somehow *become* the whole of Reality itself would it become completely true. Bradley (1897, 170–73) therefore spoke of the attainment of complete truth in terms of thought's 'happy suicide'—the proposition's disappearing altogether in favour of Reality. Furthermore, no meaningful proposition could be completely false, for the content of any meaningful proposition must have been

⁸Indeed, in the *final* analysis we can't say that floating adjectives really exist, see for example Bradley (1906, 448).

⁹The non-reality of that which isn't self-contained is, according to Hylton (1990, 52), an often implicit, but crucially important premise for Bradley. Hylton sees it most explicitly stated in Bradley's *Principles of Logic* (1883, 51).

¹⁰Reading Bradley's *Principles of Logic*, you would be forgiven for thinking that he held to a bog-standard correspondence theory of truth. This would be a mistake. Refer to note 22 below.

abstracted *from* Reality—it must therefore have some connection *to* Reality.

Ultimately, it's true that Bradley had no doctrine of internal relations. He had a doctrine of the unreality of *all* relations. But, Russell (1903; 1906) and Moore (1919) both criticise his doctrine of internal relations (understood in terms of premise (ii) of argument (i)–(iii)). Had they seriously misread Bradley? To be fair: Bradley's words often *do* make him out to be committed to some such doctrine, appealing to the internal^{essential} relatedness of all things. Moore collects some of these data. For instance, Bradley (1897, 392) says that 'every relation . . . essentially penetrates the being of its terms, and, in this sense, is intrinsic.' He also says that 'A relation must at both ends *affect*, and pass into, the being of its term' (Bradley 1897, 364, italics original, see also 580–81). If Bradley didn't believe in relations at all, why does he so often speak as if he thought that relations exist and that all of them are internal^{essential}?

This is where I appeal to Stewart Candlish (2007). He explains why Bradley gave rise to such a false appearance. First of all, he accepts that there may have been some equivocation on Bradley's part, in his *earlier* work, between the doctrine of internal relations and the doctrine of the unreality of all relations, and that Bradley only became clear on this in his later work (Candlish 2007, 155). But Candlish's (2007, 159) best answer to why Bradley always seems to be more sympathetic to internal relations than to external relations, even as his view matured, appeals to Bradley's peculiar theory of truth: internal and external relations are *both* unreal, but internal relations are *more* real, and give a *more* true picture of Reality. To this end, Candlish invokes the following passage:

As to what has been called the axiom of internal relations, I can only repeat that "internal" relations, though truer by far than "external", are, in my opinion, not true in the end. (Bradley 1911, 306)

Internal relations are more true, Candlish explains (2007, 160), because a very orthodox adherence to the doctrine of internal relations is quickly supposed to lead one to the realisation that relations aren't real. From what Candlish says, it isn't abundantly clear why the doctrine of internal relations should have this pedagogic function—leading people to the realisation that relations don't exist at all. The tacit step in Candlish's reconstruction, I believe, has something to do with the notion of *independence*.

One ontological commitment that Russell and Bradley shared was this: to exist, one needs a certain sort of 'substantiality' or 'independence'. Russell (1918, 201–02) is keen to remind us, for instance, that each of his particulars 'stands entirely alone and is completely self-subsistent . . . [E]ach particular that there is in the world does not in any way logically depend upon any other particular.' And Bradley (1883, 51) says that if something is 'not self-contained' then it can't be 'real'.¹¹ It actually seems as if Russell and Bradley are both denying that there is any sort of relation that answers to Schaffer's notion of *grounding*.¹²

A counterexample: the existence of the singleton set of Socrates certainly seems to depend, or to be *grounded* upon the existence of Socrates. Bradley can escape denying this claim by saying that it's *partially* true! It's partially true that Socrates exists, and partially true that his singleton set exists, and it's partially true that the one depends upon the other. But, it would be *more* true to say that none of them really exist, since, in the final analysis, they get absorbed into the Absolute. Russell has another escape. He was wedded to his no-set theory of sets, according to which sets don't really exist, but are some sort of *façon de parler*. Russell's considered position would probably be that Socrates exists, but that his singleton *doesn't*. In fact, Rus-

¹¹Although, as far as Russell is concerned, independence is only a criterion of existence for particulars, and not for universals. Bradley seems to have adopted the criterion more widely.

¹²Regarding Russell, this should be modified: the denial only regards particulars, but not universals—see the [previous note](#).

sell's considered position may have been that the only things to exist were sense-data and minds,¹³ everything else was merely a logical construction out of them; constructed out of sets, which, according to his no-set theory of sets, didn't really exist themselves.

The type of independence that Russell claims to be interested in is *logical* independence. Admittedly, more work needs to be done to explain what this amounts to (for instance, when are modal considerations relevant, and when not). Bradley's conception of independence could also benefit from a sharper articulation, but analogously, Schaffer's notion of *dependence* could be thought to be somewhat under-defined.¹⁴

Accordingly, one could read Bradley and Russell as agreeing, against Schaffer, that to exist at all is not to be Schaffer-dependent upon anything. The fact that they haven't done a good enough job defining what it means to be 'independent' mirrors the fact that Schaffer hasn't given us an exhaustive account of what it means to be Schaffer-dependent. Both sides of this debate need to do more work in furnishing us with more exhaustive definitions. Be that as it may, I shall call Russell and Bradley's shared doctrine, the doctrine of the independence of existents. This doctrine is the hidden step that is supposed to lead from the doctrine of internal relations to the realisation that no relations actually exist.

The process works as follows. You start out saying that all relations are internal_{essential}. Given the independence of existents, and the interdependence of internally_{essential} related relata, you come to see that all of the distinct relata of internal_{essential} relations must fail to exist. You therefore end up thinking that at most *one* thing can exist. There can be no relations at all.

¹³He gives up his commitment to the existence of minds in (Russell 1919).

¹⁴This concern with Schaffer's metaphysics is brought to the fore by Dean Zimmerman (forthcoming).

Wittgenstein, and Schopenhauer before him, appeal to the fact that sometimes one can only arrive at the truth via a falsehood, or even via a piece of nonsense, that at first blush might appear to be meaningful and even true, but only really serves to point you towards a higher truth, as you realise its shortcomings. They use the metaphor of a ladder that, once you've used it to climb to the summit, can be kicked away.

The doctrine of internal relations seems to be, for Bradley, just such a ladder. Once we adopt it, we realise that there aren't many things, but only one thing. That one thing can't be related to anything else, because nothing else exists. Accordingly, there are no relations at all. And thus we come to kick the ladder away. But this whole process only gets under way if we assume that things have to be independent of each other in order to exist.

Candlish *doesn't* use the metaphor of a ladder that gets kicked away. Nevertheless, we have, I think, arrived at what Candlish takes to be Bradley's 'mature' position (Candlish 2007, 161). The argument (i)–(iii) really does lead to existence monism, notwithstanding the tension between the doctrine of internal relations and existence monism. The tension is relieved when you realise that the doctrine of internal relations is just a ladder that gets kicked away. In Candlish's words:

Once we see that the internality of relations entails their unreality, it need no longer surprise us that Bradley was more sympathetic to internality than externality, for internal relations wear the unreality of themselves and their terms on their faces, so to speak, because their necessary mutual connectedness precludes independence . . . 'Does Bradley maintain that all relations are internal or not?' . . . [T]he only accurate answer here, when we are dealing with his mature beliefs, would have to be 'He does and he doesn't.' He does on a superficial level, as having a greater degree of truth than 'All relations are external' . . . (Candlish 2007, 160–61)

This reading of Bradley allows Candlish to make sense of his apparent commitment to the doctrine of internal relations, on the one hand, alongside excerpts likes these:

Criticism therefore which assumes me committed to the ultimate truth of internal relations, all or any of them, is based on a mistake. (Bradley 1909a, 504)

Mere internal relations, then, like relations that are merely external, are untenable if they make a claim to ultimate and absolute truth. But taken otherwise, and viewed as helpful makeshifts and as useful aids in the pursuit of knowledge, external and internal relations are both admissible and can be relatively real and true. (Bradley 1924, 645)

No relation is merely intrinsic or external, and every relation is both. (Bradley 1924, 667)

We have arrived, with Candlish, at an appreciation of the relationship between the doctrine of internal relations, and Bradley's existence monism. But we also find, in Candlish, a new critic of Russell and Moore. Candlish—as we shall see—thinks that Russell and Moore got Bradley wrong. According to Candlish, they thought Bradley committed to the doctrine of internal relations. They mistook the ladder for the summit.

In the face of Candlish and Schaffer, the standard account of Russell and Moore's defeat of monism is clearly in jeopardy. In the following three sections, I turn to examine Russell and Moore's actual arguments, alongside Candlish's critique of them, in the hope that the standard account *can* be rehabilitated. I shall argue that *if* Candlish's understanding of Bradley is right, then Russell and Moore didn't get him wrong.

6. Russell's Attack on Bradley: Prong 1

Russell's attack on monism has two prongs. The first concentrates on the relationship between monism and mathematics. The existence monist thinks that there is only one object. Consequently, any true proposition that seems to be about two (or more) things will have to be transformed into a proposition about one thing. This won't work, Russell argues, for any proposition that contains an asymmetrical relation:

The proposition "*a* is greater than *b*," we are told, does not really say anything about either *a* or *b*, but about the two together. Denoting the whole which they compose by (*ab*) it says, we will suppose, "(*ab*) contains diversity of magnitude." Now to this statement . . . there is a special objection in the case of asymmetry, (*ab*) is symmetrical with regard to *a* and *b*, and thus the property of the whole will be exactly the same in the case where *a* is greater than *b* as in the case where *b* is greater than *a*. (Russell 1903, §215)

The existence monist can't distinguish the proposition that ' $2 > 1$ ' from the false proposition that ' $1 > 2$ '. This constitutes a serious blow to the hopes of reconciling existence monism with the truth of mathematics!¹⁵

Candlish is critical of Russell's 1903 attack on monism. First of all, Russell is accused of a confusion: is his argument against the doctrine of the unreality of relations, or is it against the doctrine of internal relations? Candlish (2007, 164) forgives Russell for this confusion, since Bradley's own views had matured, and in their earlier stages, vacillated on this point. Accordingly, Russell sometimes attacks Bradley for holding that all relations are internal (e.g., Russell 1906), but *here* he makes it seem as if

¹⁵Some thinkers, who I won't be engaging with in the body of this paper, have argued that Russell's attack on Bradley seriously misses the mark. Bradley wouldn't reduce an asymmetric relation between *a* and *b* to some property of the mereological sum of *a* and *b*. Instead, he'd reduce it to a property held by the entire world, e.g., *the entire world is such that* $R(a, b)$. Objections of this sort have been raised by Timothy Sprigge (1979, 151–53, 156–59) and John Watling (1970, 40–41). I don't entertain these concerns in the body of this paper because I believe they have been effectively rebutted by Nicholas Griffin (1998), who demonstrates that Bradley's account *does* conform to the general monistic strategy that Russell was attacking. Instead of a monadic predicate of the mereological sum of *a* and *b*, Bradley would, indeed, make $R(a, b)$ into a monadic predicate of the Absolute. But the Absolute is, among other things, the mereological sum of what must be 'some definite (though not necessarily finite) number of items', including *a* and *b* (Griffin 1998, 161). Russell's argument still goes through because this *whole* will not be able to ground the asymmetry of the original relation (however many parts it has alongside *a* and *b*).

the monist is denying that any relations whatsoever exist, since they can all be reduced to *monadic properties* of the Absolute.

Contra Candlish, I don't think that Russell is confused here at all. Russell's argument is quite consistent with his having understood Bradley's 'mature' position—that the doctrine of internal relations leads directly, as a ladder that gets kicked away, to the doctrine of the unreality of all relations. Indeed, Russell says the following, explicitly, in the midst of repeating his standard arguments against Bradley:

The axiom of internal relations . . . involves, as Mr Bradley has justly urged, the conclusion that there are no relations and that there are not many things, but only one thing. (Russell 1906, 38)

Russell didn't think that his argument conflicted with appreciating that the axiom of internal relations was merely a ladder to be kicked away.

Russell's argument states that Bradley tries to reduce all relational propositions to subject-predicate propositions, and tries to prove that this tactic fails in the mathematically significant case of asymmetric relations. But, Candlish argues, Bradley thought that the subject-predicate form was *also* a vicious abstraction. In order to make a predication you need to tear a subject away from the Absolute. Candlish (2007, 165) quotes Bradley:

In short, far from admitting that Monism requires that all truths can be interpreted as the predication of qualities of the whole, Monism with me contends that all predication, no matter what, is in the end untrue and in the end unreal . . . (Bradley 1924, 672)

Russell stands accused of misunderstanding the doctrine of the unreality of all relations. As Candlish puts the accusation:

[I]n holding that relations were unreal, [Bradley] was not committed to maintaining that relational propositions were reducible to subject-predicate propositions. To repeat: there are two reasons for rejecting [Russell's] attribution to Bradley of such a commitment: first, he held firmly that subject-predicate propositions require a

relation between the subject and the predicate so that relations turn out to be ineliminable even if a particular relational proposition were to be replaceable by a subject-predicate proposition; second . . . he held that in any case subject-predicate propositions too are problematic, so that no problem with relations would be resolved by reducing them to predicates. (Candlish 2007, 165)

Russell is wrong about Bradley. Bradley's doctrine of the unreality of relations wouldn't commit him to analyse '*a* is greater than *b*' in terms of '*(ab)* contains diversity of magnitude.' This is because the subject-predicate relation is still a *relation*,¹⁶ and it's also because subject-predicate propositions are never wholly true.

Where Candlish sees misunderstanding, I see a probing insight. Bradley might think that subject-predicate propositions are never wholly true, but let's be fair to Russell: Bradley doesn't think that *any* proposition is *ever* wholly true! He doesn't even think that the proposition *that subject-predicate propositions are never wholly true* is wholly true. When a thought becomes wholly true, according to Bradley, it ceases to be a thought. Nevertheless, he certainly seems to think that internal relations are truer than external relations, and that the doctrine of internal relations leads one to the insight of existence monism, which in turn renders subject-predicate statements as the least destructive form of statement. Russell understood this well:

The one final and complete truth must consist of a proposition with one subject, namely the Whole, and one predicate. But since this involves distinguishing subject from predicate, as though they could be diverse, even this is not quite true . . . [but] it is as true as any truth can be. (Russell 1906, 39)

¹⁶In passing, Peter Hylton (1990, 154) raises the same concern with Russell here: '[T]he fact that Bradley holds that all propositions, including subject-predicate propositions, are relational in character militates against Russell's reading'. My defence of Russell's reading of Bradley is thus directed here against Hylton as well as against Candlish.

It's unfair for Bradley to defend himself on the grounds that he doesn't really think that internal relations are wholly true, or on the grounds that existence monism really renders the subject-predicate form incapable of complete truth. He *still* thinks that these forms are truer than the asymmetric relations upon which mathematical order is founded. He still thinks them truer than anything else.

Bradley's metaphysics is 'strongly stratified' such that what is true 'on one level do[es] not necessarily remain true on neighbouring levels' (Griffin 1998, 156). On one level of abstraction, external relations can truly be said to hold. 2 really is greater than 1, on that level of abstraction. On a higher level of abstraction, only internal relations can be truly said to hold. On an even higher level of abstraction, no relations whatsoever can truly be said to hold. There's no reason to think that Russell missed any of this. His worry is that, according to Bradley, the truths of each successive level are, in some sense, *truer* than the level before. This leaves the truths of mathematics languishing at the bottom of the tree. Bradley might not be concerned by this corollary of his view, but it will surely render the view unattractive to many. Russell may have been going too far when he claimed that he had rendered Bradley's position to be 'formally impossible',¹⁷ but he has insightfully articulated what makes it so unattractive.¹⁸

7. Russell's Attack on Bradley: Prong 2

The second prong of Russell's attack concentrates its fire upon Bradley's monistic theory of truth (Russell 1906). If no propo-

¹⁷See lecture 3 of Russell (1918).

¹⁸I qualify myself here, and say that he 'may have gone too far', because there is *some* sense in which Russell *has* demonstrated a formal impossibility. If we assume that the truths of mathematics are 100% true, then Russell has shown us that that assumption is formally incompatible with Bradley's monism. If we drop that assumption, then Russell has still shown us why Bradley's monism is unattractive, because it renders the truth of mathematics less true than what we would generally take to be far less sure-footed propositions.

sition is entirely true, then the monistic theory itself cannot be entirely true. If 'the partial truths which embody the monistic philosophy' are not entirely true, then 'any deductions we may make from them may depend upon their false aspect rather than their true one, and may therefore be erroneous' (1906, 36). In other words, by Bradley's own lights, we should trust none of his conclusions. If Bradley concedes that his own premises are merely partially true, how do we know what conclusions he would have come to had he started with *totally* true premises?

The doctrine of internal_{essential} relations, to the extent that it's true, demands that all things are internally related to all other things. Not only is every part of the Absolute internally related to every other part; the doctrine also demands that the Absolute itself, since it too is a thing, is internally related to each of its parts, and that each of its parts is internally related to *it*. The essence of everything bleeds somehow into everything else. It becomes very difficult to tell one thing apart from another, and difficult to tell the Absolute apart from its parts, since their essences also bleed into *it*, and vice versa:

In a 'significant whole' [*i.e.* the Absolute], each part, since it involves the whole and every other part, is just as complex as the whole; the parts of a part, in turn, are just as complex as the part, and therefore just as complex as the whole... In these circumstances it becomes perfectly arbitrary to say that *a* is part of *W* rather than that *W* is part of *a*. (Russell 1906, 31)

If part and whole cannot be distinguished, then neither can complete truth from partial truth. Bradley might want to argue that the doctrine of internal relations, which leads to this objection, is but a partial truth, since, in actual fact, Bradley believes in the non-reality of all relations. But if you can't tell a partial truth apart from the whole truth, how can Bradley be sure that the doctrine of internal relations is merely a partial truth?

According to Bradley, we come closer to Truth as we pack more and more of Reality into our judgements. But, given its na-

ture, however detailed our description of the world may be, our judgements will still be infinitely far from being True. The question thus arises: by what right do we distinguish between what we normally call 'truth' and what we normally call 'falsehood', when, on a cosmic scale, all of our judgements are infinitely far away from the Truth? Surely, even for Bradley, it's going to be more true that $2 + 2 = 4$ than that crocodiles are white. But, by Bradley's lights, both of these judgements are infinitely far away from the Truth. Perhaps he could say that one of these two judgements, though they are both remarkably far away from the Truth, can still be called 'true', and one called 'false', relative to the other, because one is marginally closer than the other. But, on that response, error seems to be a much more marginal affair than we generally take it to be.

Harold H. Joachim had 'considered very carefully the whole question of error' from a monistic perspective (Russell 1906, 32). He had come to the following conclusion, which to Russell seemed 'the only possible one for a monistic theory of truth'. Joachim says that: 'the erring subject's confident belief in the truth of his knowledge distinctively characterizes error, and converts a partial apprehension of the truth into falsity' (Russell 1906, 32; quoting Joachim 1906, 162). On Joachim's account, error has nothing to do with truth or falsehood: every proposition with which mere mortals deal is somewhere between true and false; error, on the other hand, resides in the confident belief that a partial truth is wholly true.

Russell goes on to conjure up the following scene. A jury has to decide whether a man has committed a crime. If the jury keep in mind the monistic theory of truth, and thereby remember that any verdict they come to can only ever amount to a partial truth, then their verdict will be right, whatever their verdict. If they forget the monistic theory, the same verdict will be erroneous.

Russell's final concern mirrors his concern with the coherence theory of truth. That concern is simply put: surely there are lots

of internally consistent sets of propositions; won't it be entirely arbitrary which set we decide to call *the truth*, unless we have some independent criterion (for instance, *being true*), other than being coherent with the set? Analogously, the monist calls a proposition true to the extent that it describes the whole of some object called Reality. But, how do we know that there is only one such object? They might respond as follows: the Absolute is that one object which actually completes our given/immediate experiences. But, in this response, our notion of truth seems to be prior to our notion of the Absolute, for the Absolute is that Whole which we actually (i.e. *truly*) experience.

In more contemporary times, a number of analytic philosophers have championed the notion that truth really does come in degrees (Edgington 1997; Smith 2008). A degree theory of truth, for example, can furnish us with an elegant solution to sorites paradoxes. Note however that Russell's attack on the monistic theory of truth doesn't get its teeth directly into the notion that monistic truth comes in *degrees*. Instead, his critique focuses on the idea that no proposition is entirely true, and that all propositions that we would normally call 'true' are infinitely far away from the absolute truth. Contemporary degree theories of truth don't deny that *some* propositions are completely true and that *some* are completely false. They merely claim that there are also degrees in between these two extremes. Russell's arguments have no purchase over these more contemporary theories, nor should they.

To summarise: Russell's main argument is that Bradley's monism cannot attribute complete truth to innocuous mathematical propositions; in fact, Bradley's monism can only accord a relatively lowly degree of truth to such paradigmatically true propositions as ' $2 > 1$ '; and, Bradley's monism gives rise to a completely untenable theory of truth. None of these criticisms trade upon any misunderstanding of Bradley, as Bradley has been understood by Russell's critic, Candlish.

It would be remiss to defend Russell's attack on Bradley, against Candlish and Schaffer, without responding to Bradley's *own* attempt to defend himself. As we've seen, Bradley felt himself to be wrongly accused of endorsing the doctrine of internal relations. As we've also seen, he was wrong to think that Russell was accusing him of this! But Bradley (1909b) also responded to Russell's attack on his theory of truth.

Bradley (1909b) is concerned to attack the notion that 'judgments of perception' can ever be completely 'immune from all chance of error' (1909b, 333). Bradley is right to attack this doctrine, but *that*, in and of itself, doesn't get to grips with Russell's critique of Bradley's monism. At times, it's as if Bradley conflates grounds for *confidence* in a belief with the *truth-value* of the belief, such that if we can never be 100% confident that our perceptual beliefs are true, then they cannot, as a matter of fact, be 100% true. This is simply a confusion on Bradley's part.¹⁹

Bradley goes on to claim that Russell had misunderstood his criterion of truth. He *didn't* believe that coherence was a criterion of truth, but that coherence in combination with (maximal) *comprehensiveness* was the criterion. Russell had argued that coherence couldn't furnish us with a definition of truth, in part, because we can come up with many internally coherent sets of propositions that are false. Bradley's response is that coherence was never supposed to do the task alone, but only in conjunction with *comprehensiveness*.

Robert Adams (1974) defines possible worlds to be sets of propositions that are both consistent and *comprehensive*; comprehensive, in the sense that for every proposition *p*, either *p* or its negation will be a member of each set. And thus, in the array of nonactual possible worlds, we'll have an infinite number of sets of propositions that fail to describe the actual world but which instantiate both coherence *and* comprehensiveness. Ac-

¹⁹This confusion is evidenced by his talking about 'facts' as being subject to error (Bradley 1909b, 336).

cordingly, we could argue that Russell's argument stands, even if Bradley's criterion is read right. But Bradley counters:

The fancied arrangement [of a false but coherent and comprehensive set] not only has opposed to it the world of perception. It also has against it any opposite arrangement and any contrary fact which I can fancy. And, so far as I can judge, these contrary fancies will balance the first. Nothing, therefore, will be left to outweigh the world as perceived, and the imaginary hypothesis will be condemned by our criterion. (Bradley 1909b, 339)

As I understand it, Bradley's response runs something like this. There has to be some sense in which each possible world contains all of the others. This seems to be an anticipation of the strongest modal logic, according to which if *p* is possible, then it's necessarily possible. Another way of stating this modal logic is to say that each possible world is accessible from each other world. Each world *contains*, somehow among its inhabitants, the sets that constitute the other worlds. Or at least, Bradley is claiming that all of the worlds are somehow accessible to our imagination. How are we to know which of all of these possible worlds (or 'fancied arrangements'), since they all actually exist, is the actual *world*?

Bradley suggests the following: we can allow all of the sets that aren't sufficiently substantiated by our sense experiences to cancel each other out. This rounds down the number immeasurably. We're then left with a smaller, and somewhat manageable, range of worlds. Because certainty is never completely attainable, we can never be completely sure which one is the actual world. Instead, as new data come to us, and we engage in something like a reflective equilibrium, ruling out some data, and ruling in other data, we build up, in stages, towards the ideal of comprehensiveness. And thus, Bradlean comprehensiveness is nothing like Adam's notion of a world's being complete. Rather, it has something to do with best fit with the accumulative data of our senses, post reflective equilibrium.

As Bradley puts it:

What we call our real world is so superior in wealth of detail that to include it, as outweighed in quantity, within some arrangement which we merely fancy, is to my mind not feasible. (Bradley 1909b, 339)

But this begs the question against Russell. We know the real world to be richer than many of the merely possible worlds because the real world is the one that we sense. But how do we know that it's the one that we *truly* sense if we don't have a notion of truth prior to our notion of a coherent and comprehensive world? This was Russell's exact critique, and Bradley doesn't seem to have dodged it at all. And though Bradley doesn't think that his criterion of coherence combined with comprehensiveness is in any need of amendment, he offers us a second criterion just in case we're not satisfied with his first:

The truth is that which enables us to order most coherently and comprehensively the data supplied by immediate experience and the intuitive judgments of perception. (Bradley 1909b, 339)

But this criterion walks directly into the trap that Russell had laid for him. We can only know that a set of data is truly supplied by immediate experience if we already have a notion of truth.

8. Moore's Attack on Bradley

As far as Moore (1919) was concerned, the doctrine of internal relations amounted to the following two claims:

- (1) If a is R -related to b , then not being R -related to b entails qualitative difference from a .
- (2) If a is R -related to b , then not being R -related to b entails numerical difference from a .

Given the indiscernibility of identicals, (2) seems to follow from (1). And yet, Moore was happy to accept (1) and refused to accept

(2). Accordingly, he has to show that (2) doesn't follow from (1) after all. His strategy is to interpret these two claims in such a way that (a) they best fit with what the idealists themselves had to say about internal relations, and that (b), despite appearances, the first claim won't entail the second.

Moore seems to grapple quite honestly with the figures of speech commonly found in the idealist tradition. For instance, the claim that a relation always 'modifies' its terms is one that Moore finds to be ubiquitous in the literature. Clearly, the word 'modifies' can't have its literal meaning here. It can't be that having a relation always effects a *change* in the relata. For one thing, a relation can hold between abstract objects—such as numbers—which are, in essence, *unchanging*. So, what does it mean for a relation to modify its terms?

[T]hey sometimes say even: If φ be a relational property and A a term which has it, then it is always true that A *would not have been* A if it had not had φ . (Moore 1919, 46, italics original)

Moore is unhappy with this formulation. It seems to be self-contradictory. It seems to be saying that if A did not have φ it would have been true of A that it wasn't A . He recognises that this is only a clumsy way of saying the following:

[Suppose that] A has φ , then anything which had not had φ would necessarily have been different from A . This is the proposition which I wish to suggest as giving the metaphorical meaning of φ *modifies* A , of which we are in search . . . And it seems to me that it is not unnatural that the proposition that this is true of φ and A , should have been expressed in the form, " φ modifies A ," since it can be more or less naturally expressed in the perverted form, "If A had not had φ it would have been different," . . . (Moore 1919, 46, italics original)

And so we see that a charitable reading of the doctrine of internal relations, with its talk of relations modifying their terms, commits that doctrine to a modal claim. The claim is that if a is R -related to b then it's necessarily the case that for any x , if x

isn't R -related to b then x isn't a . With this reading in hand, we can restate the two claims at the heart of the doctrine of internal relations.

The first claim is a non-modal claim, quantifying only over things that exist in the actual world. Let's supplement it with the indiscernibility of identicals, so that it can be a claim not just about qualitative difference but *numerical* difference too. So supplemented, it asserts a simple material conditional. If a is R -related to b , then for any actual x , if x is not R -related to b , then a is not x . More formally:

$$(1) \quad Rab \rightarrow (\forall x)(\neg Rxb \rightarrow x \neq a)$$

To be clear, the quantifier in (1) is restricted to actual entities. (1) seems to be trivially true. If two things have different relational properties in the actual world, then, given the indiscernibility of identicals, it is materially entailed that those two things are not the same thing.

Given what we've said above, in trying to interpret the idealist talk of a relation modifying its terms, the second claim of the doctrine of internal relations is going to be a *modal* claim. It quantifies over all possibilities. Indeed, Moore specifically invokes possible worlds. He puts claim (2) this way: if a actually has the relational property φ , then ' A could not have existed in any possible world without having φ ' (Moore 1919, 54). More formally:

$$(2) \quad Rab \rightarrow \Box(\forall x)(\neg Rxb \rightarrow x \neq a)$$

(2) is thus equivalent to:

$$(3) \quad Rab \rightarrow \Box(\forall x)(x = a \rightarrow Rab)$$

And now it's clear that (2) really *doesn't* follow from (1) after all. (1) is asserting a material conditional about actualia. (2)

is asserting something about all possible worlds. Why do so many idealists, with their doctrine of internal relations, seem to derive (2) from (1)? Moore suggests that they're led into error by the ambiguity of the word 'must'. That word has a modal reading and a non-modal reading. (1) can be read this way: 'if a is R -related to b , and x isn't R -related to b , then x *must* be distinct from a '. If you put too much emphasis on the word 'must' in that paraphrase of (1), you could be led into a modal reading of 'must', according to which 'must' is equivalent to 'necessarily', and then you're erroneously led into thinking that (1) is equivalent to (2). This is just an instance of the general phenomenon of mistaking material implication for something stronger—a mistake that Moore accuses Russell of falling into himself on occasion.

Not only is (1) trivially true, as Moore had always said it was, and not only does (2) not follow from (1), (2) also seems to have some obvious counterexamples. Why should we deny, Moore asks, that just because 'Edward VII was in fact father of George V, he might have existed without being father of George V'? Indeed, Moore's denial of (2) 'is the common-sense view, which seems obviously true, that it may be true that A has in fact got φ , and yet also true that A might have existed without having φ ' (Moore 1919, 51).

Indeed, it now appears that, according to the doctrine of internal relations, no relations can hold contingently. Moore points out that, as a consequence of Bradley's doctrine of internal relations, all truths are necessary truths. It is at this point that Candlish tacitly accuses Moore of misunderstanding Bradley. It's true that Bradley is committed to the denial of contingency, but Moore seems to forget that Bradley is 'equally committed to the denial of necessity, at least in any of its common understandings' (Candlish 2007, 154).

Think of an external relation, e.g., that x is to the right of y . We only think that the location of x with respect to y is no part of

its nature, and therefore that the relation is external, because we have abstracted x away from its context (Bradley 1897, 577–78)—we have ripped it apart from its background. Moore rightly took this to be an attack on contingency, because it seemingly left all properties as essential. Candlish points out that it was also an attack on *necessity*. We shouldn't talk about necessary properties or contingent properties because all of this presupposes that we can distinguish an object from its properties, which can only be done at the cost of a vicious abstraction.

But Candlish's qualification of Bradley's position doesn't defend Bradley against Moore. Bradley does think, as we've seen, that the doctrine of internal relations is *truer* than the posit of any external relation. And thus, some very common-sense propositions, such as the proposition that Edward VII might not have had children, will turn out to be less true than some very surprising propositions, such as the proposition that Edward VII is the father of George V in all possible worlds in which he exists at all! Even if Bradley isn't saying that the more surprising claim is true and that the common-sense claim is false, he *is* saying that the more surprising claim is *more true* than the common-sense claim. This is how Moore seeks to reduce the position to absurdity, and the attempt isn't undermined by any of Candlish's observations about Bradley.

9. Restoring the Standard Narrative

Russell and Moore's attacks on Bradley were germane. They realised that Bradley wasn't really committed to the complete truth of the doctrine of internal relations, but attacked him for thinking that internal relations are *truer* than external ones.

This much seems to demonstrate that Candlish's critique of Russell and Moore was unfair. They *had* understood their Bradley, at least as well as Candlish had. They *had* understood that the doctrine of internal relations was only intended as a

ladder to be kicked away. They had understood the true ramifications of Bradley's existence monism. Jonathan Schaffer's critique of Russell and Moore had less to do with their alleged misunderstanding of Bradley, and more to do with their alleged misrepresentation of the historical tradition of monism.

Accordingly, Schaffer can now respond: Russell and Moore might have got their *Bradley* right—Schaffer doesn't claim that Bradley was a priority monist²⁰—but they *were* wrong to think that Bradley was representative of the monists in *general*. And yet, upon an appreciation of the existence monistic theory of truth, as understood by Candlish, Russell, and by Moore, it should become clear that the historical threads that Schaffer seizes upon, to substantiate his historical contention, all turn out to be, at least potentially, deceptive.

Bradley himself—despite his existence monism—can talk about the priority of the whole to the parts. He thinks that that doctrine is a partial truth. Not the whole truth, but *truer* than talking of the priority of the parts to the whole. The priority of the whole to the parts is what gets you thinking in a direction that might lead you to the ultimate truth of existence monism. The same can be said about the doctrines of organic unity, and the world as an integrated system. The same can be said about the doctrine of internal relations itself. These doctrines are about as true as a doctrine can be before realising the unreality of all relations, which is, in turn, as true a thought as we can ever arrive at, for Bradley.

When Joachim, who adopts Bradley's monistic theory of truth, speaks about the priority of the whole to the parts, you shouldn't take him at face value. As far as he's concerned, nothing that he says is wholly true. When a British idealist speaks about parts and wholes, don't infer that they're not existence monists; the most you can infer is that they think that some ways of talking about parts and wholes are, at least, *more true* than other ways.

²⁰At least not in Schaffer (2010b), though he does seem to claim that he was in Schaffer (2010a).

For Bradley and Joachim, complete truth is a regulative ideal that we can never attain, but we can get ever closer to it. Discourse is divided into levels, each one truer than the last. If this division of discourse into levels, itself, isn't the whole truth, it's based on a metaphysical outlook that's about as close to the whole truth as we humans can get. According to that hierarchy, notions such as the priority of the whole to the parts, and the organic unity of the whole, achieve a very high degree of truth. And thus, we shouldn't be surprised to hear those words from existence monists.

It's not fair or right to paint Bradley as some idiosyncratic outsider to the tradition—one of the few existence monists in a sea of priority monists. Bradley is widely thought to have been the most influential of the British Idealists (Candlish and Basile 2013). He was the first philosopher to be singled out by a British monarch for the very rare honour of the Order of Merit. He was universally revered by his peers. G. F. Stout had reportedly said of Bradley's *Appearance and Reality* that it 'had done as much as is humanly possible in ontology.'²¹ Joachim, whose talk of the priority of the whole was pointed to by Schaffer as evidence of his priority monism, was clearly trying to flesh out a theory of truth to accompany Bradley's idealism²², which is exactly why

²¹As quoted, via Russell, in Hylton (1990, 44).

²²Joachim (1906, 4) claims that his theory of truth had been greatly influenced by Bradley and Bosanquet. He also claims that his theory benefited greatly from suggestions made to him by Bradley (Joachim 1906, 85). One might think that Bradley held a correspondence theory of truth, rather than a degree theory, since that's how he seems to present matters in his *Principles of Logic* (Bradley 1883). But it certainly isn't how things appear in *Appearance and Reality*. Indeed, in that book, he appears to hold just the sort of theory that Joachim would later advance, and which I have attributed to Bradley in the body of this paper. Thoughts receive a degree of truth corresponding to how much of the Absolute that they manage to encapsulate. Baldwin (1991) and Candlish (1989) both provide (somewhat conflicting sets of) evidence to suggest that there was either no turn-around, or less of a turn-around than there may seem to have been between Bradley's two books. The evidence

we should take his talk of wholes and parts with a pinch of salt.

I'm yet to see compelling evidence that priority monism isn't, in the most part at least, the invention of Jonathan Schaffer (obviously, there may have been *some* historical precursors, I don't want to make too general a claim). To be fair to Schaffer, he is open to this possibility:

I have argued that the priority reading is more charitable and provides a better textual fit. But perhaps closer readings of the relevant texts will reveal that both *Priority* and *Existence Monism* are interwoven into the monistic tradition. If so, then I would suggest that *Priority Monism* is the strand of the monistic tradition worth reviving. Or perhaps closer readings will reveal that the traditional monists—despite the passages I have cited—have all been existence monists after all. If so, I would still recommend the question of fundamental mereology as an intrinsically interesting question in its own right, albeit one with less historical depth. (Schaffer 2010a, 70–71)

Schaffer was wrong to think that analytical philosophy was 'born in sin' (2010a, 46). His claim is grounded in the narrative that Russell and Moore gave 'birth' to analytical philosophy in rebellion against monism, all the while misinterpreting what monism *was*, mistaking priority monism for existence monism. Schaffer is right to recommend the question of fundamental mereology as intrinsically interesting, but analytic philosophy can't be criticised for ignoring priority monism (however plausible it may or may not be) before it was ever clearly articulated. Analytic philosophy was born in the denial of a very prevalent and deeply troubling *existence* monism. That denial was insightful.

includes a clarification that Bradley, himself, makes in a footnote to a later edition of *The Principles of Logic* (Candlish 1989, 336), regretting the somewhat indelicate way he had initially presented matters; which he ultimately excuses himself for, since *Principles of Logic* wasn't really a work of metaphysics, but a work dedicated to logic (see also Candlish 1998, 148–51).

My point isn't to argue with Schaffer's priority monism.²³ My aim is merely to restore the narrative that Schaffer calls a 'creation myth'. The creation narrative that analytic philosophers tell themselves about their own intellectual tradition is a story with vague boundaries, but one central thread is that Russell and Moore successfully dealt a serious blow to British Idealism. That central thread has been disputed by Candlish and Schaffer.

I respond: contra *Candlish*, Russell and Moore *hadn't* misread Bradley (at least, not if Candlish hasn't). They understood that Bradley's doctrine of internal relations was merely intended as a ladder to be kicked away—at the very least, their arguments against Bradley don't assume otherwise. Contra *Schaffer*, we have no compelling reason to think that Russell and Moore ignored a central strand of the monistic tradition. In fact, it may well be that priority monism was never clearly articulated or endorsed before Schaffer. In any event, analytic philosophy wasn't born in sin.

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²³Even if we think that the notion of Schaffer-dependence is somewhat under-defined, he has a host of other arguments: arguments from quantum entanglement, from the possibility of a gunky universe ([Schaffer 2010a](#)), and 'from nomic integrity', which is based upon the claim that the fundamental laws of nature govern the temporal evolution of *the cosmos as a whole* ([Schaffer 2013](#)).

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