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Epistemic Realism in Bradley and Early Moore

Francesco Pesci

In this paper I attempt to show how Moore's early emancipation from Bradley's absolute idealism presupposes a fundamental adherence to certain theses of absolute idealism itself. In particular, I argue that the idea of an immediate epistemic access to concepts and propositions that Moore endorses in his platonic atomism (Hylton) is a reworking of a form of *epistemic realism* already present in Bradley. Epistemic realism is the conjunction of two theses: i) reality is independent of any constructive work of the human mind; ii) reality is immediately (non-discursively) accessible to knowledge. In this paper I first focus on Moore's early idealist phase (1897), suggesting that it should be understood as an attempt at isolating this thesis in Bradley against Kant's transcendental idealism. I then suggest that it is on the background of an invariant adherence to it that we should understand Moore's later rejection of monism and idealism (1898–9) through his anti-psychologism. I hence explore how epistemic realism is at work in Moore's platonic atomism and conclude with some remarks about the further significance of Moore's rejection of Kant.

Epistemic Realism in Bradley and Early Moore

Francesco Pesci

1. Introduction

According to the traditional picture of the birth of analytic philosophy in Great Britain, Russell and Moore began their philosophical career through a radical and thorough refutation of the idealism of Bradley, McTaggart and Green. Russell and Moore¹ themselves favored and emphasized this version of the story according to which idealism is understood not only as an old position at best carrying some historical interest, but as a very implausible and alien one to the intellectual identity of the analytic tradition.² Scholarship of recent years (Hylton, Baldwin) has shown how this picture is oversimplified and does not take into account the constructive influence idealism had on both Russell and Moore. In this paper I attempt to show how Moore's early emancipation from Bradley's absolute idealism presupposes a fundamental adherence to certain theses of absolute idealism itself. In particular, I argue that the idea of an immediate epistemic access to concepts and propositions that Moore endorses in his platonic atomism (Hylton) is a reworking of a form of

¹For example Moore (1942).

²We can find signs of this attitude some years later in analytic philosophers of the second generation. In his autobiography, Peter Geach writes: "I made little of [my father's philosophy books], but I remember in particular Bradley's *Appearance and Reality*. The work bewildered me; there were hardly any words I did not know, and the sentences were simply constructed, but I could not tell what it all meant. However, I formed the general impression that the author was a wicked man who worshipped a false God called the Absolute" (quoted in Candlish 2007, 21).

epistemic realism already present in Bradley. Epistemic realism is the conjunction of two theses: i) reality is independent of any constructive work of the human mind; ii) reality is immediately (non-discursively) accessible to knowledge; I suggest that this twofold thesis is endorsed by Bradley but detachable from his further ontological commitments to monism (there is one individual thing) and idealism (reality is spiritual). I suggest that Moore's early idealist phase (1897) should be understood as an attempt at isolating this thesis in Bradley against Kant's transcendental idealism. But it is on the background of an invariant adherence to it that we should understand Moore's later rejection of monism and idealism (1898-9) through his anti-psychologism. This general epistemic attitude structures Moore's early philosophical development and is subject to significant modifications without being abandoned.³

2. The Basic Contrast: Subjective versus Absolute Idealism

There are unmistakable signs that in 1897, the time Moore wrote the first version of *The Metaphysical basis of Ethics*,⁴ he was an admirer of Bradley. He declares in the preface:

with Dr. Caird's consistent use of the "unity of consciousness"... I am prevented from sympathising very much by my far greater agreement with Mr. F.H. Bradley's general philosophical attitude.

³I am aware that in individuating a bradleyan influence on the young Moore I am not breaking new ground. I take the main novelty of this paper to consist in finding in bradleyan *monism* the specific "bridge" Moore used during his idealist phase to overcome kantianism, but partly also in insisting that Moore's break with Kant is historically more momentous than his break with Bradley.

⁴I am here referring to the first of two versions—with the same title of *The Metaphysical Basis of Ethics*—Moore wrote to obtain a Fellowship for the Trinity College in years 1897 and 1898. The first attempt was unsuccessful. One year later Moore presented a new modified version and, thanks also to Sidgwick's support, was awarded with a six years Prize Fellowship. Both dissertations are now published in G. E. Moore (2011).

It is to Mr. Bradley's "Principles of Logic" and "Appearance and Reality" (2nd. Edn. 1897) that I chiefly owe my conception of the fundamental problems of Metaphysics (Moore 2011, 4).

Yet if one were to look for an explicit endorsement of what, in the "The Refutation of Idealism" (1903), is taken to be the general conclusion about the universe that Idealism is said to hold—namely that reality is *spiritual*—one would be left wanting. That in 1897 Moore was a follower and admirer of Bradley is rather indirectly shown by other features, including his sympathies for the distinction between *appearances* and *reality*, for the thesis about the *unreality of time*, and for the thesis that *reality* is, as a whole, *good*. These signs make an obvious case for categorizing Moore's 1897 period as his "idealist" phase (Baldwin 2008). Yet the absence of any explicit conclusion about the spiritual nature of the universe or of what, again in "The Refutation of Idealism", is taken to be a necessary condition of *all* Idealisms—the proposition that "whatever is, is experienced" (Moore 1903, 26)—makes it the more pressing to ask how Moore's early "idealism" should actually be qualified.

My suggestion is that we should understand his 1897 work as an attempt at isolating a certain ontological and epistemic *model* in Bradley that is neutral with respect to the question about the ultimate nature of reality (mental or nonmental?) that separates idealists from nonidealists.⁵ That question, it seems, does not receive direct attention by Moore until his anti-psychologist arguments are fully developed post 1898 ("The Metaphysical Basis of Ethics", "The Nature of Judgement" 1899, "The Refutation of Idealism" 1903). The reason why no explicit commitment to idealism appears in his 1897 work, then, is that idealism is left in

⁵A certain position is idealist, if it holds that there is only one *kind* of nature and that this is *mental* (or *spiritual*), and nonidealist if it denies at least one of the two conjuncts. The first conjunct should not be confused with *monism*, the thesis that there is only one *individual thing*, for the thesis that there is only one *kind* of nature is obviously compatible with the existence of more than one individual thing with that kind of nature.

the background as an unchallenged assumption, replaced by an interest in a move that Bradley's idealism allows against Kant's transcendental idealism.

The question, then, is what of Bradley's idealism interested Moore in 1897. The answer has to start with a distinction between kinds of idealism. As Hylton (1990) has suggested, *all* kinds of idealism depend, at some level, on accepting a transition from the necessary structure of the mind to the necessary structure of reality. But one could take this to be just a *necessary* condition for a position to be idealist. One could then distinguish varieties of idealism by looking at what other conditions allow us to reach what more specific conclusions about the nature of reality and its relation to knowledge.

One possibility is what both Bradley and early Moore refer to as *subjective idealism*. It is unclear whether such a position corresponds to any historically extant position, although at times Moore makes allusions to Berkeley. I will not attach too much significance to these references and will here mention Berkeley only to illustrate the general point Bradley and Moore are after. In outline, such a position assumes a distinction between *subject* and *object* and then claims that the object has to depend, for its existence, on the subject. Notoriously this takes the following shape in Berkeley: from the formula "to be is to be experienced" we can say that we only perceive our own ideas, which, with the additional premise that we also perceive ordinary objects, leads to the conclusion that ordinary objects are only *ideas*. Ordinary objects, then, turn out to be *ideas* whose existence depends on our mind conceiving of them. Although, perhaps, not argued explicitly by Berkeley, his is a *dualistic* view, which, within the realm of the mental, claims that there are both *minds* (thinking things) and *ideas* (things conceived of).

Now, of course, if this satisfies the necessary condition for idealism, because it claims the structure of reality to be dependent on the structure of the mind, the argument from illusion suggests that a more restricted, fine grained, notion of "reality" is

available, a notion capable of accounting for its difference with what we usually name “dreams”, “chimeras” or “perceptual illusions”. On the outlined position, if all we can ever be in touch with are our own “ideas”, there would be no recognizable difference between hallucinating a flying pink elephant in front of me and seeing the existing glass of water on my desk. Of course, within berkeleyan idealism we have the tools to draw such a distinction. Some of the ideas we conceive of have a special status. Their special status consists in being not simply “conceived by us”, but also in being caused by God to be conceived by us. Their origin in God allows these ideas to display features of steadiness, vivacity, and order that illusions don’t have, thereby preserving a sense, within berkeleyan idealism, to the distinction between reality and illusion.

If one were interested in understanding, beyond the general spiritual character of reality, how to offer a list of necessary and jointly sufficient conditions for the property of being real-as-opposed-to-illusory, one would need to explain God’s role in the bringing about of these ideas. This opens up a cluster of questions about how some ideas can be both conceived by God and by us, and be the *same* ideas, but we don’t need to dwell on this specific berkeleyan problem here. In spite of these berkeleyan qualifications, in fact, *subjective idealism* has to maintain that *knowledge of what is real* is a relation between a (human) mind and ideas which are *conceived by* that mind. What is important to emphasize is that *subjective idealism* claims that there is an active and, in a sense, *creative* and *productive* role of the *human mind* in any act of knowledge, precisely because the coming into being of the known thing depends on that thing being conceived by that mind. I will call this *epistemic subjectivism*. Epistemic subjectivism claims that for something to be a case of knowledge, its content has to depend on the human mind actively giving a contribution to it.

Bradley’s idealism is different from the subjective genre and denies epistemic subjectivism. I will quickly provide a brief ex-

planation of Bradley’s idealism to provide an understanding of its difference with *subjective idealism*. But we can momentarily gesture at the following. Whereas Berkeley could make sense of reality-as-opposed-to-illusion by seeing it constituted by ideas (although special), Bradley never thought of “ideas” as proper candidates for the notion of reality-as-opposed-to-illusion. In fact, for Bradley, ultimate reality cannot be made up of anything resembling human thinking or the product of a mind or, finally, a thinking substance (who thinks of something). All these, together with many other candidates, for reasons that will be apparent, present features that are incompatible with what is set out as the logical structure of reality.

This structure, as we will see, is such that not only it expunges *ideas* as possible constituents, but also the very distinction between *subject and object* that subjective idealism starts with. There is an important sense in which reality in Bradley is to be thought of as something radically different from what subjective idealism suggests it to be. In particular, Bradley’s qualification is that reality is neither a bundle of “ideas” nor a “thinking thing” but that it is *experience itself* or, more accurately, that it is a *non-owned-experience* where all contradictory aspects of appearances are joined in concord.⁶

This is an enigmatic notion which will require further comment, but I am initially interested in two features of Bradley’s view. First, it starts with a denial that reality is structured in terms of *ideas* which are a product or creation of any mind, not even as a logically necessary condition for its constitution. This negation amounts to the first defining feature of *epistemic realism*: reality is independent of any constructive work of the human mind (in fact, it is independent of the constructive work of *any* mind, since it is not a construction or product). Second, because “ideas” are not the ultimate constituents of reality, a relation to them cannot constitute knowledge. Because knowledge is not a

⁶See also Mander (1994, 31).

relation between a subject and (some of) its ideas, it cannot, *a fortiori*, be a relation between a human mind and (some of) its products. This is a negation of *epistemic subjectivism*: being in touch with ideas is neither necessary nor sufficient to count as a genuine case of knowledge. The consequences of this second negation in Bradley are far reaching, as we shall see. They lead one to espouse what I take to be the second defining feature of *epistemic realism*, namely that reality is *non-mediately* accessible to knowledge and, in particular, that it is accessible by a special *intuition* rather than by *judgment* or *thought*.

Notice, however, that both claims of *epistemic realism* are neutral on several issues. For instance, denying that reality is not made up of ideas and hence that a relation to them is not knowledge, does not say anything about whether reality is one or many or about whether it is spiritual or material. Bradley's position is that reality is "a single and all-inclusive experience" (1893a, 146), which is a distinctly monist and idealist position, but this does not follow necessarily from epistemic realism. One could, for example, claim that reality is independent of the constructive work of the (human) mind because it is made up of a *plurality* of *non-mental* items. But epistemic realism also does not say whether the mind's *immediate* access to reality is to be thought of as a kind of *identity* between reality and the cognizant mind (Bradley) or as a bare presence of non-mental items to the passive (non-creative) mind (realist Moore). Bradley's position is that proper knowledge consists in a form of "higher intuition"—different from judgment and thought—where there is no difference between what is known and what does the act of knowing, which is an expression of the first alternative. But again, this does not follow necessarily from epistemic realism. One could, for instance, claim that the immediate access is to be thought of as an intuition of what is radically different from what does the act of intuiting.

I mention these alternatives because, as it is apparent, they constitute the two different ways of satisfying the requirements of *epistemic realism* that Bradley and Moore's early *platonistic atom-*

ism may be seen as offering. Locating these two positions at the extremes, one can take Moore's idiosyncratic position in 1897 as a transition phase, where he was attempting to be an epistemic realist by still relying on some of Bradley's own ways of satisfying the requirements. This is why what mostly emerges from his 1897 Dissertation is, I believe, an attempt at isolating epistemic realism itself, rather than an interest in the specific form it takes in Bradley. This attempt relies still importantly on Bradley's *monism*, and not so much on his idealism, but already shows an aspiration towards Moore's platonic atomism.

3. Bradley's Absolute Idealism: Monism and Intuition

I will here offer a brief reconstruction of some salient features of *Appearance and Reality* that, it seems to me, were important for Moore in 1897. Bradley thought that the ordinary world—made up of chairs, tables, rivers, and forests—and our ordinary experience of it, gained through perception and thinking, are both unsatisfactory and in different degrees inadequate. Accordingly, the first half of *Appearance and Reality* is devoted to revealing the more or less explicit inadequacy that lies behind a number of ordinary concepts when we fully flesh out their consequences: the notions of relation and quality, space and time, self, causation, and activity are all unsatisfactory *appearances*. But what kind of inadequacy does Bradley have in mind? The primary guidance is the "absolute criterion" according to which "[u]ltimate reality is such that it does not contradict itself" (Bradley 1893a, 136). This general overarching principle is taken by Bradley as self-evident, as it is suggested by the only laconic argument given to support it: if we try to question or doubt such a principle, we are tacitly presupposing its validity, because any proof of its falsity would need to be non-contradictory. But there is also a less explicit consequence that ties the notion of non-contradiction to the notion of substance, or individual thing. Bradley seems to assume that

for anything to be real, it has to be a completely independent and self-contained substance. And for anything to be so self-contained and independent it has to be non-contradictory. The immediate upshot is that we can draw an obvious distinction between reality and appearances: appearances are in some sense intellectually unsatisfactory or contradictory, reality is not.

From the “absolute criterion”, Bradley’s method of inquiry follows straightforwardly: he only has to show how a given candidate produces contradictions to exclude it from his technical notion of reality. A special place in this method needs to be assigned to his widely mentioned and much controversial argument against relations. Because *relations*—as many other candidates—are inherently contradictory, they cannot have that character of full reality that belongs to a perfectly consistent and autonomous substance (or they cannot be the terms by which we can intelligibly characterize reality).

The story of this argument has partially distorted its sense. Moore and Russell implied that Bradley was attaching great significance to a distinction between *internal* and *external* relations and that because external relations are contradictory, one should reduce all relations to internal ones. Against this reduction, Moore offered his own arguments in his famous paper “External and Internal Relations” (1919–20). However, Bradley was hardly interested in such a reduction. On this version of the story it would seem as if Bradley took the notion of *internal* relation to be less problematic than that of an *external* one, but if one looks carefully at *Appearance and Reality* one is struck by its thoroughness in declaring problematic internal relations as well (1893a, 31). In fact, a better diagnosis of what is happening is that Bradley is offering a series of arguments, working as a team (see Candlish 2007), that are meant to target the co-implicated notions of *quality* (or term) and *relation*, which are essential to our ordinary ways of representing reality.

The upshot of those arguments is in fact very general: “the conclusion to which I am brought is that a relational way of

thought—*anyone* that moves by the machinery of terms and relations—must give appearance and not truth” (1893a, 33, my emphasis). I will not enter into the details of the two distinct arguments here, one targeting *internal relations* and the other targeting *external ones*, because what I am mainly interested in is the significance of this general attack on relational thought (which is expanded on by other arguments in several places in Bradley’s work). In a sense, thinking that qualities and relations have a proper autonomous ontological status is a mistake for Bradley and hence there is a sense in which none of them can be a constituent of the fabric of the world, nor can they be the means by which proper knowledge is articulated.⁷

The upshot of the argument against relations is hence that relations and qualities (together with everything that requires them) are “not real”. But can we really say that Mount Everest, my car, and the former being greater than the latter are all “un-real”? Bradley does not want to completely deny reality to these entities, which is why he endorses what I will call the principle of “appearances-in-reality”. This principle says that what appears, for the mere fact that it does so, *is real* (or simply *is*). There is a sense in which appearances belong to reality. But again, how? How can this principle be compatible with the absolute criterion according to which if something is contradictory it is not real? Bradley’s reasoning is as follows: we might think that from an application of the absolute criterion, we are entitled to divide everything there is into two realms: the contradictory appearances and the consistent reality. Some philosophers (like Kant) made use of such a distinction and deemed true reality (the Thing in

⁷In another sense, and with other arguments, Bradley (see his *Principles of Logic*) emphasizes the intrinsic inadequacy of relational thought as an epistemic failure. Representing reality by means of thought is an enterprise destined to failure because of the very terms in which it is carried out. Knowledge cannot be achieved by means of judgments and thought. The apparent tension here about whether he argues against an ontological characterization or against *how* we know the world (an epistemic critique) is solved by the identity of knowledge and its content on his model of “higher intuition”.

Itself) unknowable. But as soon as we draw this distinction between realms, according to Bradley, we get into trouble. First, the notion of something existing and unknowable is senseless (if it's really unknowable we wouldn't know that it exists); but more importantly, if we posit appearances on one side and reality on the other, we immediately have to deal with the problem of *how they are related*, even if all we could mention was their numerical difference (the idea of two unrelated things seems plainly unintelligible or self-defeating). The mere fact that we think of reality and appearances as two, as plural, implies that they are somehow related. And being related, even in this minimal sense, leads to unacceptable contradictions. The conclusion is that appearances and reality cannot be thought of as two entities but as some kind of *unity*. Appearances and Reality constitute a special whole and the former cannot be thought of as real if not as part of this organic whole.

A further qualification is however required. Because this organic whole should not be thought as held together by relations, what we have to say is that the plural aspects of appearances are present in the whole reality in a *non-relational* way. Appearances will have to be included in reality in a harmonious way, by avoiding relations and contradictions: "The universe is one in this sense that its differences exist harmoniously within one whole, beyond which there is nothing" (Bradley 1893a, 144). This allows to maintain that reality as a whole is not contradictory and also that appearances belong to reality. Rather than a defense of internal relations, then, one should see Bradley as defending a holistic *non-relational* character of reality. In this respect, Moore and Russell's attribution to Bradley of a reduction of all relations to internal ones is non-justifiable because Bradley is very careful in saying that the problem concerns all relations, but it is perhaps understandable because, even if inaccurate as a reading of Bradley, the reduction to internal relations may seem more intelligible than Bradley's idea of a non-relational conjunction of all

differences in one.⁸ As we shall see in a moment, Moore, even in the moment of his greatest philosophical proximity to Bradley, will never clearly commit to the bradleyan holistic *non-relational* character of appearances' union with reality.

Two observations are relevant here. First it should be clear how this kind of *monism* offers a radically different picture of reality than what subjective idealism offers. Reality is not made up of "ideas". It is an encompassing whole which cannot be identified with *any* (type or token) of the appearances it is made of. Reality is made up of all appearances, but cannot be identified with, nor reduced to, any of them. One way to apply this point is to say that reality is always something above and beyond any particular type of candidate we might want to pick as its fundamental constituent. No type of appearance can exhaust its nature. So the mistake of subjective idealism is that of taking a certain kind of object ("ideas") and believing that it can be considered the ultimate brick of the universe. This gives us the first aspect of epistemic realism as a particular application of a general point: because reality is none of its constituents taken separately, it cannot be a product of the human mind. And yet, secondly, because, in a sense, reality is given *in* the whole of appearances and cannot be a separate and distinct realm, there is room for the possibility of an epistemic access to it. On Bradley's model, that is, one does not need to wonder how one can know something that is entirely beyond our knowing capacities, for reality is given in the same ontological space in which appearances are given. These two aspects, I believe, were very important for Moore in 1897.

⁸Another aspect to consider in this respect is the very likely possibility that Moore and Russell, regarding relations, were reacting to Joachim's version of idealism, rather than Bradley's. In "On the nature of Truth" (1907) Russell delivers his attack on internal relations against Joachim's book *The Nature of Truth* and Baldwin (2008, 28–35) has shown some evidence that Joachim (a pupil of Bradley) might in fact have been responsible for defending a reduction of all relations to internal relations.

4. Moore's "Idealism"

Moore's project in the 1897 *Dissertation* was a relatively complex and ambitious one. The central aim was that of finding a metaphysical basis for his platonic conception of the notion of good. Although Kant's work was crucial in order to set out the philosophical agenda, his metaphysics of morals was irremediably contaminated by a subjective vein that made his notion of the rational will a very improper candidate for the objective foundation of good. A much more compelling contender at that time was nothing less than Bradley's Absolute. Moore's own conclusion in the *Dissertation* is that the Real is the only object that can be fully good (whereas appearances have different degrees of evil and good), a thesis strongly reminiscent of Bradley's claim that the Absolute's perfection and harmony justifies the attribution of goodness to it.⁹ Despite the ethical framework, however, the overarching theme is the anti-subjectivist opposition to Kant which is primarily worked out in epistemology and then extended to the metaphysics of morals (much less weight will Moore give to the metaphysics of morals in the 1898 *Dissertation*). For our purposes, then, the greatest interest lies in Moore's discussion of Kant's "too psychological standpoint" (Moore 2011, 64) in epistemology and its overcoming thanks to Bradley.

The appropriate focus of interest is hence Moore's discussion of the epistemic access to the Ding an Sich. Although he praises Kant's claim regarding the *existence* of a Reality beyond Appearances—and its foundational role towards the empirical world—he considers mistaken Kant's idea of an *unknowable* Thing in Itself. There is no evidence that Moore is here think-

⁹See Moore (2011, 83) and Bradley (1893a, 430). The *Dissertation* is enriched by several other themes: Moore is interested in understanding the relation between the phenomenal and the noumenal through Kant's notion of Transcendental Freedom, he dwells briefly upon the unreality of time, presents an embryonic version of the naturalistic fallacy and discusses Sidgwick's version of hedonism.

ing of Bradley's arguments against the Thing in Itself (as we have seen, Bradley (1893a, 127–32) thinks that something existing and unknowable is senseless and thinks that the division in two realms implies relations which are contradictory), but he certainly shares the same skeptical attitude towards the notion of an existing yet unknowable reality. One could say that, on Moore's view, Kant faces the following problem: how can he say that there is the thing in itself and deny that this is knowable? Moore's solution will be: I'll give you a "bradleyan" characterization of the relation between appearances and reality which, together with the premise that we know appearances, will grant that we can know reality. Moore's argument comes from a longer discussion of Kant's epistemology but it can be elicited easily. In discussing the limits of our Reason, Kant presupposes a distinction between the mind and the world as it is in itself, but then says that certain *a priori* concepts, which are discovered by an investigation of the human faculties, structure necessarily the content of our experience. Thus, Kant starts with a promising distinction but seems to focus only on the mind's contribution (its creative function) in accounting for the content of knowledge and seems unable to grant that this work of the mind is not all there is in the content of our knowledge. His position is psychological because it makes the content of knowledge dependent on human faculties rather than on the independent world. Taking the initial opposition between human faculties and world as exclusive, the consequence is that we are prevented from having the world presenting itself to our knowledge:

The investigation of knowledge, upon such a presupposition of its opposition to reality, can obviously lead to nothing but to its confinement to Appearance. When our knowledge is from the beginning investigated as belonging to us as opposed to the world, it can never be brought into relation with the world. . . The world is from the beginning for Kant a Ding an Sich; and, in this sense, which is its primary and explicit one, the conception is totally invalid (Moore 2011, 33).

Indeed, Moore claims explicitly that the kantian view runs the risk of being just too “berkeleyan”:

But by this too psychological statement of the nature of knowledge, Kant did in reality lay himself open to the charge of Berkeleian Idealism, which he indignantly repudiates by asserting the existence of the Ding an Sich. For he has no answer to the question: How do we *know* that these conditions imposed by our *knowing* faculty are universal? (Moore 2011, 30).

How, that is, can Kant show that the content of our knowledge is not *entirely* subjective? On the basis of the labels I have introduced above I think we should diagnose Kant’s problem, on Moore’s behalf, in the following terms. It would be unfair to represent Kant as a flat out proponent of *subjective idealism*. Kant makes a claim to the existence of a Thing in Itself whose nature does not depend on any work of the human mind and he actually thinks it plays an indirect role in constituting the content of our experience. Thus Kant would have the tools to satisfy the first requirement of *epistemic realism*, namely that there is a reality that is completely independent of the human constructive power. Kant seems also to hold epistemic subjectivism, the thesis that for something to be a case of knowledge, its content has necessarily to depend on the human mind actively giving a contribution to it.

However, in positing the notion of a Thing in Itself that is prevented from “appearing” to us, Moore argues, Kant is in danger of actually holding a stronger epistemic thesis, the thesis that the contribution of the mind is not only necessary for constituting the content of knowledge, but also that it is its only source. If the contribution of the human mind is necessary for the content of knowledge and knowledge can never be *of* the Thing in Itself, it follows that the contribution of the human mind is not only necessary, but the only source of knowledge. But this stronger version of epistemic subjectivism is virtually indistinguishable from subjective idealism, the idea that what we cognize in knowledge is simply and exclusively a *product* of the human mind (as

it is the case in Berkeley). Kant’s position is seen by Moore as an unstable position wavering between the first requirement of *epistemic realism* (there is a reality independent of human knowledge) and *subjective idealism*.

As we have seen, this instability depends, on Moore’s diagnosis, both on holding that the Thing in Itself is unknowable and on holding epistemic subjectivism. Thus his strategy is to work primarily on the relation between appearances and reality, showing that they are connected much more intimately than Kant supposes. It is in order to solve this problem, it seems to me, that Moore offers a reworking of bradleyan monism. But if they are intimately connected, and it is true that we can know appearances, it follows that we can thereby know reality, that reality which is independent of us. This, in turn, means that the contribution of the human mind is now moot in explaining the content of knowledge and we can drop *epistemic subjectivism*.

How, then, are Appearances and Reality related? Some of the difficulties in understanding Moore’s position here come from the fact that he lays out the terms of the problem in a Kantian framework, only to attempt a “bradleyan” solution to it. In Kant, especially in his discussion of Transcendental Freedom, Moore finds the resources to pose a dilemma. We could think of the relation between appearances and reality as either *causal* or *logical*. On the first alternative, which is the one chosen by Kant in describing the freedom of human beings as the power to begin a new causal chain, we can say that Reality is an existing object, a substance that brings other objects into existence, but we would imply that Reality is related only “externally” to Appearances (in the same way in which they are related to one another), it would be a separate and independent object, structurally “beyond” them, as the Kantian Thing in Itself actually is. Moreover, if the relation is merely causal, even if we could “know” that Reality was *the cause* of Appearances, this knowledge could never possess the degree of certainty that knowledge of a conceptual implication could have.

On the other hand, if we see Reality and Appearances as related by means of *logical implication*—which Moore takes to be the necessary connection between a part (of a concept) and its whole—we could claim that Reality is related “internally” to Appearances, that it is necessarily implicated by them and hence we could claim epistemic access to Reality with a degree of certainty that being merely the cause of Appearances would not guarantee; however, logical implication is merely a *formal* connection, and thus it would be incapable of showing that Reality *exists as an object* (a substance). One could know that it is the necessary ground of Appearances, but would be unable to claim it exists *qua* object. The solution to this dilemma is to argue that we should take the relation between Appearances and Reality to be a *hybrid* relation between the *causal* and the *logical* one. Logical implication guarantees necessity and causal relation guarantees the proper “ontological weight” to Reality. In this context we find Moore’s idiosyncratic endorsement of Bradley’s monism:

On this view, therefore, it is unnecessary to deny that the Real World appears to Intuition—our own experience. . . There is no longer any need for conceiving Reality as external to all particular Appearances in the same way in which one Appearance is external to another—a false conception, which seems to have led Kant to call the Reality a cause. It is indeed their “ground”; but that relation is to be conceived not merely like that of formal logic nor like that of cause and effect, but as something between the two. The Reality is not an Individual separated from particulars as they are from one another, not yet a mere universal from which they might be deduced; it is an Individual both implied and existing in them. It is “transcendental”, in the sense in which the categories are said to be so, but no longer “transcendent” since nothing can be so (Moore 2011, 35).

I don’t think we should care too much about the plausibility (or even intelligibility) of this strange view Moore arrives at (one year later he will already reject the possibility of this hybrid relation). What is interesting about it is rather that it echoes emphatically Bradley’s absolute idealism, without being a faithful or accurate representation of it.

The first thing to notice is that Bradley’s *monism*, according to which Reality and Appearances are a “unity”, is carefully couched by Bradley, as I tried to show above, as a “non-relational” unity. This depends, as I said, on Bradley’s thorough rejection of relations. In Bradley the mode of conjunction of appearances in reality is such that saying that they are, in any sense, “related” to reality (even just through their numerical difference) is a mistake. Moore, however, seems to capture this unity by using some kind of “relational” language: Reality is “implied and existing” in Appearances. He seems to capture the spirit of Bradley’s monism without being careful about its letter (perhaps a sign of his tendency to think of reality as made up of entities and relations rather than as that ineffable nonrelational whole cherished by Bradley). But this seemingly bradleyan monism, at this time, is enough to do what he needs it for. Monism, in fact, expressed in this combination of reality as “implied and existing” in appearances guarantees to Moore the possibility of defending the twofold thesis of epistemic realism. If it is true that we know appearances, that they appear to our intuition (a premise that is hard to question), and it is true that reality is “implied and existing” in them, we can infer that we *can* know that reality which, as Kant himself had seen, exists independently of our creative capacities. Is Moore interested in *monism per se*? It seems to me that monism is here invoked not so much *qua* monism, but because it was the best tool Moore had available at the time for defending epistemic realism. Within the varieties of extant idealism (among which there are subjective idealism and Kant’s transcendental idealism), Bradley’s was the only one capable of offering a route to epistemic realism.

Is Moore’s position a form of *idealism*? Or rather: is Moore thinking of this single reality-in-appearances as a mental or non-mental entity? I think the most cautious answer is that Moore gives no clear answer, but that the little he offers marks a tension with Bradley’s idealism. His recurrent appreciation of Bradley could support the thought that he may be thinking of this reality

as, in some sense, spiritual, although we have no explicit textual evidence for it in this or other works of the same period.¹⁰ Yet, the little he offers in his cursory mention of the work of “intuition” is already in tension with Bradley’s commitment to idealism. Bradley’s commitment to idealism is captured, as I suggested initially, by saying that reality is a “non-owned *experience*”. Such an idealist view, as I said above, is compatible with epistemic realism because it can maintain that reality is not the product of the human mind and that it is immediately accessible to knowledge, by insisting that there is *no difference* between reality *qua* content of knowledge and the perfected act of knowing it.¹¹

In this sense it is an “experience” where there is no difference between the knowing mind and the known reality. But Moore does not seem prone to show an interest in this particular idealistic aspect of Bradley’s view. In fact, his very way of mentioning intuition may even suggest his later conception of it, where what we intuit or perceive immediately is something whose nature is entirely distinct from the act of knowing (act/object). But of course Moore does not say this (nor had he developed the act/object distinction yet) and his claim that the Real World “appears” to our intuition could instead be developed along loose Bradleyan lines. This would however prove difficult, because no clear distinction between the “intuition” and what it is an intuition *of* should be recognizably in place in a faithful account of Bradley’s view on knowledge of the Real.

All things considered, it seems to me we have too little to justify either any clear departure from Bradley’s idealism, or any clear endorsement of it. This is why I think the safest conclusion is that idealism *per se* goes simply unchallenged in Moore’s early view. This is however not surprising if we assume that Moore is inter-

ested at this stage only in isolating epistemic realism. Because Bradley’s view, even in his fully fleshed out idealistic features, is compatible with epistemic realism, Moore is not yet subject to any particular pressure to argue against Bradley’s idealism.

5. Moore’s Realism

If what I have argued above is on the right track, we should conclude that Moore’s position in 1897 should be understood as an attempt at isolating epistemic realism without being committed fully to Bradley’s absolute idealism. In particular, Moore works with a version of *monism* that allows him to escape the traps of Kantian epistemic subjectivism without committing clearly to *idealism*. The transition to Moore’s novel platonic atomism, which will begin one year later in 1898, carries significant changes, but maintains the structural features of the *epistemic realism*—in fact it makes them more apparent and distinctly Moorean—he already tried to isolate in Bradley. It is hence worth glancing at how epistemic realism is maintained while, in the foreground, the infamous break with idealism takes place. In accounting for how Moore can defend epistemic realism in his novel metaphysics, I will rely on two elements: his theory of propositions and his conception of the transparent mind. These, I shall argue, are the crucial elements that allow Moore to be an epistemic realist at this time.

The central move against idealism is recognizably in action in “The Nature of Judgment” (1899), although it appears already in the 1898 Dissertation.¹² It is Moore’s anti-psychologist argument in the theory of meaning against Bradley.¹³ For the purposes of

¹⁰Moore’s “idealist” phase includes only three writings: the 1897 Dissertation, the article “In What Sense, if Any Do Past and Future Time Exist?” (1897a), and a review of Léon Brunschvig’s *La modalité du jugement* (1897b).

¹¹This is a Bradleyan thesis I have no space to illustrate in full here. But it is presented in Bradley (1893a; 1893b; 1909) and I sketch it in the next section.

¹²“The Nature of Judgment” was originally a portion of the 1898 Dissertation. See Moore (2011).

¹³The origins of Moore’s anti-psychologism are disputed. In his influential work, Hylton (1990) argues that Moore’s anti-psychologist arguments are inherited from Bradley’s own anti-psychologist arguments against the empiricists (especially in Bradley 1883), whereas Preti (2008) suggests that they

this paper I am not crucially interested in the credentials of the argument,¹⁴ for, in spite of its possible weakness and distortion of Bradley, Moore does have a clearly anti-idealist position which he now thinks he can support with that argument. The primary tenet of his novel position is that concepts and propositions are entities whose nature is entirely independent of *any* mind, they are neither part of a mental content, nor produced by a mind; they are rather substantial entities on their own. In a passage rich in consequences for the history of analytic philosophy he says:

A proposition is composed not of words, not yet of thoughts, but of concepts. Concepts are possible objects of thought; but that is no definition of them. It merely states that they may come into relation with a thinker; and in order that they *may* do anything, they must already *be* something. It is indifferent to their nature whether anybody thinks them or not. They are incapable of change; and the relation into which they enter with the knowing subject implies no action or reaction (Moore 1899, 179).

Moore is here voicing his realism (platonism) about meaning. Words and sentences express concepts and propositions, and the former are a “*genus per se*, irreducible to anything else” (Moore 1899, 178–89). His position is also atomistic in that he takes propositions to be formed by composition from more fundamental and irreducible elements (concepts). A striking feature of Moore’s account of propositions, to which I will briefly return in the conclusion, is that he seems to pay no attention to what we might call the logical form of the proposition (not even in terms of a basic subject-predicate form), where the different roles of the different components are articulated. “Concept” seems to be just the term for any simple component of a proposition. What matters here, however, is that concepts and propo-

come from the Brentano school, from which Moore inherited the distinction act/content/object.

¹⁴For a critical discussion of the argument, which shows how Moore likely misunderstood Bradley, see Baldwin (2008, 14–15).

sitions are said to belong to a platonic realm of *being*, which is out of time and space and within which concepts and propositions are immutable. Some of them, we shall see, *exist* also in time. With these claims Moore is already rejecting idealism about meaning—meaning is neither a part of a mental content nor the result of the constructive work of the mind—and he lays the ground for rejecting monism. Concepts, he argues, are the only *substances* there are, and since there are several of them which combine in several (true) propositions, there is more than one substance in the universe.

But the introduction of platonism about meaning does not yet fully disclose Moore’s view. What makes this platonism distinctly Moorean is primarily the suggestion that reality, inclusive of the ordinary objects we touch and hear and feel, can in fact be *reduced* to concepts and propositions and hence that the real is ultimately and exclusively made up of concepts and propositions. One could perhaps contrast this with Frege’s platonism about *senses*. In his notorious metaphor in “Sense and Reference” (1892), Frege claims that the objectivity of a sense can be compared to the objectivity of the image of the moon (where the moon itself is the referent) running through the telescope and creating as many different retinal images as are the observers (the subjective realm of individual consciousnesses); being, that is, the same objective item available for many subjective representations. But for Frege (see also “The Thought” 1918) the realm of the *sense* is, as it were a “third” (objective) realm, alongside the inner (subjective) world of individual consciousnesses and the outer (objective) world of referents. Although these realms interact in complex ways (as the telescope example illustrates), there are no, as it were, relations of intra-reduction among them, each realm preserves its distinctness.

On Moore’s picture, on the other hand, from the premise that concepts and propositions are platonic entities, he reaches the somewhat startling conclusion that everything that there is is made up of concepts and propositions. In order to appreciate

why Moore held this view—and to comment further on the comparison with Frege - we have to glance at his theory of truth. This is important not only for the sake of an accurate account of Moore's position, but also because it will help us understand the nature of that independent reality that, at this time, Moore took to satisfy the first requirement of *epistemic realism*.

One can conveniently start from the observation that a proposition differs from a concept in that "it may be true or false" (Moore 1899, 179) and from here pose the question of the nature of truth. Like other of his contemporaries (like Bradley and Frege) Moore rejected the correspondence theory of truth. In "The Nature of Judgment" (1899, henceforth NJ) he introduces a suspicion against correspondence by noticing that mathematical truths like $2+2=4$ are true quite independently of whether they correspond to anything existing. He then proceeds to offer an argument on the following lines (it should be noted that "judgment" and "proposition" are interchangeable terms for Moore):

[a judgment] must be true or false, but. . . its truth or falsehood cannot depend on anything else whatever, reality for instance, or the world in space and time. For both these must be supposed to exist, in some sense, if the truth of our judgment is to depend upon them; and then it turns out that the truth of our judgment depends not on them, but on the judgment that they, being such and such, exist. But this judgment cannot, in its turn, depend on anything else, for its truth or falsehood: its truth or falsehood must be immediate properties of its own, not dependent upon any relation it may have to something else (Moore 1899, 192).

The argument is slightly compressed, but it can be rendered as follows. Suppose truth is some kind of correspondence to reality. Then we must say that the reality to which a true proposition is said to correspond *exists with such and such qualities* (otherwise what would the proposition correspond to?). But if we say so, what we are doing is actually using a *proposition* to "talk about" the thing that the true proposition is said to correspond to ("existence is itself a concept, it is something which we mean" Moore

1899, 180). Briefly, if we try to say that this thing exists and what it is, we shall inevitably resort to using a *proposition* that says that it exists with such and such qualities. But now, what else could *this* proposition correspond to? Of course not an existent (a "thing"), since we are defining the existent by means of a proposition, and would hence fall into a vicious circle (Moore 1899, 181). It can only mean that there is nothing outside it to which it can correspond. But this means that *its* truth does not consist in correspondence but must be an immediate property of its own. If this is the case, the further conclusion (which Moore does not draw explicitly in this passage) is that we no longer need to say that our original true proposition corresponds to this thing, which we now recognize to be itself an immediately true proposition (rather than "a thing"): we can simply say that it is *identical* to it. A true proposition and the state of affairs to which it is merely said to correspond are in fact the same thing:

A truth differs in no respect from the reality to which it was supposed merely to correspond: e.g. the truth that I exist differs in no respect from the corresponding reality—my existence. So far, indeed, from truth being defined by reference to reality, reality can only be defined by reference to truth (Moore 1902b, 717).

There are undoubtedly some problematic aspects to Moore's theory of truth. One of them is the resulting picture of material objects, which are identified with true existential propositions. Baldwin has argued that the view might appear plausible if we interpret it as saying that material objects are just sums of their properties and then treat these sums as conjunctions of true propositions concerning the existence of a property at points of space and time (Baldwin 2008, 42). But he has also noted that there are unavoidable flaws in Moore's conception, not ultimately having to do with the difficulty of applying such a theory to attributive concepts like "heavy", which cannot be added as a further conjunct to the sum, and about which Moore seems to have overlooked the difficulty (as his example of "Heaviness exists here and now" seems to show). But without underestimating

these (and other) problems, one can certainly grasp Moore's motivation for the theory, even if the argument for it, or its details, do not withstand critical scrutiny. One can in fact understand the identity theory of truth (as Frege did without yielding to it)¹⁵ as a way of bringing the theory of correspondence to its extreme consequences. For if truth is to be a property that a proposition has in relation to some independent reality, there is a constraint on the latter for the relation of correspondence to hold. Reality must indeed be capable of "being corresponded to" and it can do so only if it displays, as it were, the same structure and nature of the proposition. One can hence think that in order to make sense of correspondence, one should think of it as "perfect" correspondence, as identity between truth-bearer and truth-maker.

This is not the place for a lengthier discussion of the theory (see [Candlish 2007](#) for a more detailed discussion), but it is undoubtedly useful to make a brief comparison with Bradley. The identity theory of truth is in fact one of those places where we see again the influence of Bradley against the background of a rejection of an aspect of his doctrine. I cannot delve into the details of Bradley's theory, but we can provide a less-than-minimal reconstruction of it. Bradley works essentially with an abstractionist picture of *thought*, exemplified in the workings of a bradleyan "judgment", which is not a moorean proposition. The idea is that, whereas in our immediate experience of the world in time we receive a mass of indistinguishable qualities meshed together, thought operates by singling out and abstracting "ideal contents" (call them "universals", "predicates", or "concepts")¹⁶—hence breaking the unity of immediate experience - and predicating them of states of affairs. The ideal content is different in nature from the reality it is predicated of. Whereas the fact is individual, exists in time, and is part of reality (in the ordinary sense), the ideal content has an "adjectival" nature, is general and sym-

¹⁵See [Frege \(1918\)](#).

¹⁶This is the step that Moore argues against at the start of NJ, by charging Bradley with psychologism.

bolic, and does not *exist* in time. As far as ordinary knowledge is concerned, we can proceed by using judgments which will try to abstract qualities from the reality given in immediate experience and predicate them back of it, in an effort to correspond to it. But no matter how well thought can approximate this correspondence, it suffers from a constitutive tension. On one side it tries to include all aspects of reality, expanding in an infinite number of judgments, but on the other, since judgments necessarily involve a departure from the immediacy or "actual life" of reality given in immediate experience, they cannot, strictly speaking, *correspond* to it.¹⁷

And so: is there a way for thought to preserve its aspiration to perfect representation (correspondence) while avoiding the tension due to its ideal nature? Bradley's answer is as simple as it is paradoxical: it should be reality itself. Thought is "infected" by the incapacity of matching reality because of its constitutive difference from it: it is, after all, an *ideal* content, abstracted from an original content given in temporal immediate experience. In order to "heal" this defect, the difference should be eliminated. But the only way to do that would be to make thought indistinguishable from reality itself: "Thought seeks to possess in its object that whole character of which it already owns the separate features. . . if the object were made perfect, it would forthwith be-

¹⁷To belabor this point just a little, we can say that Bradley's understanding of the crucial asymmetry here depends on his aversion towards abstraction. Thought is condemned to constantly falsify reality's character because it presents as distinct aspects that in reality are joined together. Even if we were able to produce a gigantic and perfectly complete conjunction of all the true statements that include all features of reality, those aspects that in reality constitute an undistinguishable whole would still be presented as separate (if I say "the apple is red" I present "apple" and "red" as two elements whereas they are unified in reality). And if we claim that reality does present different aspects, we only show that we are under the illusion generated by our own thought to see distinctions where there are none. It is this point that Bradley's lamentations on thought lacking unity, immediacy, and "actual life" are meant to highlight. See [Bradley \(1893a, 181\)](#).

come reality" (Bradley 1893a, 181). And "if truth and fact are to be one, then in some such way thought must reach its consummation. But in that consummation thought has certainly been so transformed, that to go on calling it thought seems indefensible" (Bradley 1893a, 172). One could without excessive distortion attribute to Bradley an identity theory of truth,¹⁸ but I find myself more in attunement with Candlish's proposal to attribute to him an eliminativist theory of truth.¹⁹ What Bradley, in fact, seems to be saying is that the perfect coincidence, or identity, of thought and reality just is the elimination of thought (or rather "judgements") altogether. Nothing is left of the intuition that reality is represented correctly by true thoughts (or judgements), because there is no thought left, nothing which truth could be predicated of, no, as it were, truth-apt item. We are left with that all-encompassing non-owned experience which, although grasped in a "higher intuition" is, strictly speaking, ineffable.

What matters for us is that whereas Moore is obviously attracted (and perhaps unwarily so under the influence of Bradley) by the idea of a coincidence of thought and reality, the resulting picture is different. The identity theory of truth, in fact, provides in Moore the additional premise for the conclusion that everything is propositional/conceptual in nature, a rather "un-bradleyan" conclusion. If concepts and propositions are platonic entities and a state of affairs is not different from a true proposition, we can say that reality (the world, the universe) is just the totality of true propositions. And if propositions are made up of concepts, then "[i]t seems necessary. . . to regard the world as formed of concepts" (Moore 1899, 182). In fact, given platonism about meaning and the identity theory of truth, Moore's view that everything is conceptual in nature follows. Reality is completely independent of any mind's creative power (anti-idealism) and constituted fundamentally of a plurality (anti-monism) of

true propositions, which in turn are just composed of concepts (atomism).²⁰

It is difficult to underestimate how important the theory is for Moore at this time. I now want to briefly illustrate why it is also important for my argument. Platonism about meaning, as such, does not entail epistemic realism. Consider Frege. Frege distinguishes between *sense* and *referent* and he is a platonist about *senses*. When they are expressed by indicative sentences, *senses* can be imagined as thoughts, which, roughly speaking, are ways of presenting reality. As far as reality is presented by means of a fregean sense (with truth-value true), one can say that it is presented mediately. When we know something to be the case, we are not in immediate touch with what is the case; we know what is the case under a particular representation, as it were. But now consider Moore's view. He suggests not only that propositions are platonic entities (like fregean senses are), but also, and thanks to the identity theory of truth, that true propositions are actual states of affairs. From this, it follows that the reality which

²⁰Just in order to give a more accurate qualification of this moorean reality, I shall remind that Moore held at this time a distinction between *being* and *existence*. The distinction provides the background for distinguishing two kinds of true propositions. Some truths are not, as it were, about the world in space and time. The paradigmatic case is that of mathematical truths which involve exclusively concepts which cannot exist in parts of time and are Moore's equivalent of *a priori* truths: "2+2=4 is true, whether there exist two things or not" (1899, 64). Others, as we have hinted at, are *empirical* truths about objects existing in space and time, in which case they are propositions including the concept of existence: "[a]n existent is seen to be nothing but a concept or complex of concepts standing in a unique relation to the concept of existence" (1899, 67). The upshot of this brief discussion is that, if in general we can say that reality is the set of all true propositions, we can also say that the *material* world, the one we perceive with our senses, is the set of all true *existential* propositions (those combined with the concept of existence). The distinction between being and existence hence gives us a guide to understanding how Moore was able to re-elaborate the idealist distinction between appearances and reality, while maintaining that everything that *there is* is as independent of us as bradleyan reality is, and as the first requirement of epistemic realism claims.

¹⁸See Baldwin (2008, 43).

¹⁹See Candlish (2007, 96).

is presented by means of a moorean proposition is not presented under a particular representation, it is bare reality. A moorean proposition is not a fregean thought, a way of presenting what is the case, *it* is what is the case.²¹ But this means that the relation of knowledge will be naturally cast as an *immediate* relation with reality—a true proposition. In considering Moore’s view, it is helpful to emphasize that he takes *meaning* to be the *object* of thought, rather than its content, or the articulation of how thought represents reality. But for my purposes what matters is that, given platonism about meaning and the identity theory of truth, it seems to follow that there is no role of mediation that thought (meaning) is supposed to play in knowing reality. And this seems to give a foothold to both features of epistemic realism: there is an independent reality and knowledge of it is immediate. It should not come as a surprise, then, that Moore’s theory of the role of the mind in knowledge is a theory of transparency and immediacy.

6. Moore’s Conception of the Transparent Mind

We are now in a position to say something about what counts as the *immediate* relation that, in knowledge, we have to reality, which is the second feature of epistemic realism and which, if my line of argument is on the right track, is at work in different senses in Bradley, in Moore the “idealist” and, now, in Moore the realist. Let me offer three preliminary remarks of clarification. First, let me be clear that when I talk about “knowledge” I mean non-inferential knowledge, the grasping of a state of affairs, or of the moorean proposition that is identical to it, which is not derived from other propositions. Secondly, let me also clarify that, as far as his idealist phase goes, there is a minor textual difficulty in addressing Moore’s conception of “knowledge”. This

²¹Baldwin argues in a similar vein that Moore’s concepts and propositions are much more accurately assimilated to fregean referents rather than fregean senses (2008, 44).

is simply the fact that, although in his idealist writings we see the word “intuition” in connection with something like cognition of the Real (as in the bradleyan passage quoted above), it is hard to make much out of it. There are at least two kinds of kantian intuition (sensible and intellectual), there is a bradleyan intuition and Sidgwick’s intuition, and Moore’s usage of the term is not stable enough to reconstruct a distinct conception of it at this time. This notwithstanding, the “higher intuition” in the above passage, which seems an idiosyncratic synthesis of Kantian intellectual intuition and Bradley’s own “higher intuition” (see Bradley 1893a, 172), grants at least a gesture both to Bradley and to Moore’s future self, in which cases we have clearer conceptions of what the immediacy of knowledge consists in. Let me finally remind that Moore is an anti-empiricist, he believes that there are two kinds of knowledge, *empirical* and *a priori* (in fact also synthetic *a priori*). The textual evidence I will use to talk about the mind in an immediate relation to an object pertains mostly to empirical knowledge, but Moore believed that the essential features of the mental acts in relation to an object are in fact the same for all kinds of knowledge (in fact for other kinds of mental acts as well) and hence I will take his remarks to extend to the way we grasp synthetic *a priori* truths, which is mostly addressed by Moore in *Principia Ethica*.

The exegetical difficulty that we have to face in accounting for Moore’s conception of the transparent mind in his realist phase has to do with the fact that the most substantial things he says about it appear at a time in which he had already started to relax his radical platonism of NJ. There are two issues. The first one, of little momentum, is the following. If one were to strictly follow the radical platonism of NJ, one would need to argue that literally everything is conceptual, not only material objects, but also *minds*. This is indeed what Moore, in the enthusiasm for his novel view, seems to say, suggesting that minds are also to be reduced to “complex judgments” (propositions):

From our description of a judgment, there must, then, disappear all reference either to our *mind* or to the world. Neither of these can furnish “ground” for anything, save in so far as they are *complex judgments*. The nature of judgment is more ultimate than either. (Moore 1899, 193, my emphases).

We are not given any further detail on this reduction, but it is easy to see how bizarre the resulting picture of knowledge would look. If minds are propositions and knowledge is an immediate relation to true propositions, knowledge is an immediate relation between propositions. Whether Moore actually believed something like this at the time of NJ is difficult to confirm. What is certain is that in his other writings we quickly see the emergence of a different and more plausible picture of the mind, as his own use of expressions like “the knowing subject” in NJ seems already a prelude to.²² “Mind” or rather “consciousness” will quickly become an irreducible something, which, although transparent and “diaphanous” to its object, is however of a different nature than its object. In “The Refutation of Idealism” (1903) he will say:

And, in general, that which makes the sensation of blue a mental fact seems to escape us; it seems, if I may use a metaphor, to be transparent—we look through it and see nothing but the blue; we may be convinced that there *is something*, but *what* it is no philosopher, I think, has yet clearly recognised (Moore 1903, 446).

And in “Experience and Empiricism” (1902a):

“Experience,” then, denotes a kind of cognition; and, like “cognition” and “knowledge” themselves, the word stands for a double

²²Consider also the following from the 1898 Dissertation: “If it is supposed that sensations are immediately cognised as something given, and that this is the basis of Kant’s theory, I can only repeat that I cannot find myself to be more passive with regard to them than with regard to any other object of consciousness. In the relation of subject and object, the object always appears to me as something merely ‘presented’, merely there, not as something produced by the subject, which contemplates it, and this equally whether it be a sensation, a thought, or a feeling” (Moore 2011, 155).

fact: (a) mental state, and (b) that of which this mental state is cognizant (Moore 1902a, 82).

Thus, I will here attribute to Moore such a conception of the mind as a substantial something, yet fully transparent to its object as his informed view in his realist phase, to which “The Refutation of Idealism” and *Principia Ethica* still belong.

The second issue may appear more concerning. In the years immediately following NJ, Moore refines his understanding of “concepts” with a categorial distinction between *universals* and *particulars*. The former are the platonic entities proper, belonging to a realm out of space and time and possibly subject to a special act of contemplation, whereas the latter are instantiations of universals, which exist in time, and which maintain a relation of conceptual identity to their universals, but can differ among themselves merely numerically while being exactly similar to one another (the universal “black” has several instantiations in time: see “Identity” 1900, 114). This has an advantage, because particulars seem to require to be interpreted as instantiated properties rather than “concepts existing in time” and hence allow Moore to conceive of material objects as collections of such instantiated properties at a given time and space (1993, 93), rather than long conjunctions of true existential propositions (in PE Moore uses, quite unhelpfully, “object”, “idea”, “quality”, and “property” as if they were all interchangeable). But this may now seem in tension with the identity theory of truth, which holds that an existent is no different from an existential proposition, a view Moore is still committed to:

It may seem strange to some that the object of an experience should be called a proposition. But such object may undoubtedly be “the existence of such and such a thing” and it seems impossible to distinguish the cognition of this from the cognition “that such and such a thing exists” (Moore 1902a, 89).

One way of addressing this tension may be as follows. The identity theory of truth claims simply that there is no difference be-

tween a true proposition and a state of affairs. But it does not say anything about the nature of either of them. What it commits us to say, however, is that what the proposition is *about* must itself be a *constituent* of the proposition. If in Moore's new ontology we have existent particulars as new elements of the universe, what we shall say is that they shall figure as components of a proposition about them. So, a proposition about the existing shade of red will have the particular existing shade of red as one of its components. If now Moore conceives of this as an instantiated property, we shall say that it is that instantiated property that is a component of the proposition. This is, in fact, the general take that Moore has on propositions, which can have both universals and particulars as their constituents. There are several critical issues here, but I will mention only one in passing. If a proposition has particulars existing in time as its constituents (it is in fact a "whole" of which they are parts) and it is *true*, there emerges a difficulty about the nature of both the proposition and its truth. For Moore wants to insist, at this time, that the truth of a proposition is *atemporal* (and seems thereby to imply that a proposition is as well).

For a truth is not to be regarded in the same way either as a particular configuration of matter which may exist at one moment and cease to exist at the next, nor yet as matter itself, when it is conceived to exist at every moment. The truth that something exists, it would seem, never does exist itself, and hence cannot be accurately said to occupy any moment of time (Moore 1900, 297).

But it is hard to understand how a proposition made, at least partially, of particulars which exist in time should itself not exist in time or how an atemporal truth could be attributed to a proposition whose parts are temporal.

In spite of these difficulties, what matters for our purposes is that, holding firm his commitment to the identity theory of truth, Moore can still define knowledge as cognition of true propositions and, in particular "experience" ("empirical knowledge")

as cognition of true existential propositions, not dissimilar from what he had argued in NJ:

it remains to say something more with regard to the kinds of object which can be properly said to be experienced. It has been laid out above that all such objects must be true, and must be existential propositions. . . from the first of these conditions it follows that every object of experience must be complex (Moore 1902a, 88).

Given his commitment to atomism, of course, Moore believes that we also have cognition of *simples*, whether they are universals or particulars (after all in PE the word "good" is said to denote a simple object of thought), but it is interesting to notice that according to many passages of "E&E" like the one above, we should interpret all basic mental acts of apprehension of the material world as cognition of a complex. These remarks may shed some light on an aspect of "The Refutation of Idealism" which is never fully made explicit by Moore. In "The Refutation of Idealism" Moore talks of the "blue", the "sensation of blue", etc., and one may form the impression that he is articulating some kind of cognition of a *simple* object, like a sense-datum. Of course Moore had not introduced sense-data yet, but it is consistent with his view at the time that he might have thought of a particular which does not exist in time (since one that exists must be an existential proposition), a possibility he left open by conceding that it is not essential to particulars that they exist in time. But in other passages he uses expressions like "the existence of blue", "consciousness that blue exists", and, importantly, "experience of blue". The very appearance of these terms, which he defines much more accurately in "E&E", published just around the time of "RI", seem to count in favor of the interpretation that the RI example should be understood as a case of cognition of a complex, indeed an existential proposition. This is again confirmed by "E&E" where he claims that even 'sensation' "denotes a cognition of the *existence* of a simple quality" (1902a, 89) and hence

is, strictly speaking, cognition of a complex object (an existential proposition).²³

So knowledge is for Moore essentially cognition of true propositions which extend all the way down to experience. What then, of the mental act? Independently of the exact interpretation of what exactly is the nature of the *object* which Moore relentlessly insists in RI to be utterly independent from the *act* of grasping it, we should recall that Moore argues that the difference between mental acts is reducible to the difference in their objects (1900, 83) and that what is left of any cognitive act once we factor out its object is a feature of being transparent and in an immediate relation towards the object:

the moment we try to fix our attention upon consciousness and to see *what*, distinctly, it is, it seems to vanish: it seems as if we had before our eyes a mere emptiness. When we try to introspect the sensation of blue, all we can see is the blue: the other element is as if it were diaphanous (Moore 1903, 450).

In this passage Moore voices his conception of the transparency of the mind. A mind (or a mental act) is something that exists but which is completely transparent to the thing it is perceiving, experiencing or knowing.²⁴ There is a metaphor of passivity here and a metaphor of vision. Knowledge consists in the uncontaminated gaze on a world utterly independent of our possible experience of it. It follows that the *what* that our knowledge is *of* is nothing other than the bare presence of the world to us;

²³The degree of Moore's unexplicitness here is testified, among other things, by the fact that Sellars, in a brief comment on "The Refutation of Idealism", attributes to him the view that consciousness of blue is consciousness of a sense-datum, which notoriously triggers the difficulty of explaining its relation to non-inferential knowledge. See "Empiricism and the Philosophy of Mind" (1997, 19). If my interpretation of this particular point of Moore is correct, however, Moore was here thinking of the "consciousness of blue" as already a form of non-inferential knowledge, in terms of an existential proposition.

²⁴"The Refutation of Idealism" goes further than this. This simple relation between a mind an object is the same sort of relation in which we are to the mental act, when we analyze philosophically awareness of something.

there is no activity of "shaping" the world in our knowing of it, nor of presenting it in any particular way as opposed to another. If this is on the right track, we can, I think, see some such conception of the mind in the grasping of universals (it is after all what Moore does in PE with "good") and in the cognition of *all* true propositions, even synthetic *a priori* ones, when he claims that we recognise their truth immediately. Let me briefly notice two things: first, this is clearly a way of satisfying the second requirement of epistemic realism, however we exactly think of the objects of our knowledge (whether simple or complex), whether they are propositions or whether they are, as in Moore's later writings, sense-data. Knowing something is being in immediate touch with it. Secondly, this is a very different way of satisfying epistemic realism than Bradley's is. In a sense, Moore satisfies both requirements by maintaining the *separate* existence of mind and world, although the latter is still conceived as propositional in nature. There is a world of (decomposable) propositions and a mind which reflects it perfectly by passively receiving it. Bradley, on the other hand, satisfies them by identifying knowledge with what it is knowledge *of* (hence immediacy) and insisting that the resulting individual entity is the only thing there is, it is the only substance and absolutely independent of anything else.

7. Conclusion

I have argued that Moore's idealistic phase should be understood, with regard to epistemic realism, in continuity with his later rejection of idealism. Because in 1897 he was committed to the idea that we know appearances, but was entangled in Kant's understanding of the separateness of the Thing in Itself, arguing that *reality* is *one-in-appearances* was the only way he could ensure epistemic realism. But upon developing his crucial anti-psychologist argument in the theory of meaning against Bradley, claiming that concepts and propositions are independent *non-mental* objects and that each grasping of a true proposition is

a separate act of knowledge, not only he could reject idealism, but he also didn't need to endorse monism in order to ensure epistemic realism.

Is there any further historical significance to the individuation of epistemic realism as such a crucial feature of Moore's early development? I think there is, although I have no space for arguing for it properly. It seems to me that Moore's early realism about meaning is, in a sense, a more significant departure from Kant than from Bradley. This is because there is a central kantian point that both Bradley and Moore reject, which has to do with the nature or rather, the function, of judgment in knowledge. Of course Moore and Bradley reject this in very different ways, but if my hypothesis of historical development here is correct, it is plausible that Bradley had a great influence on the rejection of this kantian point. As I noted, in his realist phase Moore does not seem to give great importance to the logical form of a proposition, it is not a very thematized aspect in his writings. This may appear surprising, and of course it does not mean that Moore believed that propositions have no structure, but it may be related to his understanding of a proposition as a state of affairs rather than as a *thought*. But the rejection of this point is strictly related to another. For in neglecting the relevance of the logical form of thought, Moore seems also to reject the kantian idea that when we analyze the structure of judgment, we are in effect accounting for how the judgment determines its object in accordance to the form that is proper to it. To put the point broadly, Kant takes the judgment to be an *intentional* item, which determines its object in accordance to the form of the judgment itself. Kant, that is, takes his theory of judgment as a theory of how thought determines its object (a priori). Moore, on the other hand, takes his theory of judgment as a theory of the *object* of thought, which, in turn, is conceived as a mere transparent means of access to the object. I think there are philosophical reasons for being sympathetic with such kantian points, but it is not my aim to argue for it here. I will content myself with concluding that, if my hypothesis about

Moore's early development is sound, we have here the makings of an early rejection of Kant that may be responsible for later development of analytic philosophy and, in particular for the development of that line that has pushed authors like Sellars and McDowell to complain about "the Myth of the Given" and has urged them to cure it with a recovery of Kant.

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