The Logical Foundations of Bradley's Metaphysics

Judgment, Inference, and Truth

This book is a major contribution to the study of the philosopher
F. H. Bradley, the most influential member of the nineteenth-century
school of British Idealists. It offers a sustained interpretation of
Bradley's *Principles of Logic*, explaining the problem of how it is possi-
ble for inferences to both be valid and have conclusions that contain
new information. The author then describes how Bradley's solution
provides a basis for his metaphysical view that reality is one intercon-
nected experience and how this gives rise to a new problem about
truth.

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For my father,
James Willard Allard, Sr.,
and in memory of my mother,
Mary Irene Dieterich Allard

Contents

Preface

Despite a recent revival of interest in F. H. Bradley within a small commu-
nity of analytic philosophers, the feeling persists that Bradley's philosophy
and the late-nineteenth-century British Idealism it represents was a weedy
exotic – an import from Prussia that stimulated a revolution in philosophy
by G. E. Moore and Bertrand Russell, but that has since been rooted out,
leaving only faint traces of its passage. This feeling has been reinforced
by vast differences between the issues engaging philosophers today and
those that engaged nineteenth-century British Idealists, by the current
use of mathematical logic in philosophy, and by the widely held belief that
constructive work in philosophy consists in solving problems rather than
in constructing systems. Less obviously, but perhaps more significantly, it
has been further reinforced by concentrating on the metaphysics of the
British Idealists at the expense of their logic. Their metaphysics certainly
deserves attention. They saw metaphysics as the most significant part of
philosophy as well as the only all-encompassing one. Nevertheless, they
often found the materials for their metaphysics in logic. In fact, their
use of logic as a basis for metaphysics was a new departure in British
philosophy, one that has left a lasting mark.

The longest and most influential book on logic written by a British
Idealist is Bradley's *The Principles of Logic*. It is a difficult book, more diffi-
cult than Bradley's better-known *Appearance and Reality*, because of both
its greater length and its poorer organization. Bradley provided no expla-
nation of its selection of topics, of the order in which he discussed them,
or even of his purpose in writing it. As a result, *The Principles of Logic* has
usually been read selectively as a source for Bradley's views rather than
as a continuous argument. There is justification for doing so. The most

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important part of the book, roughly its first third, is the most provocative part, and it does not presuppose the remainder of the book. It contains, among other things, Bradley's rejection of psychologism, a topic connecting his philosophy with that of his more analytic contemporaries, as well as his account of how judgments refer to reality. The latter emerges as a central topic, perhaps the central topic, in *Appearance and Reality*. But the remainder of the book is also important for *Appearance and Reality*. In fact, it creates the problem about the relation between thought and reality to which *Appearance and Reality* is the solution. Furthermore, placing the book in its historical context shows that it is not merely a collection of essays on related logical topics but a drawn-out, convoluted answer to the Kantian question "How is deductive inference possible?" Bradley's dual aim in the book uses his answer to this question to defend deductive logic against the criticisms of John Stuart Mill and to reject the Hegelian view that thought is identical to reality. In carrying out his aim, Bradley distinguished between the grammatical and logical forms of judgments and denied what had until then been a truism, that truth is correspondence with reality. These aspects of *The Principles of Logic* form part of Bradley's enduring legacy to analytic philosophy.

The eight chapters of this book lay out the main line of Bradley's argument in *The Principles of Logic* and connect it with the forms of idealism that preceded it and with the pragmatism and analytic philosophy that followed it. The first two chapters sketch the historical context in which the book was written. This context determines Bradley's concerns. Chapter 1 explains how British Idealism provided a response to the Victorian crisis of faith produced by the conflict between evangelical Christianity and the twin disciplines of evolutionary biology and the scholarly study of Scripture. It sketches the way British philosophers from J. H. Stirling to T. H. Green introduced and developed ideas they found in German philosophy, particularly the ideas of Kant and Hegel, as a way of resolving the conflict. The most important of these philosophers, T. H. Green, argued that nature is constituted by relations. By claiming that relations exist only for a knowing consciousness, he concluded that reality exists only for such a consciousness. Green thought this knowing consciousness was a universal self-consciousness in which individual human knowers participate. By identifying this universal self-consciousness with God, he concluded that God's existence is a necessary presupposition of human knowledge and so not something that can be threatened by any form of knowledge, whether scientific or scholarly. Green, in other words, met the crisis of his age by identifying God's thought with reality, an identification anticipated by

Hegel. But while this identification resolved the crisis, late in his career Green began to question it. One mark of this questioning was his interest in translating the works of Hermann Lotze, a German idealist who denied that thought is identical to reality. Prevented by his early death from alleviating his doubts, Green left the problem for his successors. Because for them logic was the study of thought, resolving it demanded a study of logic, a study that Bradley was the first British Idealist to provide.

Chapter 2 sketches the three principal developments in logic that formed the context for Bradley's book. These were innovations in formal logic, the elaboration of logic as the theory of scientific method, and the development of transcendental logic. The third was of particular importance for Bradley. By modeling the functions of the knowing mind on the different forms of judgments recognized in Aristotelian logic, Kant created a new form of logic, transcendental logic. For Kant, transcendental logic was concerned with the logical categories inherent in the mind by means of which thought constructs objects of knowledge from sensory materials and with the forms of inference by means of which thought organizes the systematic interrelationships between the judgments constituting knowledge. As Kant conceived it, thought imposes these categories on reality as it is known but not as it is in itself. In this limited respect, as a constituent of knowable reality, thought for Kant is reality. Subsequent philosophers, principally Hegel, rejected Kant's identification of the categories of thought with reality as it is known and identified it instead with reality as it is in itself. Transcendental logic thus provided two incompatible ways of understanding the relation between thought and reality. Chapter 2 discusses the disagreement over this issue among German philosophers, including Hermann Lotze and Christoph Sigwart, philosophers to whom Bradley expresses indebtedness. It reinforces Chapter 1 by showing that the relation between thought and reality was a central issue for anyone working within the framework of transcendental logic.

Chapters 3, 4, and 5 are concerned with Bradley's analysis of the truth-conditions of judgments: Chapter 3 covers Bradley's definition of judgment. "Judgment proper is the mental act which refers an ideal content to a reality (recognized as such) beyond the act" (PL 10). There are two important elements in this definition. First, Bradley treats ideas as meanings that have been abstracted from the presentational continuum given to the senses. Abstracting for Bradley always removes qualities. As abstract, meanings are always general or, as Bradley prefers to say, universal. Second, Bradley insists that judgments contain a reference to reality as it is given in immediate experience and that this reference is independent

of the ideas in the judgment. The ideas in a judgment, in other words, do not enable the judgment to refer to reality. An additional element is required, and this is analogous to a demonstrative reference to reality.

Chapter 4 covers Bradley's analyses of categorical and conditional judgments with its consequent commitment to holism. The results of these analyses are summarized by the following simple argument:

All conditional judgments are abbreviated inferences.
All judgments are conditionals.
Therefore, all judgments are abbreviated inferences.

Bradley supports the first premise by taking counterfactual conditionals as his model for conditional judgments. Counterfactual judgments, he claims, are thought experiments. They suppose the truth of the antecedent and they assert that when it is conjoined with the relevant laws of nature combined with a description of the circumstances in which the experiment is imagined to take place, it entails the consequent. Conditional judgments are thus true if and only if the inference they abbreviate is sound. Bradley then argues that all judgments are conditionals. This conclusion rests on his analysis of judgments that are grammatically categorical. This analysis is relatively straightforward for universal categorical judgments but quite intricate for singular categorical judgments. From this analysis Bradley concludes that all judgments are conditional. When taken with his premise that all conditional judgments are abbreviated inferences, this analysis entails his conclusion that all judgments are abbreviated inferences. This conclusion, in turn, is also a statement of his holism. For if all judgments are abbreviated inferences, then evaluating a judgment involves determining the soundness of the inference it represents. But this requires determining the truth of the premises of that inference. But because they too are condensed inferences, this requires determining their truth and so on. Judgments for Bradley thus become true of reality only in the context of other judgments.

Although Bradley repeatedly claims that all judgments are conditionals, his argument for this rests on his treatment of categorical judgments. He provides quite different treatments of the other forms of judgments he considers. Negative judgments, disjunctive judgments, modal judgments, and judgments of probability, he claims, are also abbreviated inferences, but he reaches this conclusion by separately analyzing these forms of judgment. Chapter 5 covers these analyses. Of particular importance are the interrelated analyses of negative and disjunctive judgments. Negative judgments, Bradley claims, presuppose a positive basis. That is, if the

negative judgment "A is not *b*" is true, then it is because the affirmative judgment "A is *c*" is true where A's being *c* is incompatible with its being *b*. In other words, A is *b* or *c*; because it is *c*, it is not *b*. In this way negative judgments are implicitly inferences with disjunctive premises. Disjunctive judgments likewise involve inferences. Their disjuncts are mutually exclusive, and exclusiveness is to be understood by means of conditional judgments. For example, if "A is *b* or *c*" is true, then if A is *b* it is not *c* and conversely. Because conditionals are abbreviated inferences, it follows that disjunctive judgments are as well. When taken with Chapter 4, Bradley's analyses of these other forms of judgments support his conclusion that all judgments are abbreviated inferences the premises of which contain conditional judgments. Or to put it his way, they are components of a system of judgments. It is the system rather than the individual judgment that is true or false of reality. This analysis of the truth-conditions of judgments is the basis for Bradley's treatment of inference.

Chapter 6 explains the problem that Bradley's theory is meant to solve, a problem he describes as "the essential puzzle of inference." It was popularized by John Stuart Mill, who claimed that all arguments can be reduced to syllogisms and that valid syllogisms are circular. Consider his example of a "syllogism":

All humans are mortal.
Socrates is human.
Therefore, Socrates is mortal.

Mill argued that the general proposition "All humans are mortal" is a conjunction of singular propositions about all individual humans. If Socrates is human, then one of these singular propositions is "Socrates is mortal." But if this is true, then the conclusion of the argument is already asserted in the first premise, in which case the argument is circular. After discussing Mill's version of this problem and his solution, that syllogisms are useful only as a way of registering the conclusions of ampliative, nondeductive inferences, I consider two Idealistic versions of the problem – one by Hegel, the other by Bradley's contemporary and fellow British Idealist Bernard Bosanquet. Both Hegel and Bosanquet defend deductive logic, but in quite different ways. Hegel argues that deductive inferences can be legitimate even though their conclusions contain information not asserted in their premises. Bosanquet, by contrast, claims that inferences need not be circular even though they appear to be when analyzed as syllogisms.

Chapter 7 covers Bradley's solution to this problem and his conse-
quent rejection of the identity between thought and reality. His solution
rests on his theory of inference, a specification of the principles that
enable inferences to be both legitimate and informative. Bradley treats
inferences as thought experiments that synthesize their premises and
then derive a conclusion from this synthesis by analysis. Analysis and syn-
thesis thus become two of his principles of inference. Bradley calls his
third principle "The Axiom of Identity"; it is presupposed by analysis and
synthesis because it justifies treating terms in different judgments as se-
mantically equivalent. These principles, taken with Bradley's claim that
all judgments are abbreviated inferences, allow him to offer his own so-
lution to the problem of inference. He maintains that the conclusions
of inferences can be both legitimate and informative because judgments
always abbreviate inferences having conditional premises. Their conclu-
sions can be legitimate and informative because they assert information
that is present in their premises only in conditional, unasserted form. On
this basis Bradley addresses the problem of the relation between thought
and reality. He argues that in order for thought to be identical to real-
ity, systems of judgments, including the inferential relations contained in
them, must be identical to reality. But because these relations are ideal
rather than real, he concludes that thought is not identical to reality and
that because even valid inferences do not correspond with reality, truth
must not be understood as correspondence. Bradley's conclusion thus
challenges what had until then been regarded as a truism, that truth is
by nature correspondence with reality.

Chapter 8 describes how the argument of *The Principles of Logic* shaped
the development of Bradley's later work as well as his confrontations with
the pragmatists and with Bertrand Russell. Denying that thought is identi-
cal with reality left Bradley the problem of clarifying the relation between
thought and reality, and this is the main problem in *Appearance and Reality*.
Thought, he argued there, contains a criterion of success that it is unable
to satisfy. To the extent that it does not satisfy it, thought is not identical
with reality. But were it able to satisfy its own criterion, then it would be
identical to reality. The criterion of success that Bradley proposes func-
tions as a criterion of truth, and this allows Bradley simultaneously to
insist that no thought is completely true, yet all thoughts contain a de-
gree of truth. Bradley's admission that thought is unable to satisfy its
own criterion exposed him to criticisms from pragmatists, who asked why
thought should assume a preeminent position in philosophy, given its
admitted failings. Bradley responded to these criticisms by setting forth

his account of the relation between thought and reality as a theory of truth. This, in turn, brought him into conflict with Bertrand Russell, who forcefully criticized what he called "the monistic theory of truth." These criticisms, by the pragmatists and by Russell, together with Bradley's insistence on a robust alternative to the correspondence theory of truth generated a debate about the nature of truth and thereby created a new problem of philosophy, the problem of the nature of truth. By developing his metaphysics from his theory of judgment, Bradley showed that logic, with its accompanying concepts of truth and reference, provides a basis for metaphysics.

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Two books on Bradley's logic that I have only occasionally mentioned have been important in my thinking. The first, *Bradley and the Structure of Knowledge*, was written by Phillip Ferreira, a friend and fellow member of The Bradley Society whom I would like to thank not only for what I have learned from his work but also for a number of constructive discussions. His book covers Bradley's theory of judgment and uses it as a basis for understanding Bradley's coherence theories of truth and knowledge and his use of immediate experience as a criterion of reality. In part because of Phillip's good work on these latter topics, I have mostly shied away from them and focused on inference instead. The second book, *Bradley's Logic*, was written by Anthony Manser, a philosopher I never had the privilege of meeting. His book showed me that the revolution in philosophy that made problems of meaning central to the discipline began with Bradley rather than with G. E. Moore or Bertrand Russell. This in turn persuaded me that reconstructing the main argument of *The Principles of Logic*, something *Bradley's Logic* does not attempt, was worthwhile.

I have had the good fortune of spending my professional career in the Department of History and Philosophy at Montana State University in the heart of the northern Rocky Mountains. Montana State has supported my work with a sabbatical leave that enabled me to write my first draft, a College of Letters and Science Research and Creativity Award that allowed me extra research time in the fall of 1998, and a Scholarship and Creativity Award that provided me with a reduced teaching load in

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Abbreviations

AR   *Appearance and Reality.* [1897] 1930. 2d ed., ninth impression
corrected. Oxford: Clarendon Press.

CE   *Collected Essays.* 1935. Oxford: Clarendon Press.

CW1   *Collected Works of F. H. Bradley.* 1999. Vol. 1. Ed. Carol A. Keene.
Bristol: Thoemmes

CW2   *Collected Works of F. H. Bradley.* 1999. Vol. 2. Ed. Carol A. Keene.
Bristol: Thoemmes

CW3   *Collected Works of F. H. Bradley.* 1999. Vol. 3. Ed. Carol A. Keene.
Bristol: Thoemmes

CW4   *Collected Works of F. H. Bradley.* 1999. Vol. 4. Ed. Carol A. Keene.
Bristol: Thoemmes

CW5   *Collected Works of F. H. Bradley.* 1999. Vol. 5. Ed. Carol A. Keene.
Bristol: Thoemmes

ES   *Ethical Studies.* 1927. 2d ed. Oxford: Clarendon Press.

ETR   *Essays on Truth and Reality.* 1914. Oxford: Clarendon Press.

PL   *The Principles of Logic.* [1922] 1928. 2d ed., corrected
impression. Oxford: Clarendon Press.