

**The Experience of the Absolute: A Defense of F.H. Bradley's Philosophy of Experience  
Against William James' Criticisms**

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## **Abstract**

This thesis addresses the debate between two of the most important philosophers at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century: F.H. Bradley and William James. Their debate centered around the priority that each philosopher assigned to experience in terms of a starting point for metaphysical inquiry and the subsequent understanding of logical relations which each philosopher developed based upon their conception of experience. This thesis will consider James' "radical empiricism" as a response and critique of Bradley's philosophy. As such, through an investigation of each philosopher, this thesis will argue that James' critique of Bradley is flawed due to his misreading of Bradley's philosophy and will conclude that Bradley's philosophy holds the potential to answer the difficulties found within James' radical empiricism and, though it contains undeniable flaws of its own, holds within it the seeds for future philosophical development that exceeds Bradley and James' debate.

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## **Introduction**

Where to begin metaphysical inquiry? This is a question with which all great metaphysicians must grapple should their project be grounded in anything more than the merely arbitrary choice of the philosophers involved. For both F.H. Bradley and William James, the only starting point would seem to be our experience of reality. It is from experience that we derive all of our tools of logic and any understanding of first principles which would go on to inform the rest of our philosophy. As such, experience must be the focal point of our metaphysics and will be able to act, to varying extents, as the judge of our philosophical developments. That said, while both philosophers agree that experience is the rightful origin of philosophy, the conclusions which they reach regarding the nature of experience are very different. The central point of contention between the two could be said to be over which part of Hume's *Treatise* they take most offense to. According to Pierfrancesco Basile, "in developing their own theories of experience, Bradley and James are just disputing as to what would be the best way to correct Hume's atomistic theory of mind."<sup>1</sup> For Bradley, Hume fell into error by rejecting a holistic understanding of reality in favour the disjunctive world of associations which atomism claims, while James understood Hume's problem to be that he did not emphasize the way in which the atomistic entities were as equally connected as they were separated. In this critique of Hume's empiricism, we see that the point of origin for the dispute between Bradley and James lies in how they interpret internal and external relations.

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<sup>1</sup>Pierfrancesco Basile, "Self and World: The Radical Empiricism of Hume, Bradley, and James," *Bradley Studies* 9, No. 2 (2003): 97.

Though Bradley's awareness of James' work dates back as far as 1893<sup>2</sup>, and while there was some correspondence between the two as early as 1895, their dialogue seems to have begun in earnest in 1904 through Bradley's criticism of pragmatism in general, particularly through his confrontation with the philosophy of his fellow Oxford professor, F.C.S. Schiller. The article which spurred their ongoing debate was Bradley's "On Truth and Practice" in which he criticized Schiller's publication in the compilation *Personal Idealism* and pragmatism as a whole. The general thrust of Bradley's essay was that despite the practical merits of pragmatism, it is an unsatisfactory philosophy due to its neglect of metaphysics, its understanding of truth, and its incoherence as a school of thought.<sup>3</sup> Despite these strictures, Bradley respected pragmatism and considered it to be a fertile doctrine, "though not as a theory of first principles."<sup>4</sup> Indeed, Bradley wrote that "while reading the lectures on Pragmatism, I, doubtless like others, am led to ask myself, 'Am I and have I been always myself a Pragmatist?'" This question I still find myself unable to answer."<sup>5</sup> The article brought forth an active dialogue that persisted from 1904 until James' death in 1910 and consisted of numerous letters and articles between Bradley and James both affirming and criticizing the other's doctrines.

This thesis will explore the basics of both Bradley and James' metaphysics in an attempt to discuss both philosopher's doctrines and how the two great thinkers responded to each other's works. In particular, we will see how each philosopher understands experience as well as their accompanying understanding of logical relations and the way in which they hold sway over our

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<sup>2</sup> F.H. Bradley, "On Professor James' Doctrine of Simple Resemblance," *Mind*, New Series, Vol. 2, No. 5 (Jan., 1893): 83-88.

<sup>3</sup> F.H. Bradley, *Essays on Truth and Reality*, (Reprint, 2012. Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 1914), 73.

<sup>4</sup> F.H. Bradley, *The Collected Works of F.H. Bradley: Volume 4, Selected Correspondence 1872-1904*, ed. Carol A. Keene (Bristol, England: Thoemmes Press, 1999), 280.

<sup>5</sup> F.H. Bradley, *Essays on Truth and Reality*, 127.

understanding of reality. The format of this thesis will take the form of three chapters. In the first chapter, we will investigate Bradley's philosophy in order to lay the terrain on which Bradley and James' debate took place. This chapter will be laid out in order to understand the ascending stages of Bradley's ontology; beginning with immediate experience, followed by the relational consciousness, and culminating in the Absolute. We will see Bradley's arguments for an understanding of immediate experience which is non-relational and, therefore, prior to the distinction of subject and object, though it contains both in a non-discriminated form. We will then move on to investigate the relational consciousness (or ideality) and therein explain Bradley's argument for the unreality of relations. The chapter will culminate in Bradley's claim that "experience reveals reality to us in certain ways, which ultimately leads us to a conception of the Absolute,"<sup>6</sup> interpreted as an all-inclusive experience which harmonizes the unity of feeling and the distinction of the relational consciousness. Our second chapter will focus on James' philosophy as a framework for his critique of Bradley. Here we will see the way in which James orients his metaphysics to an affirmation of our personal experience and the common-sense understanding of the world. We will see how this common-sense understanding is undergirded by a pluralistic ontology which claims that subject and object are merely two sides of the same coin of experience and that it is the context in which we find the neutral "pure experience" which dictates whether it is subject or object. This exegesis of James will be oriented around how it responds to and criticizes Bradley's metaphysics.

Our final chapter will be a defense of Bradley's metaphysics against James' criticism. In particular this thesis will argue that James' arguments against Bradley are oriented towards a strawman constructed out of a misunderstanding of Bradley's philosophy and that the entirety of

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<sup>6</sup> Evlyn Fortier, "James and Bradley on Immediate Experience," in *Bradley Studies*, vol. 5, no. 2, (1999): 131.

James' radical empiricist metaphysics can be subsumed within a stage of Bradley's ontology. We will also see several of the claims which Bradley brought against James in response.

### 0.1 Overview of James and Bradley's Systems and the Source of Their Disagreement

We will now set out a brief overview and comparison of a few of the central concepts of each philosopher's systems, namely, the primacy that both James and Bradley give to experience and the understanding of relations which follows from each of their philosophies. As we will see in chapters one and two, both philosophers began their metaphysics with an inquiry into experience and found a conclusion which determined their understandings of relations. For Bradley, experience was characterized by unity and, therefore, relations were secondary abstractions from that unity and not properly real. Counter to this, James took experience to be a mosaic of discrete entities which were fastened together into a single reality by the relations that they shared with each other; by this reasoning, relations for James were obviously real. Thus, we are left with two systems of philosophy which began with the presupposition that reality is experience and yet we somehow are left with the opposite conclusions that on the one hand, reality is monistic and, on the other hand, that it is pluralistic. In order to determine how Bradley and James arrived at these contradictory thoughts we will examine the reasoning that lead them each to these conclusions and compare them to one another.

We will begin with Bradley and his monistic understanding of reality as an undifferentiated felt mass. Due to his starting point in experience, it is debated whether Bradley belongs properly within the idealist tradition or whether he shares more in common with British empiricism leading both idealists and empiricists to, "quarrel over his suitability for membership



of their ranks alternately as though he were a rich benefactor or a leper.”<sup>7</sup> As we will see in the first chapter, “Bradley tries to safeguard the distinction of thought and existence from the rationalist idealism of his contemporaries”<sup>8</sup> through the prioritization of feeling over ideality and the failure of rationality in recapitulating the completeness that is originally found in feeling. In so doing, Bradley brings his philosophy closer to the empiricist school of his motherland than did any idealist before him. Indeed, as a good empiricist would claim, “Bradley says that the ‘method’ he employs is not axiomatic but ‘experimental’.”<sup>9</sup> This is due to the incomplete nature which Bradley’s understanding of truth necessitates and the status which Bradley grants to experience as being part of the criteria of truth. As Bradley understands truth as arriving in degrees which continually lead to the asymptote of truth in the Absolute, judgment within his philosophy is constantly subject to addition and remediation upon learning more about reality. This explains why he describes his philosophy as experimental rather than axiomatic: Bradley believes that all of his philosophical statements arise out of observations of experience and the logical developments upon experience. Due to their root in experience and the fact that they are subject to improvement based on the addition of other judgments which are likewise rooted in experience, Bradley is right to call his methodology experimental rather than axiomatic. This combination of experimental methodology and its grounding in experience would lead one to consider it as a variety of empiricism yet the conclusions to which Bradley is drawn are *decidedly not* akin to those of the mainstream empiricists. This is because, though Bradley was undoubtedly influenced by the early empiricists such as Hume and Mill, his intellectual

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<sup>7</sup> W.J. Mander, *An Introduction to Bradley's Metaphysics*, (Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 165.

<sup>8</sup> James Bradley, “Relations, Intelligibilité et Non-Contradiction Dans la Métaphysique du Sentir de F.H. Bradley: Une Réinterprétation (I),” in *Archives de Philosophie*, Vol. 54, No. 4 (1991): 530. Translation is my own.

<sup>9</sup> James Bradley, “From Presence to Process: F.H. Bradley and A.N. Whitehead,” in *Philosophy after F.H. Bradley*, ed. James Bradley (Bristol, England: Thoemmes Press, 1996), 148.

sympathies lie much closer to the rationalism found in Hegel's idealism. Contra the atomism of the empiricist school Bradley concludes that, "we have to replace the traditional empiricist assumption that experience comes as a plurality with the assumption that experience comes as a unity."<sup>10</sup> We may be able to consider Bradley's understanding of experience and feeling as a conflation of, "the 'feeling' of Hegel and [J.S.] Mill in order to transform it from a psychological principle into a metaphysical category"<sup>11</sup> and thereby understand how it is that he comes to such a synthesis of empiricism and rationalism and also the crux of his disagreement with James.

Against Bradley, James' understood experience as pluralistic. For him, the way which we consciously engage with reality is descriptive of that reality just as common-sense would have it. Thus, we have James' thought that, "there is nothing strictly actual except what is experienced and nothing properly speaking describable as possible except as possible experience. Thus actual things, and the actual relations between them, must not only be experienceable but actual parts of experience."<sup>12</sup> Just as common-sense would have it, for James, reality is describable as something which is capable of being experienced. He is not making any claims as to the substance of reality when he states that it consists of experience, indeed, "there appears no universal element of which all things are made,"<sup>13</sup> but instead claims that there is a single characteristic which all reality must share. This universal characteristic of reality is that it is, of course, experienceable. The experience of the book on the desk is just that; there is no deeper level of analysis to be had which alters that experience beyond adding to it. There is no further

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<sup>10</sup> Pierfrancesco Basile, "Why did Bradley matter to Whitehead?: Some Questions Concerning Bradley's Doctrine of Finite Centres" in *Bradley Studies*, vol. 10, no. 1 & 2, (2004), 17.

<sup>11</sup> James Bradley, "The Critique of Pure Feeling: Bradley, Whitehead, and the Anglo-Saxon Metaphysical Tradition," in *Process Studies, Special Issue on the History of Philosophy*, vol. 14, (1985): 254.

<sup>12</sup> Timothy Sprigge, *James and Bradley: American Truth and British Reality*, (Chicago, Illinois: Open Court Publishing, 1993), 112.

<sup>13</sup> William James, *Essays in Radical Empiricism*, (London, New York: Longmans, Green and Co., 1912; Reprint, Mineola, New York: Dover Publications Inc., 2003), 27. Citations refer to the Dover Publications edition.

truth to the experience of the book on the desk other than the truth of it *as it is experienced*. Anything more than what arrives through experience is an abstraction of the given experience and should not be counted as part of reality. This is a critical point of separation between James and Bradley in that Bradley understands the truth of reality to both include and go beyond our individual experiences. Though both Bradley and James begin with experience, Bradley's rationalist sympathies guide him down a different path than James is able to follow. Whereas Bradley is able to rationally dissect reality into distinct parts, James per his own methodological considerations must take what he experiences solely and inclusively as base reality. This causes the rift between Bradley's tripartite analysis of reality as feeling, ideality, and the Absolute, and James' single level ontology.

As will hopefully become clear, the central locus of dispute between Bradley and James is Bradley's prioritization of internal relations and James' prioritization of external relations. Both Bradley's and James' positions contain certain benefits as well as certain weaknesses which we will see throughout this thesis. In particular, we will see that while Bradley's privileging of internal relations grants him a strong philosophy of identity and order, he is unable to develop a philosophy which would permit *true* novelty to emerge in reality. Bradley is forced to abandon a significant aspect of our lived experience, i.e. chance, in favour of a fully intelligible world. While this allows him to claim that all aspects of reality are important, meaningful pieces of a whole, it carries with it the defect of rejecting radical "becoming." James, on the other hand, is able to philosophize true emergence, novelty, and change while losing the ability to consider reality as anything other than contingent. Due to his privileging of external relations, James believes that reality is only knowable after an event has occurred in that events are only capable of gaining a distinct identity once they are contextualized by a set of other events to which they

are contingently tied by external relations. We see James' neglect of internal relations through his shifting the debate with Bradley from internal vs external relations to disjunctive vs conjunctive relations. Both of these latter sorts are species of external relation and James holds both of them to be of equal priority. Yet he seems to lose sight of the fact that neither of these external relations are a substitute for the identity granting character of internal relations.

# **Chapter 1: F.H. Bradley's Absolute Experience**

## **1.1 F.H. Bradley's Philosophy of Experience**

We will begin this project with an investigation into the structure of experience in the philosophy of F.H. Bradley. According to Bradley himself, it is with experience that we must begin all of our philosophical inquiry and upon which we must ground all our subsequent philosophical developments. Due to his starting point in and reliance upon feeling, Bradley, “is unable to accept the basic Hegelian identity between thought and reality”<sup>14</sup> and, in so doing, separates himself from the vast majority of absolute idealists. To be a true disciple of Hegel would be to prioritize thought over feeling as it is consciousness which marks the final stage of the development of Geist. Marking his own distinction from Hegel, Bradley takes experience to be the final mark of the real and claims consciousness to be a derivative entity that is dependent upon feeling and which ends in a necessary sublation into the final experience of the Absolute. This shows the drastic divide between Hegel’s reality which ends in complete knowledge and Bradley’s reality which is something more than knowledge can contain.<sup>15</sup> Due to this rejection of the honoured idealist dogma of the primacy of thought, “it makes as little sense to call Bradley a metaphysical idealist as it does to call him a metaphysical realist.”<sup>16</sup> Regardless of the confusion over whether or not Bradley should be classed as an idealist, it certainly seems fair to classify him with the other idealists in their attributing to reality a spiritual, experiential substrate. Bradley himself closed his magnum opus, *Appearance and Reality*, with the conclusion that, “Reality is one Experience, self-pervading and superior to mere relations. Its character is the

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<sup>14</sup> Mander, *An Introduction to Bradley's Metaphysics*, 162.

<sup>15</sup> Charles Taylor wrote that “Bradley’s dialectic [...] ends up showing how the only complete and undistorted truth, that of the whole, cannot be conceptually formulated. His conclusion is directly contrary to Hegel’s logico-ontology.” (Charles Taylor, *Hegel*, 538).

<sup>16</sup> James Bradley, “From Presence to Process: F.H. Bradley and A.N. Whitehead,” 153.

opposite of that fabled extreme which is barely mechanical, and it is, in the end, the sole perfect realisation of spirit.”<sup>17</sup> It is due to this insistence on the primacy of experience both in our personal engagement with reality *and* as that reality itself which leads me to, perhaps somewhat out of order<sup>18</sup>, begin with Bradley’s philosophy of experience.

While he does use the word in its common meaning, we will see that, for Bradley, experience has a special meaning that is not exhausted by the everyday understanding of it. Indeed, it is Bradley’s understanding of experience which demonstrates the most significant ways in which he differs from James. Bradley takes a monist approach to the issue in that he understands experience to be an immediate unity from which we excise our knowledge of the world through second-order operations of the mind, whereas James takes experience to be plural in that there are many distinct loci of experience which may take on varying meanings depending on the relationships which they hold to other such loci. If this difference were not enough, we will see that Bradley’s understanding of reality as experience means that reality is *itself* experience or “sentient” in a way which is *at least* analogous to our own experience. This complicated understanding of reality and the relationship which it holds to experience will be examined in what follows.

To begin our inquiry, we will investigate Bradley’s chapter, “On our Knowledge of Immediate Experience,” from his *Essays on Truth and Reality*. It is here that we are given the most explicit investigation of the role which experience plays in Bradley’s philosophy. He begins the chapter by writing that, “I have had occasion often to urge the claims of immediate

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<sup>17</sup> F.H. Bradley, *Appearance and Reality*, 552.

<sup>18</sup> James Bradley wrote: “that the organization of AR does not reflect the order of thought which sustains that work is clearly indicated in the text itself.” (Bradley, “Relations, Intelligibility...,” 31). Thus, following the order of Bradley’s thought which *does* sustain his philosophy, I will begin with experience and feeling.

experience, and to insist that what we experience is not merely objects. The experienced will not all fall under the head of an object for a subject.”<sup>19</sup> In this way, Bradley swiftly inaugurates us into his understanding of reality, namely, that while the subject/object dichotomy *is* indeed a part of reality, it is not a holistic description for what we experience. As we will see throughout this section, immediate experience, “is a non-discrete continuum of sense-contents”<sup>20</sup> and is therefore prior to the distinction of subject and object; though, to reduce immediate experience to merely sense-contents is not entirely accurate as, “what Bradley intends with this term is a state which includes all types of sensation, emotion, will, and desire – in short, anything which we are in any manner aware.”<sup>21</sup> To illustrate the way in which subject and object do not exhaust our experienced reality, Bradley uses the example of fragments of inner sense such as emotions and one’s own will. These are both constitutive aspects of experience and yet neither can be easily classed under the subject/object division due to them each functioning as both the object of experience and also as the subject having the experience. This is a crucial moment for Bradley as it allows him to succinctly summarize a central idea from his philosophy, namely, the non-duality of immediate experience:

“There is an immediate feeling, a knowing and being in one, with which knowledge begins; and though this in a manner is transcended, it nevertheless remains as the present foundation of my known world. And if you remove this direct sense of my momentary contents and being, you bring down the whole of consciousness in one common wreck.

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<sup>19</sup> F.H. Bradley, *Essays on Truth and Reality*, 159.

<sup>20</sup> James Bradley, “Relations, Intelligibility and Noncontradiction in F.H. Bradley’s Metaphysics of Feeling: A Reinterpretation,” 31.

<sup>21</sup> W.J. Mander, *British Idealism: A History*, (Oxford, England: Oxford University Press, 2011), 112.

For it is in the end ruin to divide experience into something on one side experienced as an object and on the other side something not experienced at all.”<sup>22</sup>

In this passage, we see that our immediate experience is one in which we feel ourselves united with reality. There is no distinct break between being and knowing and, thus, there is no distinct object which we know as separate from our own being. Thus, Bradley disposes of any sort of primordial dualism that might tie him to the distinction of phenomena and noumena that we find in Kant’s transcendental idealism. In addition to this non-dual commitment, Bradley clearly states that the attempt to isolate consciousness from experience will result in the dissolution of consciousness itself as the immediacy of experience provides the basis on which consciousness is built. Without immediate experience from which to draw its content, there would be nothing for consciousness to be conscious *of*. As such, consciousness is fully dependent upon immediate experience while immediate experience, by virtue of its non-duality has no “other” on which it depends.

#### Our Knowledge of Immediate Experience

Though Bradley believes that the notion of immediate experience is the proper place to begin our metaphysical inquiries, he nonetheless understands that there are issues regarding such a doctrine. One of these issues is that it is unclear how we may come to have knowledge of immediate experience. The issue here is that experience for Bradley is immediate and without qualification, yet it may become known and, as such, objectified in our consciousness. In this objectification, the immediate experience is itself transcended as it becomes an object of knowledge and loses the primal immediacy which precedes the subject/object division, and

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<sup>22</sup> F.H. Bradley, *Essays on Truth and Reality*, 160.



which defines the nature of immediate experience. This produces a dilemma insofar as we seem certain to have knowledge of immediate experience, exhibited in our discussion about it: “so far as I know of immediate experience, it does not exist, and that hence, whether it exists or not, I could in neither case know of it.”<sup>23</sup> Bradley’s statement here that in knowing immediate experience it ceases to exist is misleading. What he intends to convey here is that wherever we speak of knowing immediate experience, the object of our knowledge is not present. In other words, by gaining knowledge of immediate experience, one must leave the domain of immediate experience and take up the newly objectified experience as an object of knowledge. Thus, in coming to know immediate experience we actually lose the very nature of that which we sought to know and are therein left with a paradox. Due to this paradox, Bradley worries that defending the notion of immediate experience becomes difficult as to do so calls into question that which one would seek to support. His solution to this issue, is that:

Immediate experience, however much transcended, both remains and is active. It is not a stage which shows itself at the beginning and then disappears, but it remains at the bottom throughout as fundamental. And, further, remaining it contains within itself every development which in a sense transcends it. Nor does it merely contain all developments, but in its own way it acts to some extent as their judge.<sup>24</sup>

Thus, Bradley states the preliminary mechanism of immediate experience: all other conscious faculties and acts are developments upon the foundation of immediate experience. Acting as such a foundation, immediate experience remains active in all subsequent cognitive developments and cannot be removed from these faculties as to do so would be to remove the very material from

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<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid, 161.

which these faculties draw their content. This marks a crucial separation between Bradley's understanding of immediate experience or feeling and Hegel's. While Hegel saw feeling as being necessarily sublated into consciousness, Bradley noted that as immediate experience is the foundation of consciousness, "it cannot be completely sublated without wrecking the entire cognitive process."<sup>25</sup> As Bradley informs us, immediate experience already "contains" the developments which transcend it. Thus, these components which go beyond immediate experience are, in actuality, found already within it and are merely developed into ideality by judgments as carried out in the relational consciousness. Hence his reasoning for why feeling can never be overcome or sublated as in Hegel's philosophy: it provides the ground for consciousness and provides it with the non-relational content which consciousness then makes distinct and relational. Were feeling to be overcome or sublated, the rug upon which consciousness finds its ground would be pulled out beneath it thereby leaving consciousness with the impossible task of pulling itself up by its own bootstraps.

In addition to acting as the fount from which all consciousness springs, immediate experience must also function, somehow, as the judge of all other conscious acts. We are to understand that immediate experience judges the other conscious faculties not in an active sense but, rather, to the degree that those other faculties must also satisfy the demands of immediate experience in order to be judged true. The developments upon the foundation of immediate experience are judged by that foundation through the degree that the developments remain congruent and harmonious with the foundation. Thus, we have the understanding that truth is

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<sup>25</sup> Damian Ilodigwe, "James and Bradley's Absolutism," in *The Southern Journal of Philosophy*, vol. 43, (2005): 613.

contingent upon the degree to which thought coheres with immediate experience. This notion will be revisited in Bradley's understanding of the perfect ideal object.

Having seen the ways in which Bradley understands immediate experience, we will now turn our attention to two significant examples of immediate experience, namely, *attention* and *introspection*. Bradley calls special attention to these two applications of the principles found in immediate experience in that they are illustrations of the way in which immediate experience unfolds in both external and internal relations respectively. In keeping with the organization of Bradley's essay, we will first examine the phenomena of attention. The difficulty which Bradley notices in attention is that in directing our attention to different aspects of our bodies, we may become aware of sensations which we did not previously notice. As we did not previously notice them, the question is whether they existed prior to the redirection of our attention or whether they were made in the act of our attending. This is the same issue that we had seen above in our attempt to understand our knowledge of immediate experience. Here, the redirection of our attention corresponds to the objectification of immediate experience which, in this case, is the sensation in question. In each case, our awareness of the sensation or immediate experience is altered through our awareness of it and, as such, it is difficult to state the nature of our awareness of the sensation or our objectification of the immediate experience (both of which amount to the same thing). In response to this difficulty, Bradley states the following as his solution to the problem:

“(a) We must first assume that anything remains the same except so far as I have reason to take it as altered [...] (b) Next we must hold that apart from any attention we may be aware of a change in our condition [...] (c) There is again an experienced change when attention (say to a feeling B) supervenes, and this particular experience is felt otherwise

than as a mere change, say from A to B. Hence from the absence of this special feeling, as well as from the presence of the ordinary feeling of change to B, we infer that our sensation B does not depend on attention but was previously there.”<sup>26</sup>

The first part of Bradley’s solution is an application of Occam’s Razor, a straight-forward piece of philosophy resulting in a principle of parsimony wherein we are to assume that a given state of affairs will remain unchanged unless we have reason to suppose a change in it. The second step is more ambiguous than the first and concerns a change in our condition that does not occur in our awareness. This is a change in feeling (which therefore exists in immediate experience) and is prior to the distinctions found in consciousness. We have no explicit understanding of the change due to it occurring prior to the distinction of subject and object (and, therefore, knowledge); it is merely a feeling that there is an alteration within our felt reality. The third step in this argument is that, after the unattended felt change occurs, another change occurs upon our directing our conscious attention towards the felt change. Having detected the change in mere feeling, we then direct our attention to it in order to gain explicit knowledge of it and thereby understand the change. This directed attention towards the change found in feeling is felt to be different than the immediate experience of that original change. As the shift in our attention follows upon the merely felt change, the change in sensation must occur prior to the shift in attention and, therefore, the sensation must have existed prior to the redirection of our attention.

This is a more subtle argument than it may first appear. Bradley is here supporting his earlier claim that there are two levels of experience: 1) that which is immediate and concerns reality prior to the division brought about by the conscious judgment and 2) the level of

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<sup>26</sup> F.H. Bradley, *Essays on Truth and Reality*, 163.

experience that occurs through the mind's judgment of such pre-relational experience. In the example of attention to our change in feeling, we see that in the change from A to B, we notice an alteration in feeling (which is given over in immediate experience) from state A to state B whereas, in shifting our attention to the change from A to B, we notice no change in B but we do notice a change within ourselves. This demonstrates the way in which immediate experience subsists beneath the conscious mind. In shifting our attention to the altered sensation, we have objectified that which originally was a part of our immediate experience. Once objectified, that immediate experience is no longer immediate and hence the paradox. The result of Bradley's investigation into attention, however, has revealed that the original sensation existed *prior to* our knowledge of it and that, in the same way it existed prior to our attention, it may still exist in immediate experience were we to remove that attention once more.<sup>27</sup> In this way then, Bradley has shown through the analysis of awareness that immediate experience is independent of our knowledge of it. Just as with the alteration in feeling, when we attend to our immediate experience, it does not alter the immediate experience, rather, it alters our perception of it. We replicate the content of the immediate experience within the relational consciousness and dissect it via judgment in order to better understand it. Though we may gain explicit knowledge of the thing abstracted from its context in immediate experience, we lose the immediacy and unity that was found in that context and thereby form a useful abstraction from reality.<sup>28</sup>

The second part of Bradley's more in-depth investigation of our knowledge of immediate experience comes through his treatment of introspection in the form of the question, "can I

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<sup>27</sup> Bradley *does* acknowledge that certain sensation *can* be a result of attention: "Where the above felt change cannot be verified directly or again on sufficient evidence be inferred, I may conclude, to speak in general, that it was absent, and that the attention has more or less produced its object." (*Essays on Truth and Reality*, 165.)

<sup>28</sup> This component of Bradley's philosophy is thoroughly examined in his *Principles of Logic*.

observe my own present state, and, if not that, what in the end can I observe?”<sup>29</sup> To begin, Bradley returns to his doctrine of immediate experience and the understanding that we cannot have direct knowledge of it. It would seem that our present state would, like the sensation we examined in attention, correspond to immediate experience and, as such, it may be beyond our knowledge. As it is Bradley’s intention to show that we *can* have knowledge of immediate experience and as it is obvious that we have knowledge of our internal states, he first tackles the claim that all knowledge of our internal state is founded upon memory. Bradley claims that to argue that our present state is unobservable and to rely upon the memory of a past state in order to gain knowledge of it is an untenable position. The reasoning for this is that to depend on our memory of a past state of ourselves would be to rely upon a reproduction of that which is unable to be objectified. Per the logic of such an argument, the internal state when present in immediate experience is unable to become an object of our knowledge but that same state, once no longer present is then able to be objectified. Were that the case, there would be no reason to suppose that such a memory of it would be accurate to the immediate experience which it is intended to remember. In addition to this problem, there is the additional difficulty that, “if I can thus remember my past state, it seems strange that I am unable to make it an object while present,”<sup>30</sup> thereby bringing to attention the contradiction of supposing us to be able to objectify a state (which is not able to be objectified) simply on the grounds that it is no longer present. Rather than this incoherent account of memory as the key to how we are able to observe our internal state, Bradley puts forward his own theory.

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<sup>29</sup> F.H. Bradley, *Essays on Truth and Reality*, 166.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*

On Bradley's view, the attempt to observe a present internal state does not result in a time-lag wherein we are only able to observe it once that state has passed; instead, it results in the *simultaneous* objectification of the state alongside its occurrence in immediate feeling. This is Bradley's true understanding of immediate experience which will be held throughout the rest of his philosophy. Despite this claim that we can make our present state an object of our knowledge, Bradley is careful to limit the scope of his argument by stating, "that I cannot make an object of the whole of my felt self all at once, so much is certain in fact, and the principle seems clear. But that I can observe nothing of what I now feel, seems the false inference of a perverse theory."<sup>31</sup> The principle which Bradley here refers to is that in order to have an object at all, there must be a self to which the object is opposed and which experiences the object as such. Because of this, any portion of the felt self may be presented to the remainder of the self as an objectified experience but there must remain a portion of that self which does not become an object and remains that before which the experience arrives.<sup>32</sup> This in turn leads to the difficulty of how we are to observe the actual contents (or states) of the self when a portion of said contents are merely felt and are not before one's mind. As an example of this, Bradley writes:

"Take an emotional whole such as despondency or anger or ennui. A part of this doubtless consists in that in which, whether as sensation or idea, is before my mind. Any such object or objects we can observe, and, when we cannot keep them in view, we can postulate that they remain unaltered except so far as we have reason to suppose a change. But in an emotional whole there are other felt elements which cannot be said to be before

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<sup>31</sup> F.H. Bradley, *Essays on Truth and Reality*, 166.

<sup>32</sup> The amount of the self which must remain unobjectified is unclear.

my mind. And now I desire to bring these before me and to know that I have accomplished this task correctly.”<sup>33</sup>

We see here that, in introspection, we seek to objectify a present state of our self which we already feel. This felt self is the part which is given over in immediate experience while the task of introspection is to once more objectify that which is experienced. Introspection can here be seen to be merely an application of Bradley’s previous investigation of awareness directed upon the internal states of the self rather than upon the external sensations which it feels. In this we can see how immediate experience may function as the judge of our knowledge. In observing a felt change, no matter the domain that such an observation occurs within, “I have not only a general sense of change from something to something new, but I feel more specially the presence or absence of novelty or a jar with the object before me.”<sup>34</sup> The objectification of the felt change in state is an addition to the experience of that state and it is an addition which is either harmonious or discordant with the felt change. This agreement or jar indicates that the objectification which we have performed upon the immediate experience is either true or false respectively and Bradley goes so far as to state that, “apart from an appeal to present feeling, nothing of this kind, however important it may be, is sufficient by itself, I would submit, to account for the facts.”<sup>35</sup> As immediate experience is the ground from which the rest of our conscious mind is a development, it seems clear that any latter outgrowths must accord with that

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<sup>33</sup> F.H. Bradley, *Essays on Truth and Reality*, 167.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid*, 168.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid*, 169.



from which it stems. Thus, the appeal to immediate experience is the final judge and jury of Bradley's theory of truth and holds a special position in his understanding of reality.<sup>36</sup>

Bradley now turns his gaze to the phenomena of emotion, in an attempt to further elucidate the union of the felt and objective content. He writes that, "in any emotion one part of that emotion consists already of objects, of perceptions and ideas before my mind. And the whole emotion being one, the special group of feeling is united with these objects before my mind, united with them integrally and directly though not objectively."<sup>37</sup> We see here that, for Bradley, emotion is a two-faced phenomena. On the one side, it consists of objectified content in the form of ideas and distinct perceptions while on the other side we have the pre-objective group of feelings. Both the merely felt and the objective/idealized content are integrated into the unity which we experience as emotion. Due to the through-and-through integration of objective and felt content, "the agreement or disagreement [of the object] with what is felt is not merely general and suffused, but is located through the object in one special felt group."<sup>38</sup> By locating the felt content *within and throughout* the ideal content, Bradley is able to find a means to describe his understanding of experience as the judge of objective knowledge in that any additional objectification of what is felt (and, indeed, all objectification is an addition upon the merely felt) will either agree with that feeling which undergirds the knowledge and take its place as truth or else contradict its felt foundation and be revealed as falsity. In this way then, the chimaera formed by the integration of felt and ideal content takes for its criterion of truth the

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<sup>36</sup> As immediate experience is prior to the subject/object division, it would make sense that this primal bed of coherence is that which Bradley would envision as the criteria to which the reharmonization of terms and relations, embodied in his coherence theory of truth, would be forced to rely upon.

<sup>37</sup> F.H. Bradley, *Essays on Truth and Reality*, 169.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*

possibility of self-contradiction. Should the ideal content jar against the felt, we would be left with a degree of falsity in our knowledge.<sup>39</sup>

### The Character of Immediate Experience

Thus far, we have seen Bradley's preliminary investigation of immediate experience and how we may come to have knowledge of it. We have also seen its application via attention and introspection and the understanding of immediate experience which such an application can help us develop. Though these stages have been immensely helpful in understanding Bradley's notion of immediate experience, we now turn to his full-fledged investigation of immediate experience proper and the exact character that it has. To begin, Bradley distinguishes immediate experience from both the unconscious and subconscious. The reason for his doing so is that in each case, these two divisions of mind are non-objective (as is immediate experience) and can therefore lead to confusion as to their relation to the conscious mind and experience. Both the unconscious and the subconscious are distinguished by being distinct and separated from the conscious mind and due to this division, while they may share in common the non-objectivity of immediate experience, they cannot be experienced themselves. Contrary to these concepts, immediate experience *is* part of the conscious self; it is the part of the self which interfaces with reality yet it does so in such a way as to avoid the subject/object division, replacing it instead with the porous self/not-self difference without distinction. Immediate experience is the mass of feeling which comes prior to the mind's judgment (following which, we have the subject/object distinction)

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<sup>39</sup> Considering Bradley's understanding that the subject of judgment is reality as a whole, it is not hard to see how, in Bradley's coherence theory of truth, this idea of self-contradiction is eventually expanded to include contradiction with all of reality.

and, though it is prior to the division of subject and object, this does not mean that there is an absolute identity of the self with reality as a whole.<sup>40</sup> Bradley writes that:

“Outside that of which a man is aware there is, I agree, a larger world of experience. The content of this world, I again agree, is in a sense continuous with that which directly fills his consciousness. But he cannot experience the former content immediately, and, were he to do so, then (as it seems to me) the man’s self would be destroyed [...] More and less of content may come from time to time within the man’s feeling centre. But so long as that centre exists, there is a world within it which is experienced immediately, and a world without it which is not in this sense experienced at all.”<sup>41</sup>

We see here that although Bradley has dissolved the subject/object distinction within immediate experience, he is not expanding the self to the entirety of reality. He claims instead that though experience exists prior to the division of subject and object, immediate experience only extends into reality so far as the self is able to feel. Indeed, immediate experience’s reliance upon feeling is so great that it led T.S. Eliot to write that, “Bradley uses the term ‘experience’ and the term ‘feeling’ almost interchangeably.”<sup>42</sup> That said, I would side closer to Philip Ferreira’s understanding that mere feeling is, “any felt experience that is less than all inclusive,” while immediate experience, “contains, not only our given sensuous awareness, but also much of our intellectual and volitional lives.”<sup>43</sup> In this way we may see that feeling is the species while immediate experience is the genus. Indeed, Ferreira’s interpretation of feeling as immediate

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<sup>40</sup> We will see the way in which Bradley identifies the experience of a self with reality as a whole in our examination of Bradley’s theory of the Absolute.

<sup>41</sup> F.H. Bradley, *Essays on Truth and Reality*, 173.

<sup>42</sup> T.S. Eliot, *Knowledge and Experience in the Philosophy of F. H. Bradley*. (New York, USA: Farrar, Straus, and Company, 1964), 15.

<sup>43</sup> Philip Ferreira, *Bradley and the Structure of Knowledge*, (New York, United States of America: State University of New York Press, 1999), 155.

experience absent the intellectual component is supported by James Bradley's reading. He claims that, "[F.H. Bradley] maintains, rather, that [feeling] is a non-discrete continuum of sense-contents."<sup>44</sup> As Ferreira noted, and as we will soon see, experience goes beyond mere feeling through relational thinking which, though it is based in feeling, transcends its felt foundation to become something more. Thus, though immediate experience is non-relational and does not contain the subject/object dichotomy, it is not an effacement of the self. Instead, the felt self exists alongside the equally basic felt not-self; the boundary between the two being porous and subject to shift. On this understanding, Bradley is able to claim that while reality as a whole is continuous, it does not ever enter *completely* into one's immediate experience.

Initially, this could be mistaken for simply another restatement of the subject/object dichotomy, but Bradley's claim is subtler than that. In order for there to be a subject/object dichotomy, both subject and object must be part of a single self's experience. What Bradley has claimed is that there is a portion of reality which is not a part of one's immediate experience because one's feeling does not extend into all corners of reality. This is not a grand claim but simply means that, for example, the portion of reality which is separated from someone by a wall is not a part of their experience and, as such, is something other than an object for a subject. Bradley specifies his concept of immediate experience as, "that which is comprised wholly within a single state of undivided awareness or feeling."<sup>45</sup> By such a definition, anything which is not presented to us as in some way felt is not part of our immediate experience. Working within this definition, Bradley then questions when it is that experience is solely immediate and whether that immediacy is something that we can access. The importance of such a questioning

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<sup>44</sup> James Bradley, "Relations, Intelligibilité et Non-Contradiction Dans la Métaphysique du Sentir de F.H. Bradley: Une Réinterprétation (I)," 31.

<sup>45</sup> F.H. Bradley, *Essays on Truth and Reality*, 173.

is that it brings Bradley back to develop his understanding of feeling as that stage of consciousness wherein we are aware of a self alongside the felt not-self. According to James Bradley, “feeling is non-cognitive, a matter of the sensory apprehension of a plurality of features or ‘felt mass’ (AR 155) without distinction of subject and object.”<sup>46</sup> We see here F.H. Bradley’s understanding that though the felt mass which provides our senses with their content exists most primitively as a felt unity, that, “feeling, so understood, need not be devoid of internal diversity.”<sup>47</sup> This means that within feeling there is able to exist a “many felt in one” or an “undeveloped ideality” which, through judgment, can subsequently be made explicit.<sup>48</sup>

This “many felt in one” of mere feeling is crucial for Bradley’s philosophy in that it points to the instability of mere feeling. Bradley writes that, “feeling is transcended always, if you please, in the sense that we have contents which are more than merely felt. But on the other side at no moment can feeling ever be transcended, if this means we are to have contents which are not felt.”<sup>49</sup> In this statement, we see Bradley claiming once more the understanding that he espoused earlier about immediate experience; that immediate experience is always transcended and yet remains active beneath the relational developments which presuppose it. The reason for his harkening back to it is that feeling is part of the functioning of immediate experience. As we saw earlier, the bounds of immediate experience are delimited by the reach of feeling. Because of this, feeling acts as the substructure of immediate experience, extending beneath it and including experience within its bounds as well as subsuming other content that is not experienced. The importance of this becomes clear when Bradley states that, “the object not-self,

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<sup>46</sup> James Bradley, “From Presence to Process: F.H. Bradley and A.N. Whitehead,” 152.

<sup>47</sup> F.H. Bradley, *Essays on Truth and Reality*, 174.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid, 175.

and again the object and subject related before my mind, all this is more than mere feeling. But again the whole of it would be nothing for me unless it came to me as felt; and that any actual experience should fall somewhere outside of feeling seems impossible.”<sup>50</sup> We see here that concepts such as the not-self, subject, and object, are all things which exist outside the purview of mere feeling in that they are explicit, ideal content before the mind. None of these things, and indeed, *no ideal content at all*, may exist within mere feeling due to them being conscious developments made through the faculty of judgment, a secondary faculty reliant upon feeling for its content. This is what Bradley means towards the end of the last quotation: the idea that any actual experience could exist outside of feeling is impossible because if something is experienced it is felt. Whether it be a physical sensation, a mental fantasy, or a mere concept of the intellect, each of these things exist as experienced and are a part of Bradley’s domain of feeling.

To say that all ideal content exist as part of feeling is not an arbitrary statement but is a crucial development of Bradley’s holistic conception of reality. He writes that, “at every moment my state, whatever else it is, is a whole of which I am immediately aware. It is an experienced non-relational unity of many in one.”<sup>51</sup> For Bradley, if anything exists before the self, it is to some extent felt by that self. This is the reason for his investigation of both attention and introspection; they are applications and demonstrations of the functioning of external and internal feeling respectively. They show the way in which the same principles of feeling operate throughout varying contexts of experience and demonstrate that the underlying principle of feeling, namely, the felt many-in-one, exists within all varieties of experience. The crucial point

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<sup>50</sup> F.H. Bradley, *Essays on Truth and Reality*, 175.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*

of all of Bradley's investigations into experience is that without the unity of feeling, we would have no ground to posit the relational consciousness whatsoever.<sup>52</sup> The absolute importance of experience for Bradley is demonstrated in that, while all aspects of our knowledge are relational, experience itself is prior to that knowledge and is entirely different from it due to its non-relational character. Testifying to the importance of experience, Bradley writes:

Everything which is got out into the form of an object implies still the background against which the object comes, and, further, the whole experience of both feeling and object is a non-relational immediately felt unity. The entire relational consciousness, in short, is experienced as falling within a direct awareness. This direct awareness is itself non-relational. It escapes from all attempts to exhibit it by analysis as one or more elements in a relational scheme, or as that scheme itself, or as a relation or relations, or as the sum or collection of any of these abstractions. And immediate experience not only escapes but serves as the basis on which the analysis is made.<sup>53</sup>

Thus, all things are experienced as a unified whole which is only *secondarily* abstracted from, or developed upon, that unity in order to arrive at the discrete components of our ideality. This understanding of experience as a non-relational unity holds the particular problem that, "it can neither be explained nor even (to speak properly) described, since description necessarily means translation into objective term and relations."<sup>54</sup> That said, we may recall Bradley's earlier description of experience as the judge of truth in order to understand how we may speak of experience. For Bradley, a statement can only be true to the extent that it accords or harmonizes

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<sup>52</sup> "And object and subject and every possible relation and term, to be experienced at all, must fall within and depend vitally on such a felt unity." (F.H. Bradley, *Essays on Truth and Reality*, 176).

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid*, 176.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid*, 177.

with feeling. As such, in describing feeling using terms and relations, and thereby sacrificing the true nature of experience in order to communicate our understanding of it, we are able to consider our debased abstraction of it as true insofar as the description of it feels harmonious with our experience of feeling. Though it cannot achieve absolute truth, the abstraction will have a *degree of truth* and therein achieve the purpose set out for it. Thus, we see that, “our attempt [to describe experience] is justified so far as the description seems true, so far, that is, as though inadequate, it does not positively jar, and again is felt positively to agree with our felt experience.”<sup>55</sup>

Having put forward this basic understanding of experience, Bradley is now able to examine his central questions of the essay, namely 1) how can immediate experience serve as the criterion of truth, and, 2) how can immediate experience become an object of our knowledge. From the outset of the first question Bradley delimits the range of his inquiry; the first question is not concerned as to the ultimate criterion of truth but, “is limited to a special issue. How, we must ask, in the cases where my immediate experience does serve as a criterion of truth and fact, is it able to perform such an office?”<sup>56</sup> This is an important restriction of the ability of experience to function as the criterion of truth. Were it able to act as the *sole, ultimate criterion* of truth, there would be no place for the relational consciousness in knowledge, a flagrant contradiction of the importance that Bradley places on the, admittedly flawed, relational consciousness. Instead, Bradley is here seeking to evaluate the way in which experience is able to act as the judge of truth under certain conditions and to a certain degree. Again, the answer to this question has been to some extent given through the course of this section: it is the harmony of ideal and felt content

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<sup>55</sup> F.H. Bradley, *Essays on Truth and Reality*, 177.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid*, 179.



that is the hallmark of truth whereas their discord sounds the death knell of the judgment and its descent into error. This harmonization of the judgment with feeling is not, however, able to be described as the reconciliation of two distinct objects. Instead, “what is required is that the object should itself become qualified by the same content which was merely felt within me. As soon as this qualification has appeared, I have actually before me in the object that which previously was felt within me to be harmonious or to jar in regard to the object.”<sup>57</sup> Thus, in qualifying the object by the felt content we assimilate both the ideal and felt content into a single object. This assimilation is a crucial part of Bradley’s theory of truth in that, upon this theory, we seek an object that is wholly complete as the locus of truth while, “the object which fails to include immediate experience in its content, is by the unrest of that experience condemned as defective”<sup>58</sup> due to it excluding feeling and thereby not attaining completion. In combining the felt and ideal content, we come closer to the complete object that alone would be worthy of the name of truth. Now, the combination of the ideal and felt is where we may come across error. In combining the two contents, we may experience discord between both contents of the object. Per Bradley’s own words, the felt content must be seen as prior to the ideal and, as such, in any conflict that arises between the two we must defer to the felt content and alter the ideal accordingly. It is in this necessary assimilation and alteration of the ideal following the felt which demonstrates the way in which experience acts as the judge of truth.

Bradley now tackles the second central question of his essay, namely, how it is that immediate experience is able to be an object of our knowledge. While he holds to the earlier notion that it is impossible for us to have a complete and fully accurate description of immediate

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<sup>57</sup>F.H. Bradley, *Essays on Truth and Reality*, 179.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid*, 161.

experience, he believes that, “we can, however, set our immediate experience before us not only in partial detail but in its main general character. We can know about it as a positive experience, an awareness of many in one which yet is not relational.”<sup>59</sup> The method by which we are able to devise the true character of experiential reality is a multi-stage operation wherein we begin with the concept of an object that is devoid of the internal instability between ideal and felt content that would bring it into error; it is the idea of the perfectly harmonized object, “the idea of a complete reality.”<sup>60</sup> This idea of a complete reality comes about through the frustration we feel in dealing with the relational consciousness; “since the relational consciousness is built upon something fuller than it can itself provide, I always have a sense of the object that is greater than what I have managed to get into my explicit assertion.”<sup>61</sup>

To better understand this, we must take a short detour through Bradley’s theory of judgment. For Bradley, judgment is always the judgment of reality as a whole as the qualities which we may predicate of a subject always require supplementation from other qualities beyond themselves. Though this is what is required of us if we are to make a truly complete judgment, it is never possible for us to achieve it as, in order to complete the judgment, we would have to include not only all ideas which would be true of reality, but all non-cognitive content which would be able to supplement the judgment (without which, truths of reality would be absent). Mander explains Bradley’s understanding of this by writing that, “reality is more than a set of abstract generalities or ideas, however complex and all-embracing. Still more must be added. We must add all that is not thought: feeling, will, emotion, desire, in brief the whole world.”<sup>62</sup> Thus,

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<sup>59</sup> F.H. Bradley, *Essays on Truth and Reality*, 182.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid.

<sup>61</sup> Philip Ferreira, *Bradley and the Structure of Knowledge*, 157.

<sup>62</sup> W.J. Mander, *An Introduction to Bradley’s Metaphysics*, 35.

in attempting to follow the judgment to its completion we, “are led to think of an object without any external ‘elsewhere’ or ‘not-yet,’ an object which in some sense contains within itself, and already is qualified by, every real possibility. We form in other words the idea of an all-inclusive Reality.”<sup>63</sup> In order for the object of our judgment to be devoid of instability or contradiction, the object must contain all possibility within it in a fashion that harmonizes the ideal and felt content. It is an object wherein the ideal content perfectly corresponds to the felt content and wherein the felt content extends to all reality. As the idea is that of a complete reality, it must include all possibilities; as the idea is intended to be perfect, it must be fully harmonious with the felt content; should the felt content not extend to all reality, there would be a discrepancy between the ideal content and the felt content and the idea would no longer be fully harmonious. We are thereby led to the conclusion that, “anything now that is suggested or that can be suggested, if it fails to be there *in* our actual object must be made somehow *of* the actual object, if at least that object is to be complete.”<sup>64</sup>

Following this first step, we have, “the idea of an object which is complete and all-inclusive, while on the other hand the object actually before me is incomplete.”<sup>65</sup> In order to bring the object that is found in judgment closer to that fully complete object (i.e., reality as a whole), we must alter the given object via the addition of ideal content. The elements which go on to form this ideal content, “come to me in part from the unknown not-self.”<sup>66</sup> This ‘not-self’ is not part of perception (due to its being unknown), is not part of the self, and, yet, must be included within the complete object. Bradley writes that, “again, within that object which I

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<sup>63</sup> F.H. Bradley, *Essays on Truth and Reality*, 182.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid*, 183.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid*.

actually perceive there are contained (as we saw) tracts more or less undistinguished internally. These tracts are nebulae the contents of which have on the one hand manifoldness, but on the other hand are more or less without the relational form.”<sup>67</sup> It is from these tracts which we harvest the content which we add to our incomplete object in order to bring it closer to completion. The content that we extract from this nebulous region of the object arrives to us upon gaining more and more knowledge of the object and becoming better acquainted with it. Through gaining knowledge about the object of our perception, we are better able to differentiate the hitherto undistinguished sensuous whole. Through this activity:

“The object, which of course is continuous throughout, appropriates the result of this process. Hence the object now possesses to some extent actually all its contents in a discriminated form, and for the rest it can assume (rightly or wrongly) that the same result, though not actual, is possible. The object will now include for us both its distinguished and undistinguished contents, the latter taken as distinguished ideally though not in actual detail.”<sup>68</sup>

As is easy to see here, one result of Bradley’s understanding of the ideality of the subject/object distinction is that the object is able to be augmented through ideal construction. Because it is not the case that objects are given over in immediate experience (as such experience is prior to any sort of objectification of experience), this sort of addition from within means that the content which is felt in immediate experience is merely made explicit in the idealization process.

Following this exposition of the idealization of experienced content, Bradley writes that, “it is enough for us that the idea of the complete object now includes within itself an objective

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<sup>67</sup> F.H. Bradley, *Essays on Truth and Reality*, 183.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid*, 184.

‘not-yet’ external to its actual detail, and again an objective ‘not-yet’ lying undistinguished within the fact which is given.”<sup>69</sup> The latter “not-yet” is the undeveloped content within the nebulae of the experience which could potentially be distinguished and transformed into ideal content, while the former “not-yet” refers to content that was never part of the experience and yet is needed in order for the object to be truly complete. Each of these sorts of addition to the object (either addition external to the experience or internally derived from it) has its own distinct feeling. Bradley writes that, “we have, when the object is added to from outside itself, a specific feeling of newness, and that this feeling differs from that which comes when the object develops itself from within itself.”<sup>70</sup> The reason for the difference in feeling between the two sorts of addition is that the former case is the addition of something new to the object that was not there prior to the addition; it is a true addition rather than a mere development. In the latter case, the addition is simply an elaboration of that which was already contained within the object and hence it is not felt as the integration of something alien to the object but, rather, as a growth and distinction of something that was already a part of it.

Alongside these two types of addition, there is also a third type which is made neither through internal development nor the addition of content from the unknown not-self. In this third species of addition, we have a far more mysterious type of addition wherein the object is neither added to through internal development of the “nebulous tracts” of undeveloped ideality within the object, nor through an addition to the object from the not-self. Bradley writes that:

“Generally then my object is added to, and the new matter cannot be taken as without source. But in the first place the matter is not felt as wholly new but as something already

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<sup>69</sup> F.H. Bradley, *Essays on Truth and Reality*, 184.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*

there and mine. And, in the second place, what is new cannot come from the object-world. It goes beyond my actual object, and yet I cannot attribute it to the non-perceived object-world, or again to any non-relational nebula contained within my object. The origin of my experience therefore is non-objective and it is also non-relational; but, on the other side, positively, it comes to me as something which already was present to me. The idea, therefore, is suggested of an experience neither objective nor relational but, in a word, immediate.”<sup>71</sup>

Here we see Bradley describe this mysterious third type of addition as an addition that is not from within the object, and yet remains part of one’s experience. Thus, the addition cannot be something entirely new as it is felt as already being “there and mine.” And, while it *does* go beyond the object in question, the addition cannot come from the reality that is not found in our own experience (such an addition would violate the felt “there and mine” quality of the addition) and neither can it come from within the non-relational nebula within the object as the addition accompanies a feeling of newness that exceeds that of the ideal development of what is already contained within the object. The result is that this third type of addition is one derived purely from feeling, that non-objective, non-relational flow from which anything objective and relational is derived. As we had seen earlier, within the complete object we have the entirely harmonious integration of ideal and felt content within one object. It is this integration of feeling with the object which we have in the third sort of addition. To summarize this whole procedure of objectifying immediate experience, Bradley writes:

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<sup>71</sup> F.H. Bradley, *Essays on Truth and Reality*, 187.

“Our actual object fails to satisfy us, and we get the idea that it is incomplete and that a complete object would satisfy. We attempt to complete our object by relational addition from without and by relational distinction from within. And the result in each case is failure and a sense of defect [...] Then we try the idea of a positive non-distinguished non-relational whole, which contains more than the object and in the end contains all that we experience. And that idea, as I have endeavoured in these pages to show, seems to meet our demand.”<sup>72</sup>

Thus, we see that where the first two sorts of addition fail to satisfy our drive for knowledge, the third type of addition fulfills our requirements for completion. The reason for its success and the failure of the other two sorts of addition is that the first two sorts concerned themselves with only relational addition and, as we will see in the following section, relations for Bradley, though they are necessary, are always doomed to be a failed attempt to grasp reality, resulting in perpetual contradiction. The third method of addition escapes this sort of failure by being an addition of feeling to the object. In such a way, we are adding to the relational object portions of the non-relational experience in which it is originally given. Through this incorporation of non-relational content, we have added to the object that which is not alien to experience and is neither identical with the object but is harmonious with it and points beyond it to the greater system of the complete object, i.e. reality. This leads to our arrival at an object that comes much closer to the complete object which would satisfy us than any attempt to reach it through merely relational means ever could (that said, the object, even after all three sorts of addition, does not attain completion; that descriptor is reserved only for reality as a whole).

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<sup>72</sup> F.H. Bradley, *Essays on Truth and Reality*, 188.

## What to Make of Bradley's Philosophy of Immediate Experience?

Through the investigations that Bradley has performed in this essay, we have seen that, for him, we may gain knowledge of immediate experience through the demands of our drive for intellectual satisfaction, which satisfaction requires the creation of a complete object which demands the inclusion of experience and feeling. The creation of this object is achieved through the integration of ideal and felt content into a single object and, in the integration of the felt into the object, we gain partial knowledge of our immediate experience. Upon integrating feeling into the object, we have separated our immediate experience from its own nature and have thereby gained only an imperfect impression of it. The imperfection of our impression of immediate experience is necessary in that, "the above idea of immediate experience is not intelligible, I would add, in the sense of being explicable,"<sup>73</sup> due to its being prior to the relations and terms which are necessary for explication. It is not that immediate experience is contrary to the intellect and less than knowledge, rather, it is the case that immediate experience and feeling lie *beneath* intellectualization and forms the ground on which knowledge is constructed. All this to say that the imperfect impression we can form of immediate experience *does* provide us with the general character of immediate experience and in such a way do we gain knowledge of it.

The implications of Bradley's understanding of immediate experience is greater than what may at first appear. He goes so far as to claim that, "nothing in the end is real but what is felt, and for me nothing in the end is real but that which I feel."<sup>74</sup> This quote shows the importance of feeling within the restrictions of the self, namely, that all that is real *for a self* is that which is felt. We also see here an indication of the doctrine that Bradley will later develop

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<sup>73</sup> F.H. Bradley, *Essays on Truth and Reality*, 189.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid*, 190.



regarding the Absolute, namely that all reality is harmonized in the total, non-personal experience of the Absolute. While that doctrine exceeds the bounds of this thesis, it is crucial to point out that Bradley's understanding of experience extends beyond the realm of the personal and into the totality of reality as a whole. In hinting at the Absolute and the restrictions of feeling, Bradley writes that:

“The fact remains that feeling, while it remains as a constant basis, nevertheless contains a world which in a sense goes beyond itself. And when we seek for a unity which holds together these two aspects of our world, we seem to find given to us nothing but this unity of feeling which is itself transcended. Hence, as I have urged elsewhere, we are driven to postulate a higher form of unity, a form which combines the two aspects neither of which can be excluded.”<sup>75</sup>

Thus, in the transcendence of feeling we experience the need for a unifying force which encapsulates both feeling and that which goes beyond and is a development of it (i.e., ideality). We are thereby brought to the idea of a unitive whole which is capable of integrating the relational and non-relational in such a way that each retains their character and yet are fully harmonized. Hence, the inworking of the Absolute into the doctrine of experience and Bradley's statement that, “every immediate experience is the awareness and reality of the Absolute just as much as of this or that”<sup>76</sup> person.

In this section we have seen the importance of immediate experience as the foundation for knowledge and relational consciousness within Bradley's philosophy. We have seen that it is

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<sup>75</sup> F.H. Bradley, *Essays on Truth and Reality*, 190.

<sup>76</sup> F.H. Bradley, *The Collected Works of F.H. Bradley: Volume 5, Selected Correspondence 1905-1924*, ed. Carol A. Keene (Bristol, England: Thoemmes Press, 1999), 19.

possible for us to attain partial knowledge of immediate experience and to apprehend its general character in spite of the fact that such knowledge is, at first, a contradiction of the very nature of such experience. The necessary unity of feeling and its self-transcendence into relational consciousness is then alluded to as Bradley's Absolute, the ultimate unifying force of reality and, indeed, the only thing which can be said to be truly real. In the next section we will investigate explicitly Bradley's understanding of the relational consciousness and the pitfalls of such an understanding.

## 1.2 Bradley on Relations

Having passed through Bradley's philosophy of experience and taking it as the foundation of his ontology, we may now turn our attention to the domain of the relational consciousness and its hallmark trait, relations themselves. While Bradley has made it very clear that reality is non-relational in its most basic form, we cannot simply do away with our everyday understanding of the world as informed by relations. It is through performing judgment on reality and dividing it into distinct parts that are both separated and connected by relations that we gain knowledge of the world and thereby are able to function practically within it. As Bradley had shown in the previous section, there is no stage at which we have either feeling or relations to the exclusion of the other; instead, what we have is two methods of grasping reality that occur simultaneously and perform different though complimentary functions. Though both feeling and ideality are indeed aspects of the real, we will see in this section the way in which Bradley denies relations true reality and instead brands them as appearance, though this term too will need eventual unpacking.

To begin our inquiry into relations, we will examine Bradley's understanding of them as espoused in the beginning of his magnum opus, *Appearance and Reality*. Here, Bradley presents

his full-blown critique of the relational consciousness which he will depend upon throughout the remainder of his career, including the essay “On our Knowledge of Immediate Experience” which we have examined above. The point of this section will be to demonstrate how the relational consciousness and anything which we find within it is subject to self-contradiction and is therefore less than full reality. We will also see how Bradley’s understanding of relations built upon his understanding of immediate experience or feeling and show that, “Bradley’s account of relations is, then, premised upon the theory of feeling.”<sup>77</sup>

### The Quality of Relations

To begin, we will examine the third chapter from Bradley’s *Appearance and Reality*; his most explicit critique of the logic of relations. The chapter begins by claiming that while, “the arrangement of facts into relations and qualities may be necessary in practice [it] is theoretically unintelligible. The reality, so characterized, is not true reality, but is appearance.”<sup>78</sup> This lays bare Bradley’s intent and motivation for the chapter: he will attempt to show that while it is useful for us to arrange reality according to the relational consciousness, to do so is nothing more than a practical fiction which masks over the true reality which, as we have seen in the previous section of this thesis and as will be developed in Bradley’s later chapters, is non-relational. Bradley divides his examination into several claims which show the contradictory nature of the relational consciousness, first by showing the ways in which qualities are unable to exist without their relations to other qualities and then by an in-depth critique of internal and external relations. Though Bradley’s critique of qualities and their relations is merely an application of his critique

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<sup>77</sup> James Bradley, “F.H. Bradley’s Metaphysics of Feeling and its Place in the History of Philosophy,” in *The Philosophy of F.H. Bradley*, eds. A. Manser and Guy Stock, (Oxford, England: The Clarendon Press, 1984), 5.

<sup>78</sup> F.H. Bradley, *Appearance and Reality: A Metaphysical Essay*. (London, England: Swan Sonnenschein & Co., 1893; Reprint, New York, USA: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 25.

of internal and external relations, it is an important part of his critique in that it sets out the most easily understood application of his relational critique and provides a useful introduction to his understanding of relations. With this in mind, we will begin this section with an investigation of Bradley's critique of qualities and their relations before passing over to his critique of relations as such.

Regarding Bradley's critique of qualities and relations, he makes two claims. The first of these is that, "qualities are nothing without relations."<sup>79</sup> We see in this claim the first of Bradley's arguments concerning relations, namely, that we cannot have radically isolated terms; that terms must always come with relations in which they stand to other things or themselves. The general thrust of the argument is that a quality by definition qualifies something. In so doing, the quality will either be internally related to the thing which it qualifies or else it will be in external relations with other qualities. Thus, in merely thinking of a quality we find that it is immediately in relations, thereby invalidating the possibility of a quality sans relation. Were there to be nothing other than a single quality it would not perform its role of qualifying a thing and therefore would not be a quality, whereas if it did achieve its role of qualifying a thing it would be, as stated above, in relation. Thus, the search for a quality without relation proves to be unfulfilling. Following this search, Bradley writes:

"Nor will an appeal to a lower and undistinguished state of mind, where in one feeling are many aspects, assist us in any way. I admit the existence of such states without any relation, but I wholly deny there the presence of any qualities. For if these felt aspects, while merely felt, are to be called qualities at all, they are so only for the observation of

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<sup>79</sup> F.H. Bradley, *Appearance and Reality*, 26.

an outside observer. And then for him they are given *as* aspects – that is, together with relations.”<sup>80</sup>

Here we have the precursor to Bradley’s philosophy of experience and feeling. Just as in the section where we examined his essay dealing explicitly with immediate experience, feeling here takes on the character of a non-relational whole. Though Bradley, even at this earlier point in his career recognizes the existence of this non-relational state, an appeal to such a state will do no good in remedying the contradictions inherent in relational thinking. The reason for this is that within feeling, as we saw, while there are undeveloped tracts of content, they are precisely that: undeveloped. Within feeling, the qualities that lie dormant therein are unable to be distinguished explicitly as to do so would be for feeling to transcend itself; within feeling we do not gain knowledge about things but, instead, perceive differences within the felt not-self that can subsequently *become distinguished* within the relational consciousness and thereby become objects of knowledge. This separates the felt differences of experience from the explicit and knowable distinctions found within the relational consciousness.

A concern for Bradley regarding qualities and relations is the potential veracity of the claim that while we cannot *discover* qualities apart from their relations it does not mean that they do not exist without them. This is a potential argument that could claim that the idea that two distinct qualities are (by the very nature of their being distinct) related to one another is merely the result of the processes of our minds and that the relation is imposed upon the qualities from outside themselves and have, “existence only for us, and as a way of our getting to know.”<sup>81</sup> Bradley takes issue with this supposed argument and states that, “such an answer depends on the

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<sup>80</sup> F.H. Bradley, *Appearance and Reality*, 27.

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*

separation of product from process, and this separation seems indefensible.”<sup>82</sup> His counterclaim here is that, in distinguishing the qualities, we have performed a process of relation separating them from the non-relational unity of feeling. In thus separating them from the undistinguished feeling we have in fact created the qualities. Because the qualities have been created through such a process, to simply ignore the method by which we arrived at their separation and to treat them as though their newfound state is native to them is, “monstrous.”<sup>83</sup> He continues by stating that ignoring the relational process by which we distinguish qualities will likely lead to falsehood. He writes that, “the manyness of the qualities cannot, in short, be reconciled with their simplicity. Their plurality depends on relation, and, without that relation, they are not distinct. But, if not distinct, then not different, and therefore not qualities.”<sup>84</sup> For Bradley, it is impossible to hold a plurality of qualities before the mind without having them in relation to each other. For them to be distinct is to separate them from one another else they sublimate into a single union and lose their individual characteristics. The separations between the qualities are nothing other than relations which state how the qualities stand to one another thereby describing the ways in which they are similar or different and how they interact with one another. In the absence of these relations, we would be unable to distinguish between the felt differences as there would be no identity to ascribe to each of these feelings as identity requires distinction which is itself a relation.

Bradley illustrates this argument through a consideration of qualities A and B. He asks us to consider that, “the qualities A and B are to be different from each other; and, if so, that difference must fall somewhere. If it falls, in any degree or to any extent, outside A or B, we have

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<sup>82</sup> F.H. Bradley, *Appearance and Reality*, 27.

<sup>83</sup> Ibid.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid, 28.

relation at once. But, on the other hand, how can difference and otherness fall inside?”<sup>85</sup> He claims that, were the difference to appear inside either term, we would be presented with a quality and otherness within the term, a self-discrepancy which merely pushes the problem inside either A or B. This self-discrepancy simply brings the relation of difference within either term and we are thereby left with the relation merely subsisting in a different locus than in the original attempt to dispel the relation. All of this is to simply reaffirm Bradley’s first point, that qualities taken without relations are meaningless.

Before passing onto his explicit explanation of internal and external relations, we should first investigate what it is we are talking about when we discuss these sorts of relations. William Vallicella defines an internal relation as follows: “If an individual stands in an internal relation, then its very existence and identity is bound up with its standing in that relation.”<sup>86</sup> Thus, an internal relation is one which is essential to the very nature of a thing. What is more, an internal relation is one, “in which our terms are somehow adjusted to one another such that a change in one entails a change in all.”<sup>87</sup> Upon altering an internal relation, the terms of that relation would be altered beyond their natural character and thereby lose their identity as those terms in question. Examples of internal relations could be *a priori* statements about things (i.e., the classic “all bachelors are unmarried”) or characteristics essential to an entity (i.e., the philosopher Socrates is just). In each of these cases, the terms in the relations are necessarily connected and in the absence of the relation between the two terms, the terms would not be themselves. Were Socrates to not be a human, he would no longer be Socrates; should the history of a particular

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<sup>85</sup> F.H. Bradley, *Appearance and Reality*, 29.

<sup>86</sup> William Vallicella, “Relations, Monism and the Vindication of Bradley’s Regress,” in *Dialectica*, vol. 56, no. 1, (2002): 6.

<sup>87</sup> Philip Ferreira, *Bradley and the Structure of Knowledge*, 109.

table be altered, it would not be the table in question; and should any niche in an ecosystem be destroyed, that ecosystem would be no longer be the same ecosystem as it was prior to the loss. In each of these cases, the identities of the terms are logically interpenetrated and to remove that connection would be to destroy a portion of the thing in question and render the term unable to be the same term.

An external relation, on the other hand, “is one whose holding between two terms makes no difference whatsoever to its terms;”<sup>88</sup> per Ferreira, “*independence* and *self-enclosedness* characterize the term that stands in external relations to all others.”<sup>89</sup> We see here that while the internal relation was necessary to the terms involved and was tied to their very identity as those terms, an external relation is contingent and has no stakes involved in whether it is held or not held. External relations are able to be transient whereas internal relations must last the duration of the terms which it relates. As we will soon see, for Bradley, both sorts of relations are fatally flawed.

### Bradley Contra Internal Relations

Having seen his rejection of quality without relation, Bradley moves on to the second part in his rejection of relations as reality, namely, his claim that qualities, “taken together with [relations] are equally unintelligible,” and that, “relations must depend upon terms, just as much as terms upon relations.”<sup>90</sup> This interdependence creates a tension within the term as it both is supported by the relation and supports it. As both the relation and the term are products of our judgment or relational consciousness, it would stand to reason that the two are interdependent. Though it is logical for it to exist, this interdependence between term and relation is the same

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<sup>88</sup> William Vallicella, “Relations, Monism and the Vindication of Bradley’s Regress,” 9.

<sup>89</sup> Philip Ferreira, *Bradley and the Structure of Knowledge*, 111.

<sup>90</sup> F.H. Bradley, *Appearance and Reality*, 30.



issue which we have just seen regarding the placement of difference within the quality. In this case, we have two distinct qualities which stand in relation to each other (as all qualities must). In addition to this inter-quality relation, we also have within each quality a difference between the term and the relation and an impossible need for the two to become unified within each quality. Bradley writes that, “A is both made, and is not made, what it is by relation; and these different aspects are not each the other, nor again is either A.”<sup>91</sup> Bradley claims that there are two distinct relations within A, namely, the difference and connection upon which A’s character is based. This simply means that given the two terms, A and B, there is both a difference and a connection between them which impacts the identity of each term. Both A and B are characterised by the difference between themselves and the other term as well as being characterised by the connection between the two of them. For the sake of simplicity, we will consider only A though the following must hold true for all qualities standing in relation to one another. Given that separation and connection between both A and B must be determinative of A, A must contain both the conjunctive and disjunctive relation and yet, without relations, it is impossible to assign this diversity to A. Absent the relations, A would have to be a pure unity without either difference or connection (connection implying the concatenation of distinct entities). That said, given an internal relation within A which would unite the difference and connection, the overall unity of A would be disintegrated, and we would fall into an endless regress of relating two terms separated by a conjunctive relation.

We can perhaps simplify this even more by symbolising it as follows. Given  $d$  (difference) and  $c$  (connection) within A, we would need a relation internal to A by which we could unite both  $d$  and  $c$ . Yet, were we to postulate such a relation, we would be merely

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<sup>91</sup> F.H. Bradley, *Appearance and Reality*, 31.

repeating the same argument that we had seen against A and B. In this case, *d* and *c* would stand as terms external to each other and each would then be characterised by their difference and connection to the other. In such a situation, the only solution would be to postulate yet another relation internal to *d* and another internal to *c* to connect their own internal terms. This would of course need to be repeated ad infinitum, thereby losing all philosophical validity and explanatory power.<sup>92</sup> As such, Bradley states that:

“Every quality in relation has, in consequence, a diversity within its own nature, and this diversity cannot immediately be asserted of the quality. Hence the quality must exchange its unity for an internal relation. But, thus set free, the diverse aspects, because each something in relation, must each be something beyond. This diversity is fatal to the internal unity of each; and it demands a new relation, and so on without limit.”<sup>93</sup>

Thus, we see that Bradley has completely removed the possibility of relying on internal relations to explain or unify diversity and we are left with the problem that qualities within relations are equally as unintelligible as those that are without relations. Yet, how is it that Bradley is so frequently claimed as the defender par excellence of internal relations when he professes their unreality? According to Ferreira, “the account of the relational form that more closely approximates how we must think is that which deals with ‘internal relations’.”<sup>94</sup> The reason for the internal relation’s closer approximation of reality is that it emphasizes the interconnected unity of reality which we first experience in feeling and which we find transcends all cognition as the Absolute. Per Mander, the distortion of reality as appearance which we find in internal

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<sup>92</sup>This is the classic logical problem known as “Bradley’s Regress.” See William Vallicella’s “Relations, Monism and the Vindication of Bradley’s Regress.”

<sup>93</sup> F.H. Bradley, *Appearance and Reality*, 31.

<sup>94</sup> Philip Ferreira, *Bradley and the Structure of Knowledge*, 116.

relations is less than that which is found in external relations; there is a smaller, “amount of supplementation and transformation that would be required to turn [an internal relation] into an Absolute experience. It is in this sense that statements of internal relations are truer than those of external ones.”<sup>95</sup> That said, even though the internal relation is closer to the truth of reality than external relations, as a relational way of engaging with reality, internal relations always lead to the infinite regress which we have recently explored and, as such, cannot be understood as descriptive of Bradley’s final ontological position.

### Bradley Contra External Relations

This leads us to the third part of Bradley’s argument; that relations, “are nothing intelligible, either with or without their qualities.”<sup>96</sup> The first explanation for this is that, without terms, relations are really nothing. A relation by its mere existence requires terms between which it functions, else it is “mere verbiage”<sup>97</sup> and, as such, terms seem to be something beyond the relations which separate and unite them. For Bradley, a relation without terms is an *abstraction* divorced from the necessary context of its existence; one that can at most describe a possible category of engagement or interaction between terms. As previously stated, terms and relations are interdependent upon one another due to their joint origin in the relational consciousness and, as such, one cannot exist without the other. Because of the immediate unintelligibility which he perceives in a relation without terms, Bradley moves to examine the way in which a relation stands to its qualities. He writes that, “if [the relation] is nothing to the qualities, then they are not related at all; and, if so, as we saw, they have ceased to be qualities, and their relation is a non-entity. But if it is to be something between them, then clearly we now shall require a *new*

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<sup>95</sup> W.J. Mander, *British Idealism: A History*, 116.

<sup>96</sup> F.H. Bradley, *Appearance and Reality*, 32.

<sup>97</sup> *Ibid.*

connecting relation.”<sup>98</sup> This, of course, is merely the same problem which we had seen earlier wherein we moved the troublesome relation to another locus in the interaction between the qualities and which resulted in an infinite regress. In this case, were the qualities to stand as separated from the relation (were it to not touch upon their inner natures), we would require another relation which would connect the first relation to each term. That same issue of the regress rears its head in this external relation between two terms. As the relation is not located within either of the terms it is relating (such would be an internal relation which we have already seen Bradley reject), it is external to them and would require another relation which *was internal* to both the term and the relation it was connecting. But this would lead us back to the same issue which brought Bradley to reject internal relations as unreal. Because of the inevitable logical regresses into which both internal and external relations lead us, Bradley concludes that, “a relational way of thought – any one that moves by the machinery of terms and relations – must give appearance, and not truth.”<sup>99</sup>

And yet, despite the flawed nature of the relational consciousness, it is still necessary for us. If we are to think at all, it must be performed through the relational consciousness as, “to think, Bradley tells us, is to distinguish and unite.”<sup>100</sup> The very nature of thought is to be relational as, for Bradley, “the judgment is *the* basic act of cognition by which we knowingly encounter reality.”<sup>101</sup> As is elaborately described in chapter one of his *Principles of Logic*, the judgment is a relational form of encountering reality wherein we excise portions of reality (originally given over in undifferentiated feeling) and are able to engage with that portion of

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<sup>98</sup> F.H. Bradley, *Appearance and Reality*, 32.

<sup>99</sup> *Ibid*, 33.

<sup>100</sup> Philip Ferreira, *Bradley and the Structure of Knowledge*, 111.

<sup>101</sup> *Ibid*, 15.

reality as distinguished and explicit. This carries with it the obvious advantage of making reality manageable and allowing us to have knowledge about it rather than attempting to deal with the infinite content that we find in the merely felt. Though flawed, the relational consciousness, does bring with it the above benefits over mere feeling and, “even though the ideal expansion of the object according to the relational form is partially defective, we must never forget that it is also partially successful.”<sup>102</sup> Ferreira here brings up a crucial point within Bradley’s epistemology that, unfortunately, we do not have the space to probe deeply. We must remember that, for Bradley, though the relational form is contradictory, a well-made judgment *does* always possess a degree of truth even though it can *never* attain truth in the fullest sense of the term.

Thus, we see that though the relational consciousness is crucial to our engagement with reality, it is not emblematic of the fundamental truth of that reality. For Bradley, though the relational consciousness is a development upon the state of mere feeling which preceded it; it cannot be seen to be final. The contradictions and incompleteness found within the relational consciousness contradict the coherence and harmony which Bradley takes as the mark of the real and, as such, Bradley boldly claims that relations are “unreal”. In the end, we find that though terms, relations, and the relational consciousness itself are all necessary components of our reality, “that reality itself is *not* relational.”<sup>103</sup> Having seen that relations are unsatisfactory in themselves, “Bradley states his own view of the ‘substantial foundation’ or ‘whole’ or ‘real unity’ which, at least at the initial stage of experience, binds terms and their qualities together: it is not the Lotzean monad or Infinite, but the ‘immediate unity’ of feeling”<sup>104</sup> from which the

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<sup>102</sup> Philip Ferreira, *Bradley and the Structure of Knowledge*, 119.

<sup>103</sup> *Ibid*, 111.

<sup>104</sup> James Bradley, “‘Relations, Intelligibilité et Non-Contradiction Dans la Métaphysique du Sentir de F.H. Bradley: Une Réinterprétation (I),” 34.

relation originated. On Bradley's understanding of reality, the relational consciousness and feeling must be sublimated into a higher unity which preserves the differences found within the relational consciousness, unites them with the felt content of immediate experience, and then transcends them in a final, harmonious and systematic unity. Yet, before coming to this final, harmonious system, we must inquire into the way in which experience, the self, and reality as a whole are integrated. We will probe this question more fully in the following section.

### 1.3 Reality as Absolute Experience

Having passed through the bulk of Bradley's philosophy, we have seen that neither feeling nor ideality are the final word on reality. Both feeling and ideality require their own transcendence and passage into something larger which is able to harmonize the contradictions inherent to each and to unify these strata of reality with the universe at large. While we have spoken of the unity of feeling, that unity is not itself complete, and "sensuous immediacy is experienced as defective and in need of ideal elaboration in judgment because it is felt to be less than all-inclusive."<sup>105</sup> Indeed, "intellectual satisfaction is to be found only in an absolute unity which includes both feeling and thought."<sup>106</sup> This transcendence of feeling and ideality culminates in Bradley's doctrine of the Absolute which is exactly that unity which we require. In this section, we will examine several chapters of Bradley's *Appearance and Reality* in order to come to a full understanding of what the Absolute actually is, how we are able to have knowledge of it, and the way in which Bradley argues for its necessary existence from the basis of experience.

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<sup>105</sup> Philip Ferreira, *Bradley and the Structure of Knowledge*, 166.

<sup>106</sup> James Bradley, "From Presence to Process: F.H. Bradley and A.N. Whitehead," 156.

To begin, we will examine chapter thirteen of *Appearance and Reality*. In this chapter Bradley lays out the groundwork and the presuppositions which he will be working with throughout the rest of the “Reality” section of the book. In the first part of *Appearance and Reality*, we had seen that anything which we arrived at through the workings of the relational consciousness (and, by extension, anything which we had knowledge of) was rejected from the ontological category of “reality” and instead was classed as “appearance” instead. While this may seem to be a disparaging act of skepticism which rejects all of our knowledge as contradictory nonsense, Bradley had a different intention in mind. He writes that, “whatever is rejected as appearance is, for that very reason, no mere nonentity [...] For reality must own and it cannot be less than appearance.”<sup>107</sup> Though Mander claims that there are reasons for doubting, “whether when we examine it more closely we can make any clear sense of his usage”<sup>108</sup> of “appearance”, I believe that Bradley’s usage of the term is not muddled in the slightest. In the previous quote we see that Bradley’s understanding of appearance refers to a showing of the Absolute in a partial aspect of its totality which is isolated from the non-relational totality of feeling through the relational consciousness. Mander himself seems to have changed his opinion on the ambiguity of Bradley’s use of appearance and wrote in a later book that, “to call something unreal or appearance is to deny that it possesses genuinely independent being which, of course, covers everything except the Absolute.”<sup>109</sup> Simply by virtue of its existence as appearance, the appearance cannot be claimed to be unreal as it is real to the degree to which appearances are able to be. Bradley himself replied to this criticism by writing that “realised perfectly in no one part of the Universe the Absolute still is realised in every part, and it seems

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<sup>107</sup> Bradley *Appearance and Reality*, 135.

<sup>108</sup> W.J. Mander, *An Introduction to Bradley’s Metaphysics*, 136.

<sup>109</sup> Mander, W.J. *British Idealism: A History*, 116.

manifest in a scale of degrees.”<sup>110</sup> The locus of Mander’s earlier confusion regarding Bradley’s usage of “appearance” is in his own requirement that the term uphold one of two historic meanings (either Kant’s usage of the term or that of phenomenalism, i.e., “the theory that all that exists is phenomena”<sup>111</sup>). Yet this restriction on the term is not required at all by Bradley who readily admits that, “a license is involved in our use of the term.”<sup>112</sup> If one follows Bradley’s own descriptions of “appearance” throughout *A&P*, it is clear that he is using the term to indicate an entity which is a partial manifestation of the Absolute. His choice of the word, “appearance” is used to indicate that the entity in question is merely one portion of the Absolute, that it is a, “surface manifestation of the *one experience* in which he believes the universe ultimately consists.”<sup>113</sup> In a very clear statement regarding the nature of appearances and their relation to the Absolute, Bradley himself wrote, “that the glory of this world in the end is appearance leaves the world more glorious if we feel it is a show of some fuller splendour.”<sup>114</sup> It is this “showing” character of the experience of the entity which led Bradley to make use of the word “appearance” rather than some other term. Thus, though we may have quarrel with Bradley’s use of the term, we cannot claim that the idea signified by it is confused or contradictory.

Having passed beyond the summary of the first division of the book, Bradley brings into light the first aspect which we may know about the Absolute, namely, that, “Reality is known to possess a positive character, but this character is at present determined only as that which excludes contradiction.”<sup>115</sup> To properly explore Bradley’s theory of truth (which is exactly what

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<sup>110</sup> F.H. Bradley, “A Reply to a Criticism,” in *Mind, New Series*, vol. 3, no. 10 (1894): 234.

<sup>111</sup> W.J. Mander, *An Introduction to Bradley’s Metaphysics*, 138.

<sup>112</sup> F.H. Bradley, *Appearance and Reality*, 430.

<sup>113</sup> Philip Ferreira, *Bradley and the Structure of Knowledge*, 182.

<sup>114</sup> F.H. Bradley, *Principles of Logic*, (London, England: Oxford University Press, 1922; Reprint, New York, USA: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 591.

<sup>115</sup> F.H. Bradley, *Appearance and Reality*, 140.



we are dealing with in the moment we turn to his discussions of contradiction) is a task far to great for this thesis.<sup>116</sup> Suffice it to say that, contradiction is the mark of the false and harmony the mark of that which is true. The greater the degree of contradiction to be found in an entity, the smaller its degree of truth (and as a result, the degree which it can be said to be real). Bradley likewise summarizes his theory of truth by stating that:

“Reality is one in this sense that it has a positive nature exclusive of discord, a nature which must hold throughout everything that is to be real. Its diversity can be diverse only so far as not to clash, and what seems otherwise anywhere cannot be real. And, from the other side, everything which appears must be real. Appearance must belong to reality, and it must therefore be concordant and other than it seems. The bewildering mass of phenomenal diversity must hence somehow be at unity and self-consistent; for it cannot be elsewhere than in reality, and reality excludes discord.”<sup>117</sup>

In this we see that Bradley’s investigation of the relational consciousness has led him to posit that anything which is relational is contradictory and is, therefore, appearance. Because of Bradley’s understanding of reality as self-consistent and without conflict, there can be nothing which, in the final word, is contradictory. As a result, there must be a greater unity in which all contradictory appearances

Having seen that reality must be harmonized, Bradley now investigates whether reality is able to be plural (as we will later see James claim it to be) or whether it is one. If reality were plural, it would mean that there would be a number of beings which were completely isolated

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<sup>116</sup> For a truly in-depth discussion of Bradley’s theory of truth, see Ferreira’s *Bradley and the Structure of Knowledge*.

<sup>117</sup> F.H. Bradley, *Appearance and Reality*, 140.

from each other and self-sufficient. In order for this to be the case, the plurality of reals would have to “be free from external interference and from inner discrepancy.”<sup>118</sup> Yet, as we saw in Bradley’s discussion of relations this would be impossible. The internal world of each real is itself a manifold of contradictions (due to the hopeless state of internal relations in general) and the total independence of each real contradicts the plurality of their existence thus necessitating external relations between them and therein doing away with their independence.<sup>119</sup> As such, Bradley is led to conclude that, “Diversity in the real cannot be the plurality of independent beings. And the oneness of the Absolute must hence be more than a mere diffused adjective. It possesses unity, as a whole, and is a single system.”<sup>120</sup> Thus, Bradley makes the case that the Absolute is to be a holistic system if it is to be worthy of the name it bears and yet, while we are able to know that it is such a system, Bradley rightly points out that, “if we stop here, it remains but formal and abstract.”<sup>121</sup>

In order to flesh out exactly what the system of the Absolute means, Bradley draws on his earlier arguments concerning the ideality of the relational consciousness (and thus, all knowledge) and concludes that, “sentient experience, in short, is reality, and what is not this is not real. We may say, in other words, that there is no being or fact outside of that which is commonly called psychological experience.”<sup>122</sup> In this statement, Bradley claims that the system of the Absolute is to be one harmonious experience on the basis that, “anything in no sense felt or perceived, becomes to me quite unmeaning.”<sup>123</sup> As we had seen, Bradley’s investigation of

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<sup>118</sup> F.H. Bradley, *Appearance and Reality*, 141.

<sup>119</sup> As we saw earlier in our section on relations proper, any plurality carries with it either a disjunctive relation separating the components of the plurality or a conjunctive relation connecting them together.

<sup>120</sup> *Ibid*, 142.

<sup>121</sup> *Ibid*, 144.

<sup>122</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>123</sup> *Ibid*, 145.

relations and experience led him to conclude that experience is, obviously, experienced but that all parts of the relational consciousness are experienced as well. This is due to the fact that the relational consciousness is the partial objectification of the self which comes before the merely felt self and, in coming before the felt self, the object self is experienced as part of feeling.

Bradley is wary here in setting up the grounds for solipsism (which we had dealt with previously) and so pre-emptively states that, “to set up the subject as real independently of the whole, and to make the whole into experience in the sense of an adjective of that subject, seems to me indefensible.”<sup>124</sup> We must remember here that, for Bradley, experience is originally not the experience of a subject but is prior to the subject/object dichotomy. Within experience there is no relationality such as would come about in the sundering of subject and object; rather, there are merely felt differences and the presence of the felt self and not-self. This presence is not a strict discrepancy as would come about in a true subject/object divide. In the felt difference of self/not-self there is no true boundary between the two and felt content is able to pass from self to not-self. In elucidating this point, we find that, “what we discover is a whole in which distinctions can be made, but in which divisions do not exist.”<sup>125</sup> Thus, the experience which Bradley claims as the system of the Absolute is one which is totalizing but is not an erasure of difference. Due to Bradley’s demonstration of the faults of relational thinking, the Absolute is able to comprehend difference while maintaining its unity. In support of this, Bradley writes that, “nothing is ever so presented as real by itself, or can be argued so to exist without demonstrable fallacy. And in asserting that the reality is experience, I rest throughout on this foundation.”<sup>126</sup>

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<sup>124</sup> F.H. Bradley, *Appearance and Reality*, 145.

<sup>125</sup> *Ibid*, 146.

<sup>126</sup> *Ibid*.

Yet how does Bradley arrive at the conclusion of the Absolute from his prior investigations into immediate experience and the relational consciousness? Timothy Sprigge claims that Bradley's deduction of the Absolute rests on several principles derived from the rest of Bradley's philosophy, namely, the principle of universal relatedness, the holistic principle, and the principle of universal experientiality.<sup>127</sup> The principle of universal relatedness claims that, "everything is related in some way to everything else."<sup>128</sup> This may seem like a strange principle for Sprigge to saddle Bradley with given Bradley's own refutation of all relations as appearance but it is an important principle within the deduction. For Bradley's philosophical pursuit, it is necessary that he show that all knowledge is relational and that everything which can be said to exist is therefore in relation to all other things. From this basis that all knowledge is relational, the subsequent refutation of relations as appearance, and Bradley's claim that immediate experience is non-relational, we move onto the next principle.

Like the principle of universal relatedness, Bradley's holistic principle is to be found on nearly every page which he wrote. According to Sprigge once more, this principle holds that, "terms can only be related in virtue of their being united with each other, usually together with other things, to constitute a whole which is more of a genuine individual than are any of them singly."<sup>129</sup> This principle has much in common with the principle of universal relatedness but it demands a higher degree of unity than its preceding principle. Whereas universal relatedness is able to be predicated of a pluralistic ontology, the holistic principle is not. It builds upon the principle of universal relatedness by demanding that if indeed everything is to be related, those

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<sup>127</sup> Timothy Sprigge, "Bradley's Doctrine of the Absolute," in *Appearance Versus Reality*, ed. Guy Stock (Oxford, England: Oxford University Press, 1998): 197-198.

<sup>128</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>129</sup> *Ibid.*

relations will have to be internal to a greater unity of which the terms are merely parts. Thus, the holistic principle is a system building principle which grants a hierarchical order to Bradley's metaphysics which is to be found in his "degrees of truth and reality." Per his theory of "degrees," those things which harmonize to a greater extent with reality are able to be considered more truthful than those things which jar to a greater extent with reality at large.<sup>130</sup> We find the holistic principle deduced from the grounds of immediate experience, mere feeling to be precise. It was there that we saw the primordial wholeness which was the non-relational ground of knowledge. It is precisely the division of this originally holistic system found in feeling which Bradley claimed to occur through the analytic judgment. As we are now operating within the relational consciousness, we may say that by Bradley's own understanding of judgment, in order to come closer to truth, we must synthesize our analytic judgments into ever greater and more inclusive wholes in the attempt to regain the original unity found in feeling (though, of course, this attempt is bound to fail). Though each subsequent synthesis is a failure to attain absolute unity, the creation of ideas that more inclusively and appropriately subsume other ideas within it will bring us closer to the final truth. This principle grants Bradley the ability to claim that reality is a whole and to base his more speculative philosophical statements in the grounding which the principle (drawn of course from immediate experience) provides.

The final principle which Sprigge finds within Bradley's work is the principle of universal experientiality. This principle claims that, "everything which genuinely *is* is experiential."<sup>131</sup> This principle, once again, finds its origin in immediate experience and

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<sup>130</sup> This hierarchy leading to the Absolute (and based off of the Absolute) finds application in Bradley's moral philosophy. Indeed, for Bradley, "the one and supreme reality should be the same as the one and supreme value." (Torgny T. Segerstedt, "'Complete' and 'Perfect' in Bradley's Idea of Reality," in *International Journal of Ethics*, vol. 43, no. 1, [1932]: 42.)

<sup>131</sup> Timothy Sprigge, "Bradley's Doctrine of the Absolute," 198.

Bradley's discussion of finite centres of experience. Sprigge summarizes Bradley's opus spanning treatment of this principle by stating that reality is contained in either "(a) a whole [or centre] of experience or (b) an element in such or (c) an aggregate [or mereological sum] of items experiential in one of these first two senses."<sup>132</sup> Thus, Sprigge describes for us three of the central principles at work within Bradley's deduction of the Absolute.

Along the lines of what Sprigge attempted to do by describing the principles at work within Bradley's deduction of the Absolute, I have attempted to formulate a step-by-step demonstration of how Bradley arrived at such a conclusion. Mander (1994) and Candlish (1984) provided similar descriptions of Bradley's argument for his peculiar brand of idealism and the monism that is its conclusion. My attempt here will be to render Bradley's argument all the more explicit and in such a way as will be a form of synopsis of our thesis up to this point. In this deduction, we can see the principles which Sprigge outlined above and which follows from all of Bradley's major works, including his *Principles of Logic, Appearance and Reality*, and *Essays on Truth and Reality*. It proceeds as follows: 1) We are presented with a felt unity in immediate experience. This unity is not a numerical "one" but is better conceived of as a continuous flow wherein the felt differences are all united within a single feeling base wherein there are no *true* distinctions between the felt differences. Within this flow we can experience the feeling of difference but not distinction. 2) Following from this felt difference, we are able to transcend feeling through the relational consciousness; a construction upon the basis of feeling, which is logically, though not necessarily temporally, prior to the relational consciousness<sup>133</sup>. This takes the form of explicit judgments wherein we excise those felt differences from their place in

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<sup>132</sup> Timothy Sprigge, "Bradley's Doctrine of the Absolute," 198.

<sup>133</sup> W.J. Mander, *British Idealism: A History*, 104.

immediate experience and make them explicit. Though judgment allows us to gain knowledge of reality, that knowledge is both successful in leading us towards truth and also inevitably flawed in that it proves to be run through with contradictions and a lack of completion. 3) This lack of completion is remedied by the unification of ideal and felt content which, although an improvement upon the relational consciousness, does not fully satisfy our intellectual demands for completion. 4) Through this experience, we are led to understand that the restrictions which keep our feeling from including all reality are merely those limitations of our self which also proves to be appearance. Indeed, “feeling as immediate experience must be seen to be continuous with a form of feeling even larger than itself.”<sup>134</sup> 6) Because of this discovery, we are led to posit the Absolute.

Thus, we see that Bradley’s philosophy is, like the Absolute, a systematic whole. Beginning with our own immediate experience we find that reality is first a non-relational unity wherein we are not wholly divided from the world but, instead, are part of it. In order to gain explicit knowledge of the differences which are merely felt in experience, we transcend feeling and come to the relational consciousness. In relationality, we find that all of our attempts to come to the full truth of reality are thwarted by the defects of relational thinking and that we must, once again, transcend our current stage in order to come to the final unity wherein our feeling and thought will be reunited. The investigations undertaken throughout this process have led us to see that our experience necessarily points beyond itself to a reality which transcends our merely personal experience and points to a larger system of unity which will unite our experience with that larger reality. As experience is the base reality which we draw from, if the larger experience which will (inevitably and necessarily) unite the disparate selves and reality at

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<sup>134</sup> Philip Ferreira, *Bradley and the Structure of Knowledge*, 172.

large is to be understood as so encompassing, it too will have to be made of experience which is somewhat analogous to our own. The further nature of the Absolute and the extent to which we may know it, though a crucial part of Bradley's philosophy, is beyond the scope of this thesis. For us, it will suffice to have investigated experience throughout and to have seen the way in which Bradley arrives at the conclusion that reality is experience which takes the form of an all-embracing, harmonious unity in the Absolute.



## **Chapter 2: The Plurality of William James' Reality**

### **2.1 William James' Philosophy of Experience**

One of the central tasks of James' philosophy is to do justice by the lived experience of the individual person and to account for the way in which we come to know the world *through* that experience. As did Bradley, James sought to bridge the epistemic gap between subject and object through the identification of subject and object in a single experience, thereby rescuing knowledge from Kant's transcendental chasm. Indeed, "the whole point of his thought is to equate physical reality with what we do encounter directly in our own experience and can imagine clearly as going on without it."<sup>135</sup> While he shares this task with Bradley, albeit with some crucial differences, what follows from his method of arriving at this position differs greatly. This difference can be seen in James' pluralistic "weltanschauung" wherein experience is the basic reality which all things are made of and yet, is not reducible to any sort of monism. The crucial difference between James and Bradley's accounts of experience is that for Bradley, reality is a single, systemic totality composed of "immediate experience [which] takes on the status of a metaphysical substratum;"<sup>136</sup> it is the harmony of all seemingly distinct parts returning to their completed unity in the Absolute. For James, reality is rather the interaction of distinct portions of "pure experience" which come together to create mosaics of experience in consciousness. Though similar in many respects, the conclusions which James draws from his interpretation of experience, that reality is pluralistic, is in direct confrontation with Bradley's monistic conclusion that reality is an absolute whole. This section will describe the way in which James understands consciousness, its role in experience, and will conclude by showing that

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<sup>135</sup> Timothy Sprigge, *James and Bradley: American Truth and British Reality*, 122.

<sup>136</sup> Bradley, James. "The Critique of Pure Feeling: Bradley, Whitehead, and the Anglo-Saxon Metaphysical Tradition," 154.

experience, though foundational to all reality, does not function as any sort of substance or ground for reality.

### Experience All the Way Down

In his essay, “Does ‘Consciousness’ Exist?”, James puts forward the claim that in the beginning of philosophy the two poles of knowledge (subject/object, spirit/matter, body/soul, etc...) were equally potent principles that were each deserving of the same degree of interest and research but that Kant destabilized this partnership. As a result of this destabilization, the dyad has been erased and consciousness has become, “only a name for the fact that the ‘content’ of an experience is *known*.”<sup>137</sup> As such, consciousness has been reduced to the naming of an *observation* of another set of interactions taking place among principles; it is an activity *not* an entity. As it no longer occupies the metaphysical niche of an entity, James writes that, “I believe that ‘consciousness,’ when once it has evaporated to this estate of pure diaphaneity, is on the point of disappearing altogether. It is the name of a non-entity, and has no right to a place among first principles.”<sup>138</sup> Thus, James states his claim that in the post-Kantian world, consciousness does not hold the metaphysical value that it had held prior to Kant and that it is now the name for a function rather than a distinct entity in itself. James claims that in the post-Kantian world, one cannot give equal weight to both consciousness and materiality; one must choose to give precedence to one or the other with James siding on materiality. In this way, James denies the possibility of any sort of mind/matter dualism; be it Cartesian, transcendental, or otherwise. He writes that, “I mean only to deny that [consciousness] stands for an entity, but to insist most emphatically that it does stand for a function.”<sup>139</sup> Thus, rather than acting as an independent

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<sup>137</sup> William James, *Essays in Radical Empiricism*, 1.

<sup>138</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>139</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.

entity, James understands consciousness to be a function which is performed by a given entity. As such, to speak of consciousness as something independent is false. We should rather speak of it in the same way that we speak of breathing or photosynthesis, namely, as an emergent function which is made possible by the particular configuration of the given substrate.<sup>140</sup> Here we see that, “James’ proposal is not [...] to eliminate the distinction between thought and thing by returning to an undifferentiated experience or feeling, but to reinterpret the traditional subject/object distinction in terms of contexts and functions.”<sup>141</sup> In thus claiming consciousness as an activity or function, James denies the dualism that he sees as stemming from the Kantian tradition and instead makes the bold claim that, “there is [...] no aboriginal stuff or quality of being, contrasted with that of which material objects are made, out of which our thoughts of them are made.”<sup>142</sup> Thus, as consciousness is not an entity but an activity, it does not require a distinct substance from material entities that gives it its being; rather, consciousness takes place within certain physical entities of the world. It should be noted here that there is no activity *of* consciousness which consciousness performs; instead, consciousness *itself* is the activity which *something else* performs. As we have seen, consciousness is merely the activity performed by a material thing and as such they both share the same primordial substrate. Having recognized this, James states:

“My thesis is that if we start with the supposition that there is only one primordial stuff or material in the world, a stuff of which everything is composed, and if we call that stuff ‘pure experience,’ then knowing can easily be explained as a particular sort of relation

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<sup>140</sup> It should be noted that *Essays in Radical Empiricism* is not clear as to whether the substrate which consciousness adheres in must always be “matter” or whether there are other possible substrates.

<sup>141</sup> John E. Smith, “Radical Empiricism,” in *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society, New Series*, vol. 65, (1965): 209.

<sup>142</sup> William James, *Essays in Radical Empiricism*, 2.

towards one another into which portions of experience may enter. The relation itself is a part of pure experience; one of its 'terms' becomes the subject or bearer of the knowledge, the knower, the other becomes the object known."<sup>143</sup>

In this way, James equates the substrate of both consciousness and its object and in so doing eliminates the strict dualism that previously troubled him. We see here a similarity with Bradley's philosophy. Both philosophers do away with the noumenal distinction by claiming that, as there is only a single substrate, there is no metaphysical separation between the knower and the known, they are made of one and the same thing and are thereby potentially knowable to one another depending upon the epistemological possibilities inherent to each entity. James' thesis, then, is that, "the universe, or at least the totality of what we can know or even properly speculate about, is experiential through and through."<sup>144</sup> Though this may sound congruent with Bradley's account of reality as experience, we will see over the course of this chapter that James sharply disagrees with Bradley over what experience actually means to both of their doctrines.

As stated, for James, the existence of a shared substance between knower and known means that experience is essentially pre-subjective and that, "the separation of it into consciousness and content comes, not by way of subtraction, but by way of addition."<sup>145</sup> In other words, "the singular item of pure experience is a thing that has two possible modes: it is something that exists both in my thinking and out there in the world."<sup>146</sup> This is a radical shift from a dualistic perspective as it means that the exact nature of experience at any moment depends upon the context which it finds itself in. James writes that, "a given undivided portion of

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<sup>143</sup> William James, *Essays in Radical Empiricism*, 3.

<sup>144</sup> Timothy Sprigge, *James and Bradley: American Truth and British Reality*, 109.

<sup>145</sup> William James, *Essays in Radical Empiricism*, 5.

<sup>146</sup> Evlyn Fortier, "James and Bradley on Immediate Experience," 129.

experience taken in one context of associates, play[s] the part of a knower, of a state of mind, of ‘consciousness’; while in a different context the same undivided bite of experience plays the part of a thing known, of an object ‘content’.”<sup>147</sup> Thus the set of experiences which are added to the first experience provide the restrictions under which the first experience operates; “in one group [of experiences] it figures as a thought, in another group as a thing. And, since it can figure in both groups simultaneously we have every right to speak of it as subjective and objective, both at once.”<sup>148</sup> This is a crucial moment in James’ metaphysics as it is the explicit identification of subject and object and therein holds the key to his epistemology.

In identifying both knower and known with one and the same experience James described how it is that knowledge itself could arise. As the pure experience becomes conditioned by the addition of other sets of experience, it develops characteristics which suit the context in which it finds itself. James uses the metaphor of the intersection of two lines to illustrate his theory: consider a point that is intersected by two lines. The point here represents the pure experience while one line represents the experiential set that constitutes the knowing individual while the other line represents the object of knowledge. The intersection of the lines at the point describe how the same experience can take on different forms depending on which set of experiences (which line) intersects it. Through this illustration, James shows that the pure experience is both subject and object at the same time. In this way, none of the interpretations of the experience (that are truly well-grounded in other experiences) would prove to be incorrect, they would instead contribute to the initial interpretation of the experience by providing yet another of the contexts in which the experience is interwoven. James writes that, “in one of these contexts it is

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<sup>147</sup> William James, *Essays in Radical Empiricism*, 5.

<sup>148</sup> *Ibid.*

your ‘field of consciousness’; in another it is ‘the room in which you sit’ and it enters both contexts in its wholeness, giving no pretext for being said to attach itself to consciousness by one of its parts or aspects, and to outer reality by another.”<sup>149</sup> In this way we see that, for James, the pure experience of the room includes both the knowledge of the room and the room itself in a primordial, undifferentiated state. In this state, it is not appropriate to speak of subject and object as the two are merely aspects of that single original experience that has been contextualized by other sets of experiences which interact with it. Having come into contact with these other experiential sets, the pure experience is then separated depending on the stream of experience that we choose to examine. Based on the context provided by the examined stream, the pure experience is manifest in different ways; becoming in one context the room and in the other the knowledge of the room.

This contextuality of experience is what allows the distinction between percepts and concepts though it is not a radical separation as in any sort of dualism. It is against this sort of separation that his philosophy is oriented and through stating that all entities have experience as their ground, James makes this distinction without absolute separation possible. The key portion of James’ doctrine is that while all entities have experience as their ground, they are not reducible to any sort of ontological monism or absolutism. Unlike these sorts of systems, James’ radical empiricism postulates a single *character* of material that is common to all entities not a single *numerical substance* to all entities. This means that while all entities (as experience) have the same base set of possibilities and restrictions they are not reducible to a single totality or whole. Thus, unlike Bradley’s philosophy we have a true plurality of things which come together contingently to form temporary unions with one another rather than Bradley’s grand,

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<sup>149</sup> William James, *Essays in Radical Empiricism*, 7.

deterministic totality. Along with James' pluralism comes the possibility for novelty. The actualization of any entity's possibilities arises through the pure experience's interaction with other sets of pure experiences. None of which are restricted by the necessary interaction between them. Rather than Bradley's experiential monism, James simply asserts that though there is a plurality of entities, each of these entities are potentially experienceable. Because of this ontology, James is able to retain a pluralistic conception of reality while asserting that this very same reality is reducible to experience. Though pure experience itself is not a single totality, as we have seen, for James, there *is* a numerical identity between subjective and objective knowledge. The crucial thing to understand about James' subject-object distinction is that it only exists in the act of interpretation or what James calls a "retrospective experience" in which we may analyze past experiences within the contexts in which they occurred. This flies in the face of Bradley's statement in "On Our Knowledge of Pure Experience" that immediate experience and ideality accompany each other simultaneously. The reason for James' rejection of Bradley's philosophy here is that, while Bradley took immediate experience to contain both subject and object in an implicit form, James takes the pure experience to only become divided into subject and object after the experience occurs and is analyzed in a given context of other experiences. Thus, James' phenomenology of experience is one that arrives after the pure experience occurs while Bradley's phenomenology occurs simultaneously with the experience. By James' analysis, we can see past experiences giving rise to novel experiences and the way in which the streams of experience are able to intermingle and pass from one into the next. To return to the example of a person engaging with a room for the first time: the stream of experience consisting of the person's life was distinct from that of the room, they each had distinct causes leading them to be that which they are and each entity had never encountered the other until that moment. When the

two come into contact for the first time, there is the new experience of their intermingling. This intermingling is a novel experience that is distinct from either of the previous two experiences (or their sets of experiences). In this experience, the pure experience which acts as the material of the encounter is able to be interpreted as either the person knowing the room or the room as it is known by the person. In this way, the single pure experience is able to function as both subject and object. In this example we see once more James' vision of consciousness: for James, to say the person was conscious of their encounter with the room would mean merely that the person was aware of their coming to know the room. It is merely the name of the function of the interaction between the subject and object, not an entity in its own right. For James, "consciousness connotes a kind of external relation, and does not denote a special stuff or way of being,"<sup>150</sup> it is a relation between the pure experience of the act of knowledge and the disparate sets of experience consisting in one of the experiential history of the knower, in the other, of the experiential history of the thing known. Likewise, the seemingly vast experiential difference between thought and its object is entirely context dependent. James states that, "of every extended object the *adequate* mental picture must have all the extension of the object itself. The difference between objective and subjective extension is one of relation to a context solely."<sup>151</sup> That the difference between thought and its object is solely contextual comes as no great shock considering that they are both aspects of a single pure experience. What is intriguing is that James asserts that they are *identical* in all but context (this will play an important role in his consideration of the utility of ideas and the evaluation of truth). The idea must mirror the extended object in all ways other than the sets of experiences which it interacts with, thereby distinguishing the *res cogitans* from the *res extensa*. In this way then, James asserts his theory

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<sup>150</sup> William James, *Essays in Radical Empiricism*, 13.

<sup>151</sup> *Ibid*, 16.



that, “the two worlds [of mental and physical reality] differ, not by the presence or absence of extension but by the relations of the extensions which in both worlds exist.”<sup>152</sup>

Having come this far, there is a crucial clarification that must be made. Though we have said that the basic substrate of reality is experience, it must be clarified that this does not mean that experience constitutes a sort of material out of which the entities of reality are made. James writes that, “there is no *general* stuff of which experience at large is made [...] Experience is only a collective name for all these sensible natures, and save for time and space (and, if you like, for ‘being’) there appears to be no universal element of which all things are made.”<sup>153</sup> Thus we see that pure experience does not take the place of the Aristotelian substance or the Kantian noumena. Pure experience simply names the behaviour of the reality which we engage with and, in the general sense of the term, *experience*. This does not invalidate the claim that reality is experience but qualifies what James means when he states that experience is the fundamental reality of things. It is an appeal to his pragmatic sensibilities and, indeed, is found within the very methodology of James’ radical empiricism itself, namely, that, “to be radical, an empiricism must neither admit into its constructions any element that is not directly experienced, nor exclude from them any element that is directly experienced.”<sup>154</sup> Thus, anything that is to become part of James’ system of radical empiricism must be able to be experienced (thereby ruling out anything like Bradley’s Absolute) and must include anything experienceable. For James, experience does not occupy the metaphysical niche of substance as it does for Bradley. Instead it is merely a general characteristic which all reality must possess. This is an explicit attack on Bradley’s method of philosophy as, for him, the Absolute in itself is not an object of our experience; rather,

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<sup>152</sup> William James, *Essays in Radical Empiricism*, 16.

<sup>153</sup> *Ibid*, 14.

<sup>154</sup> *Ibid*, 22.

we gain knowledge of the Absolute through its finite appearances. Per James' methodology, this would leave the Absolute as nothing more than conjecture as it is an abstraction made possible by Bradley's rationalist sympathies, built upon our experience and not actually found within it. Yet what does this mean for Bradley's account of experience itself? If James is to reject Bradley's ability to postulate the Absolute, then the rest of Bradley's philosophy is rendered incomplete. As we have seen in our treatment of Bradley's philosophy, his understanding of both immediate experience and the relational consciousness are incomplete if they are not able to be harmonized successfully in the Absolute. Due to James' unwillingness to take up Bradley's rationalist methodology, they are left at an impasse with Bradley claiming the necessity of the Absolute and James claiming its impossibility.

James concludes his essay on the nature of consciousness by stating very clearly that, "the stream of thinking [...] is only a careless name for what, when scrutinized, reveals itself to consist chiefly of the stream of my breathing."<sup>155</sup> We see here that James maintains his denial of dualism and instead puts forward the materialistic explanation that our consciousness is a function of our physical bodies, that it is, as he stated earlier, merely the observation of our own interpretation of experiences. Thus, James' radical empiricism places experience as the defining quality of all things and transforms consciousness from being an entity (upon whose coattails ride the dualism the James so rallied against) into a process of interpreting the experience which all things consist of. As we have seen, James' account of experience rests on the cornerstone of context. Any given experience is granted its distinctive character based upon the set of other experiences which interacts with it and grant the context in which it comes about. Each experience has the potential to occupy a multiplicity of niches depending upon the experiential

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<sup>155</sup> William James, *Essays in Radical Empiricism*, 19.

sets which it comes into contact with and in association with which it is interpreted. This context of experiences in which the first experience interacts is a set of relations which themselves form part of experience and, at base, are made of nothing other than pure experience itself. James has also shown that rather than experience replacing previous philosophical concepts such as substance, noumena, or being, it is the description of the character of physical reality. The physical world could be made of any number of disparate materials (atoms, spirit, etc.) so long as they are all experienceable. This requirement that all things be possibly experienced is what James means by describing the nature of reality as pure experience. Through his investigation of experience, we have also seen that consciousness is itself illusory and that it is merely a name for the function of a mind's awareness of its own knowing; it is not a distinct element of its own but is rather dependent upon the physical body in order to exist. Through these conclusions, we have described the basis for William James' philosophy of experience and the way in which it is a response to the Bradley's philosophy. Rather than a total rejection of Bradley's understanding of reality, James' philosophy marks the transposition of a shared sensibility regarding the non-dual nature of reality into his radical empiricist methodology. While he and Bradley both shared the same goal of overcoming the subject/object dichotomy, the difference between his and Bradley's methodology brought them into conflict.

### The Pluralism of the Experiential World

Having seen that, for James, reality is best described as experienceable, we will now further investigate the way in which experiences, and sets of experiences, interact within the chaotic nexus that defines reality. James asserts that his radical empiricism is, "essentially a mosaic philosophy, a philosophy of plural facts"<sup>156</sup> and, as we saw earlier, these facts are not

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<sup>156</sup> William James, *Essays in Radical Empiricism*, 22

substances of any sort but are rather all entities that are experienceable in some fashion.

Anything which is capable of being experienced must be accounted for within the system of radical empiricism and anything that is not experiential must be excluded. As such, James writes that:

To be radical, an empiricism must neither admit into its constructions any element that is not directly experienced, nor exclude any element that is directly experienced. For such a philosophy, *the relations that connect experiences must themselves be experienced relations, and any kind of relation experienced must be accounted as 'real' as anything else in the system.*<sup>157</sup>

As we can see, there is a *crucial* interplay between relations and experience, the one dependent upon the other, which provide support for and ground one another. Experience provides the epistemological method whereby we can come to know relations, while the relations provide the logical structure and support for experience. Because of this codependence between experience and relations, the importance of relations within William James' account of experience cannot be understated. This understanding of relations and experience as codependent is an obvious denial of a crucial moment in Bradley's philosophy, namely, the opening chapters of *Appearance and Reality*. It is in that book that Bradley's philosophy acquires its most systematic form and if his initial critique of relations is denied, then the remainder of his metaphysics falls victim as well. Thus, in James' radical empiricism we see his explicit attempt to overturn Bradley's philosophy and absolute idealism in general. This essay will provide an account of James' development of

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<sup>157</sup> William James, *Essays in Radical Empiricism*, 22.

relations within his radical empiricism and will investigate the ways in which James' developments contradict Bradley's philosophy.

To begin, we will first investigate the structure of James' radical empiricism. The impetus for James' development of this system of thought was his dissatisfaction with pre-existing philosophies which he claimed were, "too abstract and academic."<sup>158</sup> Perhaps in accordance with his pragmatism, he desired philosophy to better take into account the everyday and that, "what the younger generation crave is more of the temperament of life in its philosophy, even though it were at some cost of logical rigor and of formal purity."<sup>159</sup> This led him to devise the system of radical empiricism, a development of the pre-existent empiricism which aimed to take full account of all parts of experience wherein, "a real place must be found for every kind of thing experienced, whether term or relation, in the final philosophic arrangement."<sup>160</sup> This means that both entities, the aforementioned terms, and the relations that they hold to one another must be equally real as they are equally experienced. This engagement with relations is a crucial development of James' new system as it attempts to remedy the lack which James saw in the other dominant philosophies of the time, namely, rationalism and empiricism. James saw in empiricism, "a tendency to do away with the conjunctions of things and to insist on the disjunctions" while rationalism attempted, "to correct [empiricism's] incoherencies by the addition of trans-experiential agents of unification."<sup>161</sup> In this way, empiricism became a parody of itself by insisting upon an entirely disjunct world, while rationalism reduced human experience to something less than real. James saw the solution to

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<sup>158</sup> William James, *Essays in Radical Empiricism*, 21.

<sup>159</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>160</sup> *Ibid.*, 23.

<sup>161</sup> *Ibid.*, 23.

each of these problems as inherent within the roots of empiricism and stated that, “if empiricism had only been radical and taken everything that comes without disfavor, conjunction as well as separation, each at its face value, the results would have called for no such artificial correction”<sup>162</sup> as is found in rationalism. This inherent possibility of finding both conjunction and disjunction within experience is James’ central deviation from the pre-established empiricism and the birth of his new system of radical empiricism.<sup>163</sup>

While traditional empiricism focussed on the disjunctive relations which distinguish entities from one another, it excluded the conjunctions which provide coherence to reality. Radical empiricism does away with this trend as it, “*does full justice to conjunctive relations* without, however, treating them as rationalism always tends to treat them, as being true in some supernal way, as if the unity of things and their variety belonged to different orders of truth and vitality altogether.”<sup>164</sup> In this way then, radical empiricism holds true to its methodology of treating all experience at face value and without neglecting anything that is experienced. Though both conjunctive and disjunctive relations are equally real in our experience, “taken as it does appear, our universe is to a large extent chaotic.”<sup>165</sup> This is due to there being no connective force that unites all things, unlike in Bradley’s philosophy. For James, not only is there no relation which connects all things together but, as we have seen earlier, there is equally no universal substance out of which all things are made. We see here the difference between Bradley’s privileging of internal relations and James’ preference for external relations. If, per Bradley, reality is internally related then there is a guaranteed order which all entities must

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<sup>162</sup> William James, *Essays in Radical Empiricism*, 23.

<sup>163</sup> It is important to note here that throughout *Essays in Radical Empiricism*; James’ concern lies with external relations (both conjunctive and disjunctive) to the expense of internal relations. This is in stark contrast with Bradley who addresses both though he favours internal relations as better capturing the true nature of reality.

<sup>164</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>165</sup> *Ibid.*, 24.

follow. If each entity is internally related to something greater than it and is made up of things less than it which are nonetheless internally related to it then there will be a necessary hierarchy and order which reality must follow. If reality is merely externally related then, though James is correct in asserting that there will remain a connectedness to things via conjunctive relations, that connectedness will be contingent. This is more to the point for James in that he desires his own philosophy to be coherent with indeterminism unlike Bradley's monism.<sup>166</sup>

Along these lines, James states that the relations which we experience, "are of different degrees of intimacy" and that as such, "we can imagine a universe of witness but no nextness; or one of nextness but no likeness, or of likeness with no activity, or of activity with no purpose, or of purpose with no ego. These would be universes, each with its own grade of unity."<sup>167</sup> As such, James puts forward a vision of reality wherein there is no *necessary* unity, rather, the unity that we experience is contingent upon the various relations that are also experienced, of which none are necessary in themselves. Because of this lack of necessary unity, "taken as it does appear, our universe is to a large degree chaotic. No one single type of connection runs through all the experience that composes it."<sup>168</sup> This is an important consideration within James' radical empiricism as it gives freedom to the way in which experiences are connected together. Rather than being connected via necessary pathways leading from one experience to the next, there is the possibility for a multitude of experiences to lead from one to another. Rather than the strict necessity of internal relations, James' reality is unified by conjunctive external relations. This in turn means that radical novelty and true change is a possibility within radical empiricism. For James, the reality of change, and therefore the reality of the conjunctive relation, is a crucial

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<sup>166</sup> William James, *Essays in Radical Empiricism*, 47.

<sup>167</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>168</sup> *Ibid.*

tipping point within any philosophy as it is at this introduction of the conjunctive relation where one can easily slip from stating the reality of the *experienced* conjunctive relation into postulating the rationalist's grand unifying force or Absolute. To confront this corrupting, rationalist trend, James claims that in order to avoid bloating the continuity of experience that we feel in the conjunctive relation, we must examine the relation as it comes to us in experience *not* as we might talk about it after the experience has passed.<sup>169</sup> To do so would be to analyze the phenomenon of experience logically rather than experientially and, as James will later state, "you cannot settle questions of fact by formal logic."<sup>170</sup> As it is the very basis of radical empiricism that all things which are part of the system must be experienceable, to analyse the fact of the continuity of experience logically would be to risk overcomplicating the phenomena of experience through introducing logical difficulties not found in the raw experience. These logical puzzles would then drive us to conjecture about secondary, non-experienceable concepts by which we can make our experience seem logically possible such as Bradley's Absolute. Thus, in prioritizing external relations as they appear in experience, James seeks to undermine the temptation for philosophers to fall into the trap of rationalism and to undermine the rationalist's methodology.

For James, prioritizing this post-hoc logical analysis of the experience at the expense of taking experience at its "face value" defiles the very nature of reality and inevitably leads to what he considers to be the folly of rationalism, namely, the postulation of supra-experiential content. James understands this postulation as an unnecessary construction on what he takes to be the baseline of reality, that is, experience. For him, there is no need to question that which arrives

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<sup>169</sup> William James, *Essays in Radical Empiricism*, 26.

<sup>170</sup> *Ibid*, 130.



through experience as experience itself is the mark of reality. In this move, we can see the direct confrontation between James and Bradley's philosophical methodology: where James takes experience to stand on its own and be immune from logical analysis, Bradley sees all things as being under the rule of logical analysis though logic itself stands upon the foundation of immediate experience. Indeed, in James' understanding of experience, internal relations are simply denied being a possibility. Nothing about a thing's essence, nature, or the way in which its qualities are necessities for its existence are a part of our experience. All of these supposed requirements are part of the rational investigation of reality, not a part of reality as it is experienced. Thus, it is simply impossible for James' methodology to give a place to internal relations within his system and, hence, his shifting the debate from internal/external to conjunctive/disjunctive relations. This difference in methodology leads to their contradictory approach to relations which leads them to their final conclusions regarding the nature of experience.

Having stated James' preference for external relations, we may now return to our previously investigated issue of the problem of the subject-object distinction in James' epistemology. Regarding his previous defense of the reality of relations, James writes that, "the first great pitfall from which such a radical standing by experience will save us from is an artificial conception of the *relations between knower and known*."<sup>171</sup> He here claims that within experience we are given all the relations necessary to know objects and that it is, once again, the retrospective analysis of experience which plants the seeds of rationalist doubt in our minds. For James, the knower and the known are distinguished in any of the following ways. Either they are 1) a single experience analyzed from separate contexts, 2) two distinct pieces of experience that

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<sup>171</sup> William James, *Essays in Radical Empiricism*, 27.

are within the mind of a cognitive subject and are connected by intermediary cognitive conjunctions, or 3) the known is merely a *possible* experience which those currently in the subjects mind could lead to if those currently held experiences were sufficiently prolonged.

The first sort of distinction between knower and known is that found in ordinary perception. In this type of knowledge, the knower is directly confronted with the known entity while the other two types are concerned with knowledge of an entity not directly experienced. James explains this variety of knower-known distinction through the illustration of the process of him finding “Memorial Hall”. He claims that, should his idea of the Hall be unable to perform the practical purposes that he sets out for it (i.e., finding the Hall, discussing the Hall, uncertainty whether the Hall was what he had in mind when he directly experiences the Hall), his idea of the Hall should be declared faulty and not considered to be knowledge. On the other hand, if his idea of the Hall does live up to those practical tasks that he might attempt to use the idea to achieve, and if, having directly experienced the Hall, James felt his idea to “terminate” in the experienced Hall, then he would have had a true idea of the Hall in his mind. He writes that:

“That percept [i.e., the Hall] was what I *meant*, for into it my idea has passed by conjunctive experiences of sameness and fulfilled intention. Nowhere is there jar, but every later moment continues and corroborates an earlier one [...] In this continuing and corroborating, taken in no transcendental sense, but denoting definitely felt transitions, *lies all that the knowing of a percept by an idea can possibly contain or signify.*

Wherever such transitions are felt, the first experience *knows* the last one.”<sup>172</sup>

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<sup>172</sup> William James, *Essays in Radical Empiricism*, 30.

Here we see the way in which James' argument for the reality of relations supports his understanding of knowledge. The idea of the Hall and the objective Memorial Hall, though two separate experiences, are connected via a series of conjunctive relations in the form of other experiences. Within an experiential chain, there is an initial experience which starts the set and a final experience which terminates it. Thus, "whenever certain intermediaries are given, such that they develop towards their terminus, [...] the result is that *their starting-point thereby becomes a knower and their terminus an object meant or known.*"<sup>173</sup>

James' notion of the directedness of experience allows us to link our understanding of the subject-object distinction with our current understanding of conjunctive relations. Earlier, we saw that subject and object are two distinct sets of experiences which intersect at a single pure experience and that it is the context in which that pure experience is interpreted which signifies the difference between subject and object. This is then supported through James' understanding of relations as experienced in that the pure experience which constitutes part of the experiential sets of subject and object is the conjunctive relation which binds them together. Thus, when the idea that the knower has of the object (as part of their set of experiences) finds itself reflected in the actual experience of the object, we see the conjunction of the one set of experiences (the knower) with another (the known entity) by virtue of an intermediate experience (the idea). In addition to his own defence of the experience of conjunctive relations being the only sort of relation, James also criticizes Bradley by claiming that, "if anywhere there were more absolute unions realized, they could only reveal themselves to us by just such conjunctive results. These are what the unions are *worth*, these are all that *we can ever practically mean* by union, by

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<sup>173</sup> William James, *Essays in Radical Empiricism*, 30.

continuity.”<sup>174</sup> Thus, by his understanding of knowledge, James states that even if Bradley’s Absolute were assumed to be real, it would have to make itself known through conjunctive external relations, thereby rendering the internal relation which the Absolute would confer meaningless. For James, unions gain value only through the concrete function which they provide and which they show via external relations. Thus, his critique of Bradley’s Absolute and his reliance upon internal relations is that they remain theoretical and do not impact the experience which we have in practice. This claim is carried by James’ previous argument wherein we saw that it is only by conjunctive relations *as they are experienced* that we are able to gain knowledge of things. James is here drawing on his pragmatic sympathies in asking, “is it not time to repeat what Lotze said of substances, that to *act like* one is to *be* one?”<sup>175</sup> and is once more an appeal to the methodology of radical empiricism.<sup>176</sup> Per application of its methodology, any unity found within the system of radical empiricism would have to be experienced. This means that any absolute force of unity would only be able to be discovered as part of the experienced continuity between things and, as we have seen above, this sort of continuity also describes how we come to know entities. As such, James has attempted to show that any force of unity that claims to be beyond the mere continuity felt in experience through conjunctive relations is nothing more than an intellectual abstraction derived from the felt continuity of experience. In so doing, James has defended his understanding of human knowledge and the continuity of experience.

For James, reality is a process in time wherein individual experiences lapse and transition into one another, indeed, “in such a world, transitions and arrivals (or terminations) are the only

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<sup>174</sup> William James, *Essays in Radical Empiricism*, 31.

<sup>175</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>176</sup> Such an appeal eliminates the prospect of James acquiescing to the rationalist’s arguments from the outset.

events that happen, though they happen by so many paths.”<sup>177</sup> This is a fairly clear statement in that it suggests that the world of radical empiricism is one of process wherein the experience of the world is one of change between termini in various sets of experiences. This is an obvious point of departure from Bradley’s philosophy which has no place for true change or novelty due to its reliance on internal relations and the strict order which accompanies such a reliance. This echoes what we had seen throughout the preceding sections of this essay but what does it mean for the doctrine of substitution? James elaborates upon this statement in writing that, “the only function that one experience can perform is to lead into another experience; and the only fulfillment we can speak of is the reaching of a certain experienced end. When one experience leads to (or can lead to) the same end as another, they agree in function.”<sup>178</sup> James here claims that while transition and termination are, indeed, the only events that occur, they are the only function that an experience can perform. It further refines the notion of experience by stating that this single function that an experience can perform is able to be echoed by a plurality of other experiences. Here we see the seeds of substitution rearing their heads. Though the world of experience is a “quasi-chaos,”<sup>179</sup> the plurality of experiences may agree in function and in this way, experiential paths which begin at disparate starting points may come to the same terminus through their agreement in function. James argues that the function of experience, namely, the transitioning into other experiences, allows us to follow a number of separate experiential paths to arrive at the same terminal experience.<sup>180</sup> In the case of substitution, this means that we may substitute a mental experience in place of a physical experience and arrive at a mental terminus which would *potentially* have a corresponding counterpart in physical reality. While this sort of

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<sup>177</sup> William James, *Essays in Radical Empiricism*, 33.

<sup>178</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>179</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>180</sup> *Ibid.*, 34.

substitution is obviously a useful tool, allowing us to perform any sort of cognitive function that is more than bare sense-perception, James is also clear that substitutions do not always lead back to physical reality, in fact, “most thought-paths, it is true, are substitutes for nothing actual; they end outside the real world altogether, in wayward fancies, utopias, fictions, or mistakes.”<sup>181</sup> As such, substitution is prone to error and is also returned to the issue of transcendence. James writes that while:

“The objective nucleus of every man’s experience, his own body, is a continuous percept; and equally continuous as a percept (though we may be inattentive to it) is the material environment of that body [...] the distant parts of the physical world are at all times absent from us, and form conceptual objects merely, into the perceptual reality of which our life inserts itself at points discrete and relatively rare.”<sup>182</sup>

Thus, we see that while we ever experience our own bodies and the physical world in which they are situated, the remainder of the physical world which is not immediately given is absent. In our experience, that non-given remainder is accounted for via the *substitution of mental for physical reality*. In this way then, the ideas which we substitute for physical reality are corroborated by other ideas which terminate in their percept; the virtual knowledge is supported by the corroborating verified knowledge which corresponds to physical reality. In addition to this defense, James also states that, “even if our ideas did in themselves carry the postulated self-transcendency, it would still remain true that their putting us into possession of such effects *would be the sole cash-value of the self-transcendency for us.*”<sup>183</sup> As such, by pragmatist

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<sup>181</sup> William James, *Essays in Radical Empiricism*, 34.

<sup>182</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>183</sup> *Ibid.*

principles, the dispute between the rationalist's adherence to self-transcendancy and the radical empiricist's defense of substitution as a means to knowledge amount to the same *practical end*.

We have thus seen, in brief form, the main push of William James' radical empiricism. It is a philosophy which prides itself on placing that which is experienced as the sole criteria of reality and, as such, describes reality *as* experience. This description, however, does not claim experience to be the material out of which reality is produced, as clay is the substrate of the sculpture, but instead posits experience to be a metaphysical character of any matter which could function as such a substrate. In such a way then, James positions experience as the ontological prerequisite needed for anything to exist. Any reality *must* be a possible object of experience if it is to be factored into the system of radical empiricism and, additionally anything which is experienced must factor into that system in some way. Such a doctrine allowed for James to do away with the Kantian distinction of noumena and phenomena in favour of a radical identity of the subject and object in the same experience. As a single pure experience can figure as subject, object, or multiple subjects/objects, James' philosophy provides a way in which we are able to understand how two minds may share the same object as the locus of their perception and thought. This identity of subject and object is familiar to us from our previous account of Bradley's understanding of experience though, no doubt at this point, it is obvious that the implications and reasoning leading to this solution to Kant's problem result in very different conclusions for each philosopher. As we have seen in this section, James' understanding of experience is explicitly tied to his concept of relations and, as such, is a purposeful deviation from Bradley's philosophy and a criticism of it. We will next investigate James' treatment of relations proper and further understand his quarrel with Bradley's understanding of relations.

## 2.2 William James on Relations

We now turn our gaze towards James' understanding of relations and the criticism of Bradley which brought about James' own doctrine on the topic. According to James, in the experienced flow of life we do not experience such contradictions as required Bradley to claim the unreality of relations; instead, it is, "only when the reflective intellect gets at work, [that] it discovers incomprehensibilities in the flowing process."<sup>184</sup> Thus James states that Bradley's concerns with contradiction are only an issue in the reflective intellect and that it is due to that intellect's task of distinguishing aspects of experience from one another that it runs into difficulties. For James, the reflective intellect proves better equipped for analytic than synthetic judgment,<sup>185</sup> and it is in this mismatch of capability that we find the root of Bradley's problem with experience and his need to postulate an absolute unifier which brings coherence back to reality. The push of James' argument against Bradley and rationalism writ large lies in his single-level ontology of experience and the way in which this informs his understanding of the intellect as a faculty which performs the task of substitution. We will see that, "for James, Bradley's infra-relational and relational levels of experience are collapsed into one level of process."<sup>186</sup> In this chapter, we will examine the way in which James' radical empiricism provides an alternative route to Bradley's rationalism by way of interpreting relations as they are given over in pure experience.

As we had seen in the previous chapter, James describes reality as pure experience, "the name which [he] gave to the immediate flux of life which furnishes the material to our later

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<sup>184</sup> William James, *Essays in Radical Empiricism*, 48.

<sup>185</sup> In the Bradleyan senses of the terms.

<sup>186</sup> Leemon B. McHenry, "Bradley, James, and Whitehead on Relations," in *The Journal of Speculative Philosophy, New Series*, vol. 3, no. 3, (1989): 157.



reflection with its conceptual categories.”<sup>187</sup> In this flux, both disjunctive and conjunctive relations are equally as experienced as any entity and, as per the methodology of radical empiricism, both sorts of relations are accounted equally as real as any entity or term is. Here we see that, “in taking relations as givens – or, more aptly, as ground-level elements – within his system, James commits himself to the notion that relations are in fact themselves *experiences*, members of the collective of pure experience, and even discrete bits of pure experience.”<sup>188</sup> The reason for them both being equally real is not only that they are experienced as such but that, “both relations and things are at first tendencies in pure experience which are subsequently actualized and made explicit in a particular context.”<sup>189</sup> For James, it is the error of the reflective intellect in which the issues surrounding relations arise. The aforementioned problem of contradiction which plagued Bradley’s consideration of relations is described by James as arising out of a flaw in the reflective intellect wherein it is only suited to dissect experience but falls short of reintegrating that which it has now taken apart (a position not far removed from Bradley’s own). While this may seem unduly disparaging of the reflective intellect, James does not think that we intellectualize experience without reason or benefit. He claims that the rationalist believes that we intellectualize experience because, “the theoretic life is absolute and its interests imperative; that to understand is simply the duty of man; and that who questions this need not be argued with, for by the fact of arguing he gives away his case.”<sup>190</sup> As such, James sees the rationalist as intellectualizing experience for the intellect’s own sake. More sympathetically, James gives an account of the naturalist’s answer to this question of why we

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<sup>187</sup> William James, *Essays in Radical Empiricism*, 49.

<sup>188</sup> David C. Lamberth, *William James and the Metaphysics of Experience*, (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 33.

<sup>189</sup> Charlene Haddock Siegfried, “The Structure of Experience for William James,” in *Transactions of the Charles S. Peirce Society*, vol. 12, no. 4, (1976): 341.

<sup>190</sup> William James, *Essays in Radical Empiricism*, 50.

intellectualize experience. In short, the naturalist believes that intellectualizing experience brings the subject a survival advantage and that it is done for that practical purpose alone. Indeed, if one meanders through the intellectualization for its own sake and does not bring it to bear on some aspect of experience, then the very purpose of the intellect has been forsaken.”<sup>191</sup>

To clarify the pitfalls of the rationalist’s account of the intellect, James targets F.H. Bradley directly as an example of said camp’s folly. He writes that Bradley is an “ultra-rationalist” and that Bradley, “admits that our intellect is primarily practical, but says that, for philosophers, the practical need is simply Truth [...and that] Immediate experience has to be broken into subjects and qualities, terms and relations, to be understood as truth at all.”<sup>192</sup> James sees this as a great mistake on the part of Bradley as to do so is to misunderstand the very nature of experience by which the material out of which we intellectualize is given and to mistake a second-order function of experience (i.e. abstraction) as the truth of the matter. In place of Bradley’s notion of truth (and the view of the intellect which follows upon it), James claims the pragmatic notion of truth, namely that “only in so far as they lead us, successfully or unsuccessfully, back into sensible experience again, are our abstracts and universals true or false at all.”<sup>193</sup> This notion harkens back to the previously discussed idea of substitution wherein we substitute a mental reality, or idea, in the place of a physical reality in order to perform some sort of experimentation upon it and thereby can some insight into how physical reality might function were the same action performed in the physical as opposed to mental realm. For James, we substitute the mental for the physical only for the purpose of reintegrating back into physical reality with a new understanding of it and, thereby, further insight into how we should act. Thus,

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<sup>191</sup> William James, *Essays in Radical Empiricism*, 50.

<sup>192</sup> *Ibid*, 51.

<sup>193</sup> *Ibid*, 52.

for James, the measure of truth for an idea may be reduced to the ability for a mental reality to correspond to the physical reality which it was a substitute for.

Having earlier argued for the validity of conjunctive relations and the way in which they negate any need for a monistic Absolute, James now turns to Bradley's doctrine of relations. He writes that, "Mr. Bradley, informs us that a term can logically only be a punctiform unit, and that not one of the conjunctive relations between things, which experience seems to yield, is rationally possible."<sup>194</sup> James sees that, were this true, it would sound the death knell for radical empiricism which takes these relations as the foundation of its system. Radical Empiricism represents the world as:

a collection, some parts of which are conjunctively and others disjunctively related. Two parts, themselves disjoined, may nevertheless hang together by intermediaries with which they are severally connected, and the whole world eventually may hang together similarly, inasmuch as *some* path of conjunctive transition by which to pass from one of its parts to another may always be discernible.<sup>195</sup>

As such, we can see that James presents us with a way in which reality may still form a unity which intersects all existing objects. This holism which James' understanding of experience represents differs greatly from that of Bradley in that it is a "concatenated" whole formed by the stitching together of various pieces rather than a "through-and-through" whole of "each in all and all in each."<sup>196</sup> This allows James to maintain a holistic vision of reality while not falling into any of the difficulties which Bradley's vision of reality enforces (i.e., his rejection of motion, time,

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<sup>194</sup> William James, *Essays in Radical Empiricism*, 56.

<sup>195</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>196</sup> *Ibid.*

the self, etc. as all belonging to appearance rather than full reality). Yet, in order to hold this view of reality, radical empiricism must be saved from Bradley's accusations against the conjunctive relation.

To mount this defense, James makes the practical move to distinguish internal from external relations. Of external relations he writes that, "the term's inner nature is irrelevant to it. Any book, any table, may fall into the relation, which is created *pro hac vice*, not by their existence but by their casual situation."<sup>197</sup> Thus we see that external relations have to do with the contingent relations which a thing is engaged with and which do not alter the nature of the thing in question. No matter what external relation the book enters into, whether it fall from the table, be placed in a bag, or be left on a bus, the nature of the book will not change. This is crucial for James' radical empiricism as, "many of the conjunctions of experience seem so external that a philosophy of pure experience must tend to pluralism in its ontology."<sup>198</sup> This means that, as we had seen earlier, for James, reality is concatenated into a unity; it is sewn together from the edges into quilt rather than being embedded in a single unifying substrate as a mosaic is. Michael Slater elaborates on James' description here, stating that, "in calling the world 'a pluralism,' he means that (1) *reality as we experience it* has a pluralistic, not a monistic character [...] and that (2) *absolute unity* 'still remains undiscovered, still remains a *Grenzbegriff*."<sup>199</sup> Taking external relations in such a way is a direct confrontation to Bradley who believes that external relations are merely an inadequate way of expressing the internal relatedness of reality. James writes that, for Bradley, "not only is the *situation* different when the book is on the table, but the *book itself*

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<sup>197</sup> William James, *Essays in Radical Empiricism*, 57.

<sup>198</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>199</sup> Michael R. Slater, "William James's Pluralism," in *The Review of Metaphysics*, vol. 65, no. 1, (2011): 68.

is different as a book, from what it was when it was off the table.”<sup>200</sup> We see here James’ confusion of Bradley’s prioritization of internal relatedness over discrete relations. In Bradley’s ontology, experience is a felt continuum wherein there are no discrete relations only an internal relatedness and that it is only through judgement that relations themselves appear. It is not the case that Bradley argues that external relations touch upon the essence of a thing but, rather, that things which *appear* to be externally related are only so through the relational abstraction from the whole in which they are primordially found. As such, we may consider the book’s relationship to the table to be an external relationship when, for Bradley, it is more accurate to recognize that the book and table are themselves relational abstractions from non-relational feeling. Thus, Bradley’s argument centers on the observation that in judging a thing, we have created a new relation. Due to this result, Bradley presents us with several questions: 1) If the relation makes no difference to the terms which it relates, what difference does the relation make at all? 2) What meaning follows from describing the terms in such a relation? 3) How can the relation truly describe the terms if it is external and does not touch upon their natures?

In the first case, James responds by claiming that though the relation makes no difference to the terms involved it *does* make a difference to the onlookers. This makes perfect sense when one considers what James understands as the cause of the relation. If the relation arises out of the subject’s substitution of the physical reality for a corresponding mental reality in order to understand a portion of the physical reality with the aim of returning to that physical world better informed, then James’ statement follows directly. In such a case, the relation, though it does *truly exist* in the physical world, is only distinguished as such in the act of substitution meaning that the difference which the relation makes is, as James claimed, in the onlooker. This is not a return

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<sup>200</sup> William James, *Essays in Radical Empiricism*, 58.

to a dualism but is rather an emphasis on the importance of context for the pure experience. Just as subject and object are equal parts of the same pure experience, the relation is part of a pure experience which takes the form of a relation upon entering the subject's experiential context. In the actual pure experience, the relation is, as we saw earlier, merely that same pure experience as interpreted within differing sets of experience though it is explicitly brought to attention only for the subject performing the substitution.<sup>201</sup> It is easier here to see Bradley's answer to the question. For him, the relation must make a difference to the terms it relates as the terms themselves are only wrested from the non-relational flow of feeling by the act of judgment which itself consists in relating things.

In the second case, James states that the meaning following from such a relation is to simply describe the position of the terms involved in the relation. While Bradley questions whether the external relation can actually provide us with meaning about the terms involved, due to it not touching upon the nature of either term in the relation, for James, it provides us with practical information regarding both terms. We can see here how Bradley's methodology gets in the way of his philosophizing. Due to his preoccupation with getting to the nature of ultimate reality, Bradley overlooks the practical side of what such a relation could provide us with. As such, the notion that it could merely provide us with working information regarding the terms is not a possibility. Bradley's final concern regarding how the relation could truly describe the term if it does not touch upon the term's nature is related to the second case. Here, James questions, "is it the 'intimacy' suggested by the little word 'of,' here, which I have underscored, that is the root of Mr. Bradley's trouble?"<sup>202</sup> In such questioning, James brings up the fact that relations can

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<sup>201</sup> How these sets of experience are related to one another is an issue of conjunctive relations.

<sup>202</sup> William James, *Essays in Radical Empiricism*, 59.

be of varying intimacies, in other words, that the relation may be able to describe the term to greater or lesser degrees and that it is not an all or nothing response to the term.<sup>203</sup> This is not an issue for James, however. For him, if an object “contributes only its surface” the relation touches upon that term in the relation only superficially. For example, the book laying open faced on the table is a less intimate relation than if something were folded into the same book’s pages and is a far less intimate relation than if the book were placed under water (which relation would eventually undermine its identity as a book). We are here once again brought back to the difference between Bradley’s immediate experience and James’ pure experience. In Bradley’s ontology, immediate experience is monistic due to the lack of relations at that ontological level while James’ doctrine of pure experience is a pluralistic ontology. As such, James is able to take entities as being contingently related to one another as they are primordially distinct whereas Bradley must take entities as being primordially connected and only distinguished upon relational judgment. Because of this, for Bradley every relation must in some sense touch upon the entity’s nature as the entity in question is distinguished from immediate experience through the function of the relation. Because of this, without the relation the entity is nothing and without the entity the relation is nothing.

James next takes issue with Bradley’s return to “the antinomies of space” wherein Bradley attempts to show, via internal contradiction, that relations taking place in space (i.e., external relations) are unreal. In this argument, Bradley believes to have shown that what we take for external relations, are truly contradictory (the following conclusion being that they are less real than internal relations) unless they are taken to really be internal relations which alter

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<sup>203</sup> The obvious response for Bradley would be that a relation must be either internal or external; it either touches the nature of the term or it does not. For it to do so to even a small degree is for it to be an internal relation and fall victim to the faults of that sort of relation.

the terms which are engaged within the relation and, indeed, the whole of which the relation and terms are mere abstractions. James takes obvious issue with this stance as it contradicts the first principle of radical empiricism: as the relation is experienced it must be taken to truly be a part of reality. In claiming that the external relations are in truth internal, Bradley believes himself to have shown that the relations that the terms are engaged in really do alter the nature of the terms up to a point. James claims that Bradley is forced by the rest of his philosophy to claim that any alteration of a relation is nothing less than a “through-and-through” alteration of the term; it is changed entirely from what it was by the new relation which it finds itself in. The thrust behind this claim is that, “the ‘whole’ which [Bradley] here treats as primary and determinative of each part’s manner of ‘contributing,’ simply *must*, when it alters, alter in its entirety.”<sup>204</sup> Thus, we see that James has attempted to back Bradley into a corner: if Bradley is to treat everything as being pieces within a whole then, when any piece is altered whatsoever, that alteration must ripple through the rest of the through-and-through whole in which the part is found and given its character. As such, James takes Bradley’s arguments contra external relations to be unconvincing.

We have here seen that James’ rejection of Bradley’s understanding of relations pivots upon each philosopher’s understanding of reality as either pluralistic or monistic. Due to James’ understanding that experience is plural, he is forced to claim that relations are external and that they are only contingently linked to one another and are, therefore, subject to change. For Bradley, this is unconscionable, due to reality being monistic. As reality is to be taken as one and only made plural by our relational abstraction from the primordial unity, it is obvious that reality is characterized by internal relatedness to the expense of external relations. Through this dispute

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<sup>204</sup> William James, *Essays in Radical Empiricism*, 60.



over relations, we have seen that Bradley and James dispute comes down to the difference in their metaphysical first principles, namely, Bradley's immediate experience as opposed to James' pure experience. It is this point as well which explains the source of their confusion over the other's position and rejection of the opposing philosophy. In the next chapter, we will continue to compare and contrast James and Bradley's philosophies and I will argue that James' criticisms of Bradley miss their mark. This argument will be followed by my claim that James' ontology is able to be subsumed within Bradley's philosophy with little alteration of Bradley's own system needed.

## **Chapter 3: Immediate Experience or Pure Experience?**

### 3.1 The Problem with James' Analysis of Bradley's Metaphysics

James' greatest criticism of Bradley's metaphysics is that he eliminates relations as being unreal. For James, to deny relations their reality as they are experienced is equivalent to denying experience itself as in his understanding of reality, the relations connecting the terms must be as real as the terms themselves due to them both being equivalently found in our experience. Though James is undoubtedly correct that Bradley's philosophy, taken as James interpreted it, does contradict our lived experience, I believe that his interpretation of Bradley was mistaken. The central flaw which I see in James' analysis of Bradley is that when Bradley spoke of experience, James believed that they were speaking of identical things when the truth of the matter was much different. The difference between James and Bradley's systems begin with the difference between James' pure experience and Bradley's immediate experience. Pure experience describes reality as a pluralistic concatenation of entities which are revealed through the relations which cohere between these distinct entities. Immediate experience, on the contrary, refers to a level of experience which is prior to all relational distinctions and which is a felt unity. In confusing these two ontological principles, James has criticized something different than what he intended. When James wrote that, "Mr. Bradley's understanding shows the most extraordinary power of perceiving separations and the most extraordinary impotence of comprehending conjunctions,"<sup>205</sup> what we see here is a mistake in James' understanding of Bradley's ontology. We must recall that, for Bradley, experience exists at a stage *prior* to the explicit distinction of subject and object, where everything subsists as a flow of feeling. Thus, our explicit judgments of things do not actually occur within immediate experience, instead they

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<sup>205</sup> William James, *Essays in Radical Empiricism*, 61.

are a development upon immediate experience which occurs simultaneously with it. Due to his conflation of Bradley's immediate experience with his own pure experience, James ends up holding immediate experience to the standard of pure experience when a more accurate comparison would be Bradley's relational consciousness with James' pure experience. This more accurate comparison would then place James' relational reality alongside the corresponding ontological principle in Bradley's philosophy.

Such an alteration of approach for James would not, of course, render the two philosophers identical. James would still have a pluralistic conception of reality as opposed to Bradley's monism, but it would reduce some of the discrepancies between James' philosophy and Bradley's. Relations for Bradley would remain ultimately unreal, but they would be real to a certain degree; indeed, they would be equally as real as one's own self or any other discrete entity would be. This would align much more closely with James' philosophy and if we consider James' philosophy to be an attempt to rescue common-sense from rationalism's excesses it would seem to hold much in common with Bradley's relational experience as it is through the relational consciousness that Bradley believes we operate in practice.<sup>206</sup> Due to James' confusion over Bradley's ontology and the subsequent way in which he describes things, we see the genesis of several of James' mistaken perceptions such as his belief that Bradley requires the Absolute to take the place of conjunctive relations due to the failure of Bradley's view of judgement.

As I have been attempting to illustrate, James' conclusion can only arrive due to a mistaken interpretation of Bradley's philosophy wherein the relational consciousness and feeling are wrongly placed in the same ontological level. Within James' own philosophy, immediate or

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<sup>206</sup> F.H. Bradley, *Appearance and Reality*, 33.

pure experience is taken to be on the same ontological level as the relational understanding of the world. Contrary to this, Bradley separates the level of immediate experience from our relational consciousness due to the contradictions inherent to relational thought. Though I began this thesis with Bradley's account of immediate experience for the purposes of illustrating the ontological layout of Bradley's understanding of reality, Bradley himself arrives at the need for immediate experience secondarily in *Appearance and Reality* through the investigation of relations which we examined in section two of this thesis. There is no doubt that, for Bradley, the majority of our day to day dealings with reality occur at the level of relations (it is, after all, the level at which our distinct selves exist) but there is also no doubt that this level of reality calls for supplementation from a lower, undifferentiated level of reality which is able to supply the unity needed for relations to occur at all. It is the relational consciousness and our dealings that occur at this level of reality which James would claim as pure experience. Because of the difference in James' combination of relational thinking and pure experience and Bradley's separation of relational thought and feeling, James does not engage with Bradley on equal terms. To show this misunderstanding, I will demonstrate the way in which the arguments which James brings to bear against Bradley (found in chapter two) are ill founded.

The first issue that James has with Bradley's understanding of relations is that he believes that Bradley unjustly privileges terms at the expense of relations. As we had seen, this is anathema to James in that he considers both terms and relations to be real in just the same way as they seem to us in our individual experiences. Yet, why is it that James considers Bradley to privilege terms over the relations between them when Bradley himself claims that terms and relations are interdependent? Bradley recognized this inexplicable mistake in James' reading of him and corrected him, writing that, "Prof. James assumed me to hold that terms are, as such,

ultimately real, while relations are not so. He at that time apparently had no idea that the view to which he opposed himself was that both terms and relations are alike, as such, mere abstractions.”<sup>207</sup> Indeed, this interdependence between terms and relations is the root of the contradictions which Bradley believed to prove that both are appearance and not reality proper. For Bradley, both terms and relations only exist due to the idealizing function of the judgment. This cognitive function takes the merely felt difference which was found in immediate experience and makes it explicit thereby developing it but also tearing it from the context which it originated in. Thus, the term is isolated from the whole with which it was originally continuous and is made distinct and separated. Relations are then introduced by which we reconnect the term to other terms and attempt to recreate the originally united context in which we found the term. In this way both synthetic and analytic judgments (responsible for conjunctive and disjunctive relations respectively) find their place in Bradley’s metaphysics. Yet, even though judgment can come to concatenate the newly made particulars, we can never again arrive at the full-blown, through-and-through unity of feeling due to it being prior to all relational distinction whatsoever. Even James would not be able to incorporate this level of experience into his understanding of experience as it is prior to the distinction of the self and is therefore not available as something to be known. It is here that we require the functioning of the Absolute to join the pre-judgemental feeling with the ideality that is derived from it. James’ criticism of Bradley only functions at the level of relations and requires that judgment be able to concatenate reality into a whole. This is a job that Bradley’s relational consciousness is perfectly capable of and which it performs in practice during all of our conscious lives. The further unity which Bradley seeks is the many-in-one harmony of feeling along with the distinctness of the ideal and this is something that is only

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<sup>207</sup> F.H. Bradley, *Essays in Truth and Reality*, 151.

possible through the Absolute's reconciliation of immediate experience and relational experience.

The second issue that James has with Bradley's philosophy is that he believes Bradley to do away with the connection found in life and to understand reality as a disparate collection of unrelated entities. Here, James' issue arises once more in his faulty understanding of Bradley's ontology. James posits that Bradley only considers connection as being possible through the Absolute and faults Bradley's understanding of judgment as doing irreparable violence to the unity of experience. While James is correct in claiming that Bradley understands judgment as primarily a tool of dissection which, though it is also capable of synthesis, forever renders the judgment less than the context which it was excised from, he is incorrect in understanding Bradley to be forced to rely on the Absolute in order to unify reality into a cohesive whole. James' ontology of experience begins with the same sort of distinct particulars which for Bradley arise only through judgment; the difference is that James believes the conjunctive relations which connect the particulars to be equally a part of experience as the particulars. As we had seen in chapter one of this thesis, Bradley does away with the possibility of a relational way of thinking due to the incoherence of such a view and instead posits the relational consciousness to be a secondary development of a non-relational immediate experience which provides the ground for the relation to exist at all. As such, the primordial unity which Bradley attributes to immediate experience through its non-relationality is never part of the picture for James. Instead, James rejects Bradley's refutation of relations and claims instead that Bradley denies the primacy of experience and the concatenated unity of reality. The lack of unity which James' bemoans in Bradley's philosophy is a strawman built out of the misinterpretation of Bradley's ontology. The analytic and synthetic judgments which Bradley considers inadequate to recapitulate the unity

found in feeling are for James the sole way in which we experience reality. The conjunctive relations, for him, perfectly describe the concatenated unity which experience is. This concatenated unity is likewise espoused by Bradley, though with the difference that (as a result of conjunctive relations) it is considered as a secondary development upon the foundation of feeling (which provides a *true* unity and not mere connection) and as such is not primary to Bradley's account of experience as James believes it to be. Because of this, while Bradley sees relations as inadequate to the unity of feeling, James sees them *as* that same unity. Thus, the concatenated unity which James considers to be reality is perfectly attainable within Bradley's philosophy, it is simply that the totally thorough unity alongside difference which Bradley would seek is not a possibility within James' system. This difference in the origin of both philosophers' understanding of experience explains why James decries Bradley as rejecting the relational nature of reality.

Against James' claim that Bradley is a champion of separation akin to Hume and the empiricists, Bradley is quite clearly a defender of the unity of reality owing more to Spinoza than the empiricists. Due to the origin of Bradley's philosophy in feeling, reality for him *begins* with unity and it is only in the secondary developments upon that unity that James' philosophy enters the scene. Because of his philosophy's late entry point into the investigation of experience, James misinterprets Bradley's ontology by beginning in the middle of Bradley's scheme and decrying him as ignoring the unitary flow of our individual experience by relying upon a non-experiential Absolute to rejoin our dissected and idealized feeling. In so doing, James misses the difference which Bradley clearly establishes between the unity of feeling and that of the Absolute. In order to explain the relationship between the unities of the Absolute and feeling, Bradley writes that, "[the Absolute] is immediate because it includes and is superior to

mediation. It develops, and it brings to unity, the distinctions it contains. The ‘this’ [i.e., feeling] is immediate, on the other side, because it is at a level below distinctions. Its elements are but conjoined and not connected.”<sup>208</sup> Thus, feeling and the Absolute are found on either side of the relational judgment. We see here that, though the Absolute is certainly a fundamental part of Bradley’s metaphysics, it is not the origin of unity; the unity which we experience in reality begins with feeling rather than the Absolute and the unity which James seeks is attained in the relational consciousness. For Bradley, we have seen that feeling contains the ideality which we experience in the relational consciousness in an undeveloped form. This ideality, though not yet existing, is a crucial part of reality and though it may be mere appearance, it is still necessary for the completion of reality. Thus, post-judgment, we are left with a disjointed understanding of reality which does not bring the intellectual satisfaction that we sought and assume to be possible. This satisfaction can then only be found in the reunification of that which we tore asunder through the inclusive power of the Absolute. It is not that reality begins without unity for Bradley, but that the unity which reality begins with is not the *completed* unity which reality must end with in order to understand reality as noncontradictory. In order to pass from the unity found in experience to the completed unity of feeling and ideality, we must pass through the stage of relational thought which is then unified by the Absolute. Thus, James’ issue with Bradley’s philosophy is not the result of his understanding of judgment but through Bradley’s understanding of reality which requires the unification of ideality and feeling in order to complete the primordial unity of mere feeling.

James’ confusion over Bradley’s ontology arises in the fact that he believes that our judgments are equally primordial to our felt reality. Due to his skepticism of logic’s power to

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<sup>208</sup> F.H. Bradley, *Appearance and Reality*, 225.



explain facts, James would be content to leave the judgment in its self-contradiction so long as we were to acknowledge that the contradictions found there were artifacts of the reflective intellect and were not representative of the same contradictions within reality.<sup>209</sup> He denies the unity of feeling which Bradley would try to establish in favour of a philosophy wherein each thing is experienced as separate yet related to other things; a reality wherein its flow is made up of the concatenation of discrete entities rather than a continuum of regions of porous difference as Bradley would have it. When James attempts to criticize Bradley for eliminating relations from reality, he has missed the entirety of Bradley's discussion on the felt difference found in immediate experience *as well as* not understanding the way in which Bradley uses the term "appearance". Though I sympathize with James' interpretation of Bradley's philosophy (Bradley's idiosyncratic word choices, particularly his use of "appearance" and "reality", are not, perhaps, the best choice of word for the concepts which they describe), upon close reading, Bradley's understanding of "real" and "appearance" do not yield the interpretation which James believes them to. Due to Bradley's distinction of feeling from ideality and James inability to recognize his distinction, when James criticizes him for relegating relations to the domain of appearance, "the result must be a misrepresentation of Bradley's position."<sup>210</sup>

When Bradley claims that relations are unreal, he is not positing their non-existence (in fact, he rallies *explicitly* against this idea) but is claiming that they are less real than the total system of reality, namely, the Absolute. Rather than addressing the subtlety of Bradley's theory of the degrees of reality, James takes it that things can only be real or not real and thereby misses the point of what Bradley's philosophy claims, namely, that things can be more or less real

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<sup>209</sup> William James, *Essays in Radical Empiricism*, 130.

<sup>210</sup> Damian Ilodigwe, "James and Bradley's Absolutism," 614.

depending on how closely they come to the perfection of the complete reality. This holds true for all common entities of our experience such as change, time, and the self. Indeed, Bradley wrote that “far from denying these facts I should even be forward to urge their eminent reality, if only you would not seek to deny or degrade what will not fairly fall under them, if only you would cease to assume that there cannot be anything more inclusive, more concrete and real.”<sup>211</sup> We see here then a common breakdown in the interpretation of Bradley’s philosophy, one which Bradley’s writing is responsible for, and one which James falls prey to. In this way then, we can see that what James has described throughout *Essays in Radical Empiricism* as pure experience is contained within Bradley’s ontological niche of relational consciousness or ideality. What James describes as being the brute fact of our experience, namely, the relational nature of reality is for Bradley, a secondary derivation from immediate experience.

Indeed, this confusion forms part of Bradley’s argument against James in the appendix to his essay, “On Truth and Copying.” In the appendix, Bradley questions James, asking, “are terms and relations, in a word, abstractions and mere ideal constructions, or are they given realities? The above two views are irreconcilable, and to myself Prof. James seems committed to *both* of them.”<sup>212</sup> Bradley here brings to bear against James the charge that the latter conflates immediate experience and ideality into a confused chimaera which does justice to neither. By claiming that relations are part of the flow of experience he commits himself to claim them as given realities while simultaneously holding that reality is a flow of experience thereby leading him to hold the contrary views which Bradley highlighted above. Yet, these concerns in place, the weight of Bradley’s criticism of radical empiricism lies in the fact that:

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<sup>211</sup> F.H. Bradley, *Essays on Truth and Reality*, 471.

<sup>212</sup> *Ibid*, 151.

“In arguing for Pluralism and against Monism [James] urges habitually that terms and mere conjunctive relations, are, as such, immediately experienced; and indeed any contention short of this would leave his argument baseless. But while he identifies himself thus with the first view, the second view, that immediate experience is non-relational, seems essential to his doctrine. And yet how to combine these contrary views we are, I think, nowhere informed.”<sup>213</sup>

Thus, we see that Bradley’s rebuttal of James’ criticisms leaves James with the problem of self-contradiction. James is unable to maintain that terms and relations are immediately experienced if he is also to hold that reality is most basically experienced as a flowing continuum. Yet, he is also unable to hold this non-relational point of view if he is to maintain fidelity to his understanding of experience as being composed of the terms and relations found in our day to day life. Hence, the self-contradiction which Bradley charged him with. The difficulties of completely integrating James’ radical empiricism and pluralism have also been picked up on by other philosophers more sympathetic to James view such as Richard Gale, Michael Slater, and Marcus P. Ford.<sup>214</sup> The reason for Bradley being able to illuminate the issues with James’ philosophy while the reverse is unable to maintain its charge is that Bradley was able to distinguish the faults within our structures of interpreting the world (i.e., the relational consciousness) while also reaffirming the merits of that structure. Though Bradley’s philosophy *does* hold a strongly skeptical vision, it is in the service of a constructive project which utilizes philosophy for the purpose of understanding reality in a more thorough fashion at the expense of common-sense. James’ philosophy on the contrary, was designed with his pragmatism in mind

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<sup>213</sup> F.H. Bradley, *Essays on Truth and Reality*, 151.

<sup>214</sup> See Gale’s *The Divided Self of William James*, Slater’s “William James’s Pluralism,” and Ford’s “William James: Panpsychist and Metaphysical Realist.”

and was designed to uphold the ends of a purely practical inquiry into metaphysics rather than a completely self-interested investigation of first principles.

This practical end of radical empiricism is evident in the final chapter of James' *Essays in Radical Empiricism*, wherein he describes explicitly his problem with absolute idealism. Against idealism, James brings forward the question of whether fact should trump rational or logical inquiry and claims that if fact is to be recognized as the ultimate principle, "it sets a limit to the 'through-and-through' character of the world's rationality [...] Reality would have to be given, not by Reason, but by Fact."<sup>215</sup> Yet, why should fact and reason collide? Can there not be a rationality explaining the fact as experienced which renders the fact to be more than what it appears? This would seem to be exactly what Bradley would claim with his understanding of reality: that there is a reality which goes beyond and includes the presentation of fact and which expands and supports our understanding of fact which is garnered from experience. To search out these grounds and explanations beyond mere fact would be what Bradley would seek to do. And yet, for the purpose of practicality, James would prefer that we take facts at their face-value rather than plumb their depths through logical inquiry. This is of course something which Bradley would agree with so long as we provide the qualification that our practical understanding of the world, "is a makeshift, a device, a mere practical compromise, most necessary, but in the end most indefensible"<sup>216</sup> and thereby situate our factual (or relational) understanding of the world as not adequate to the full system of reality as a whole.

Were James to take the metaphysicians task seriously, he would not reject logical inquiry in favour of factual observation. Both should go hand in hand as they do within Bradley's

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<sup>215</sup> William James, *Essays in Radical Empiricism*, 143.

<sup>216</sup> F.H. Bradley, *Appearance and Reality*, 33.

metaphysics. Indeed, where else do our understandings of first principles and logic come from if not from experience? Bradley himself wrote that, “most of us, no doubt, agree that in metaphysics we start, in some sense, from what is given, and that hence the question as to what is given at the start is fundamental and vital.”<sup>217</sup> Yet James candidly admits that his motive in rejecting idealism and all other rationalisms is of a more personal nature. He writes that:

“At bottom [my motives] are of an aesthetic and not of a logical sort. The ‘through-and-through’ universe seems to suffocate me with its infallible impeccable all-pervasiveness. Its necessity, with no possibilities; its relations, with no subjects, make me feel as if I had entered into a contrast with no reserved rights, or rather as if I had to live in a large seaside boarding-house with no private bed-room in which I might take refuge from the society of the place.”<sup>218</sup>

In short, the base of James’ distaste for philosophies such as Bradley’s is that it interrupts his practical considerations in favour of logical consistency. Indeed, “the one *fundamental* quarrel Empiricism has with Absolutism is over this repudiation by Absolutism of the personal and aesthetic factor in the construction of philosophy.”<sup>219</sup> To repeat, James’ problem with absolute idealism is that he understands it’s monism to do away with all variety of free, personal entities in favour of retaining a logically grounded determinism by which we can come to understand all of reality if only we were sufficiently adept at logical analysis. Hence his bid to defend pluralism against monism comes down to an attempt to defend the existence of the individual’s freedom

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<sup>217</sup> F.H. Bradley, *Essays on Truth and Reality*, 199.

<sup>218</sup> William James, *Essays in Radical Empiricism*, 145.

<sup>219</sup> *Ibid*, 146.

and thereby the common-sense understanding of such concepts as morality, chance, theism, and the humanism which he later espoused.<sup>220</sup>

Due to James' attempt to defend a pluralistic conception of reality which can support individual freedom and spontaneity against the determinism of Bradley's monism, we see that the crux of all of James and Bradley's disagreement can be said to hinge upon how they interpret the problem of the one and the many, traced back once more to the difference between their doctrines of pure experience and immediate experience. Indeed, "James himself came to regard 'the problem of the one and the many,' or the conflict between monism and pluralism in metaphysics, as the most important and far reaching of all philosophical dilemmas."<sup>221</sup> Though both thinkers reject dualist ontologies their difference comes from Bradley's prioritization of the one and James' prioritization of the many. This great difference leads them to such similar conclusions in many aspects of the philosophies and yet led Bradley to claim himself a monist and James to wear the badge of pluralism. All of this boils down to the fact that Bradley understands reality as operating in the form of a single system wherein each individual entity is a part of the greater whole (thereby privileging unity) while James see reality as operating in the form of discrete entities which occasionally subjugate their plurality in order to come together as systems. Because of their different starting points, Bradley's philosophy is able to subsume James' as just a portion of the overarching system of his idealism while James' philosophy is unable to do the same with Bradley's doctrine. As James' philosophy may be subsumed within the relational consciousness of Bradley's ontology, the criticisms which James puts forth against Bradley do not bear the consequences which he intended. Rather than refuting Bradley's

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<sup>220</sup> William James, *Essays in Radical Empiricism*, 47.

<sup>221</sup> Michael R. Slater, "William James's Pluralism," 64.

metaphysical position, James merely contributed to a phenomenology of experience which can be nested within Bradley's metaphysics. James' only *true* recourse against Bradley's monism is an appeal to our lived experience and common-sense, which appeal Bradley would accept and has *already* an answer written.

This is the reasoning behind my support of Bradley's philosophy over James: true to his pragmatism, it would seem as though James denies an in-depth metaphysical investigation of first principles in favour of defending the common-sense understanding of life. He is unwilling to undertake the radical skepticism which Bradley is so willing to do and, as such, is unable to come to a fully consistent theory of reality. Because of this methodological inadequacy, I am left with the same conclusion as Bradley, namely, that, "with all his merits as a philosopher, and assuredly they are great, I cannot think it is as a metaphysician that Prof. James's name will hold its place in the history of thought."<sup>222</sup>

### 3.2 Thesis Conclusion

Throughout all of this thesis I believe to have shown that I would side with Bradley over James in the field of metaphysics. In Bradley's philosophy, we are presented with a coherent system which provides both an explanation of how reality functions holistically *and* provides a means of understanding how the particulars of reality are able to act both as individuals and as part of the system. Following Bradley's understanding of "real" as he intended it and not as it would appear at face-value, we are left with a metaphysics which allots the particular a very real (in the common-sense understanding) place within Bradley's ontology with the single caveat that it is subordinate in that ontology to the system itself as manifest through the Absolute. Following

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<sup>222</sup> F.H. Bradley, *Essays on Truth and Reality*, 158.

in the footsteps of Spinoza and the other great monist philosophers, Bradley's metaphysics is founded upon a belief in the functioning of the universe as a system; an explanation of reality more cogent with our lived experience and scientific developments than any sort of radical pluralism. James' philosophy, on the other hand, requires that one reject the notion of system in favour of contingent assemblies of particulars and yet it never answers to the need for those same particulars to exist within such a system. I can see no way of allowing that experience itself could exist without the vast system of natural and metaphysical laws in place which govern reality. To claim that these constitutional necessities do not form a *real* system seems, to me, indefensible; to claim them to be contingent seems illogical. Yet this is apparently what James would seek to do in claiming that reality is merely a mosaic of entirely disparate particulars fastened together at the seams by external relations. Thus, forced to choose between Bradley and James and conceding that Bradley's own philosophy is not without flaws, I throw my hat in Bradley's ring and make my stand in the court of monism as opposed to pluralism. I can see fewer deficiencies which Bradley's monism would force me to concede whereas with James' pluralism, I would be forced to cast away the intelligibility of reality and this I cannot do.

As a good student of Bradley, I would like to conclude this thesis on a note of synthesis rather than division. As I sought to show in the final section, James' ontology is able to be subsumed within Bradley's own and, through this understanding, I believe that it is not only possible but necessary for us to bring together both ontologies in order to come to a complete understanding of reality. It seems clear that while it is an undoubtable fact that our lived experience is plural in the manner of James, it also seems clear that there is always an equally real unity in which the plurality is found and upon which it depends. This is where the philosophy of F.H. Bradley seems to reign victorious. Within Bradley's ontology, we have the



systematicity that is required for reality to function in a predictable, logical way alongside an explanation of how we may understand plurality within this system. It is this inherent and simultaneous plurality within unity which is the greatest benefit of a Bradleyan understanding of reality and though there are definite aspects of his philosophy which remain unsatisfactory, Bradley's thought remains a significant development in modern metaphysics.

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