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Paul Redding

Excerpt

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INTRODUCTION: ANALYTIC PHILOSOPHY AND THE FALL AND RISE OF THE KANT–HEGEL TRADITION

Should it come as a surprise when a technical work in the philosophy of language by a prominent analytic philosopher is described as ‘an attempt to usher analytic philosophy from its Kantian to its Hegelian stage’, as has Robert Brandom’s *Making It Explicit*?¹ It can if one has in mind a certain picture of the relation of analytic philosophy to ‘German idealism’. This particular picture has been called analytic philosophy’s ‘creation myth’, and it was effectively established by Bertrand Russell in his various accounts of the birth of the ‘new philosophy’ around the turn of the twentieth century.²

It was towards the end of 1898 that Moore and I rebelled against both Kant and Hegel. Moore led the way, but I followed closely in his footsteps. I think that the first published account of the new philosophy was

¹ As does Richard Rorty in his ‘Introduction’ to Wilfrid Sellars, *Empiricism and the Philosophy of Mind*, with introduction by Richard Rorty and study guide by Robert Brandom (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1997), pp. 8–9.

² The phrase is from Steve Gerrard, ‘Desire and Desirability: Bradley, Russell, and Moore Versus Mill’ in W. W. Tait (ed.), *Early Analytic Philosophy: Frege, Russell, Wittgenstein* (Chicago: Open Court, 1997): ‘The core of the myth (which has its origins in Russell’s memories) is that with philosophical argument aided by the new logic, Russell and Moore slew the dragon of British Idealism . . . An additional aspect is that the war was mainly fought over two related doctrines of British Idealism . . . The first doctrine is an extreme form of holism: abstraction is always falsification. Truth can be fully predicated of the absolute alone, not of any of its constituents . . . The second Idealist doctrine is that external relations are not real’, p. 40.

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Moore's article in *Mind* on 'The Nature of Judgement'. Although neither he nor I would now adhere to all the doctrines in this article, I, and I think he, would still agree with its negative part – i.e. with the doctrine that fact is in general independent of experience.³

Russell's accounts of his first eight years at Cambridge culminating in his rebellion against idealism convey a familiar picture of the precocious young man coming to find his distinctive voice. Philosophically, he found himself in an environment dominated by 'Kantians' or 'Hegelians',⁴ and disappointment with the teaching of the mathematics to which he had been initially drawn led him to plunge 'with whole-hearted delight into the fantastic world of philosophy'. Initially he 'went over completely to a semi-Kantian, semi-Hegelian metaphysic',⁵ and for the next four years became increasingly Hegelian in outlook, embarking on a series of Hegelian works on mathematics and physics. When the break with idealism came in 1898 however, his outlook was very different. It was experienced as a break with the 'dry logical doctrines' into which he had been 'indoctrinated', and as a 'great liberation, as if I had escaped from a hot-house on to a wind-swept headland'.⁶

This was a time, of course, when revolution was in the air, and Russell uses this term to describe the change in his approach to philosophy in 1898, this revolution contrasting with the 'evolution' of his views from that time on. From his descriptions of the change of outlook, however, it would seem more appropriate to talk of a reversal or perhaps inversion with regard to his relation to Hegelianism. As he tells it, it was his work on Leibniz that had led him to the topic of *relations* and there he discovered a thesis at the heart not only of Leibniz's metaphysics but also of the 'systems of Spinoza, Hegel and Bradley'.⁷ This thesis he termed the 'axiom of internal relations'. Its content was that '[e]very relation is grounded in the natures of the related terms',⁸ and it was ultimately based on Leibniz's assumption that 'every proposition attributes a

³ Bertrand Russell, *My Philosophical Development* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1959), p. 42. A similar account is given in 'My Mental Development' in P. Schilpp (ed.), *The Philosophy of Bertrand Russell* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1946).

⁴ Sidgwick, 'the last survivor of the Benthamites', was the exception. *Ibid.*, p. 30.

⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 29–30.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 48.

⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 43.

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predicate to a subject and (what seemed to him almost the same thing) that every fact consists of a substance having a property'.⁹

This idea that it was the adherence to the subject–predicate structure of the Aristotelian categorical judgement, and the syllogistic term logic based on it, that was at the heart of the idealists' metaphysical errors became the commonplace of Russell's various accounts. Thus, for example, in 1914, Russell writes:

Mr Bradley has worked out a theory according to which, in all judgement, we are ascribing a predicate to Reality as a whole; and this theory is derived from Hegel. Now the traditional logic holds that every proposition ascribes a predicate to a subject, and from this it easily follows that there can be only one subject, the Absolute, for if there were two, the proposition that there were two would not ascribe a predicate to either. Thus Hegel's doctrine, that philosophical propositions must be of the form, "the Absolute is such-and-such" depends upon the traditional belief in the universality of the subject–predicate form. This belief, being traditional, scarcely self-conscious, and not supposed to be important, operates underground, and is assumed in arguments which, like the refutation of relations, appear at first such as to establish its truth. This is the most important respect in which Hegel uncritically assumes the traditional logic.¹⁰

This criticism of the logic presupposed by Bradley and Hegel of course highlighted the general philosophical significance of the *new* system of logic, the first order predicate calculus with 'quantification theory' ultimately based on a propositional rather than, as with Aristotle, a term logic. This new logic derived from the work of Gottlob Frege, and Russell was one of its earliest advocates and developers.

An intellectual revolution could, presumably, proceed by abandoning the old and developing some new approach to the problems under consideration – in this case, problems concerning the foundations of mathematics. But Russell's characteristic reaction to idealism, as he tells it, seems to have been not so much to *deny* its central axiom and replace it with a new one, but to assert its contrary – to replace the axiom of *internal relations* with that of *external relations*. 'Having become convinced that the Hegelian arguments against this and that were invalid' he notes, 'I reacted to the opposite extreme and began to believe in the reality of

⁹ Ibid., p. 48.

¹⁰ Bertrand Russell, *Our Knowledge of the External World* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1914), p. 48.

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whatever could not be *disproved*'.¹¹ Thus in opposition to the *monism* which he believed necessarily flowed from the axiom of internal relations he opposed an *atomistic, pluralistic* view. As Ray Monk points out, Russell was fond of referring to the monistic idealism derived by his teachers from Kant and Hegel, as the 'bowl of jelly' view of the world to which he came to oppose his own 'bucket of shot' view.¹²

Russell's policy of 'believ[ing] everything the Hegelians disbelieved'¹³ gave him his curiously pluralistic ontology of this early period: 'I imagined all the numbers sitting in a row in a Platonic heaven . . . I thought that points of space and instants of time were actually existing entities, and that matter might very well be composed of actual elements such as physics found convenient. I believed in a world of universals, consisting mostly of what is meant by verbs and prepositions'.¹⁴ In this Platonic realism Russell was clearly influenced by Moore who also had started out as an idealist influenced by Bradley but had swung around to a realism critical of Bradley in his 'Prize Fellowship' dissertation for Trinity College.¹⁵ Moore's criticism was directed mostly to what he took to be Kant and Bradley's denial of the 'independence' of facts from knowledge or consciousness, and in its place construed judgement as the mind's direct grasp of mind-independent concepts, regarded as the constituents of the propositions constituting the world. Thus, although Moore was later known as an advocate of common sense, as Thomas Baldwin notes, 'it would be a great mistake to regard Moore's early philosophy as a reaction of common sense empiricism against the excesses of idealism; in its commitment to timeless being Moore's early philosophy is anti-empiricist'.¹⁶ Moore's extreme Platonism perplexed members of the idealist establishment such as Bosanquet, who had examined Moore's thesis in 1898, complaining that *this* way of correcting

¹¹ Russell, *My Philosophical Development*, p. 10.

¹² Ray Monk, 'Was Russell an Analytic Philosopher?' in Hans-Johann Glock (ed.), *The Rise of Analytic Philosophy* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1997), p. 42. The passage of Russell's account of Hegel's jelly-like universe that Monk discusses is from Bertrand Russell, *Portraits from Memory* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1956), p. 21. In Chapter 8 I argue against the implied idea that Hegel views the world as a single substance.

¹³ Russell, *My Philosophical Development*, p. 48.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 48–9.

¹⁵ Peter Hylton, *Russell, Idealism and the Emergence of Analytic Philosophy* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990), pp. 118–24.

¹⁶ Thomas Baldwin, *G. E. Moore* (London: Routledge, 1990), p. 40. Moreover, according to Baldwin, Moore not only misunderstood the nature of both Kant's and Bradley's ethical theories, but his *own* ethical theory, which is, Baldwin thinks, 'best reconstructed (I do not say interpreted) as an incomplete Kantian theory'. *Ibid.*, p. 9.

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the alleged subjectivism of Kant surely amounted to throwing the baby out with the bathwater.¹⁷

The choice of *Platonism* rather than empiricism as an alternative to his teachers' idealism has to be seen in the context of Moore's deep antagonism to forms of ethical naturalism, in particular that of J.S. Mill. Perhaps the most well-known doctrine from the major work of Moore's career – the hugely influential *Principia Ethica* of 1903 – was its critique of 'the naturalistic fallacy', and far from being an anti-idealist critique, the critique of naturalism in ethics had effectively been a staple of the idealist tradition. In the latter third of the nineteenth century it had been idealism which had claimed the anti-psychologistic high ground, Kant's comments on Locke's 'physiological' approach to the mind in the *Critique of Pure Reason* effectively having established the model for this kind of critique of reducing normative to natural facts.¹⁸ In the last third of the nineteenth century, Hermann Lotze, whom John Passmore has referred to as the most pillaged philosopher of that century,¹⁹ had revived the Kantian critique of this reduction of ethical normativity with a vengeance.²⁰

In effect, Moore's criticism of Kant and Bradley in *Principia* was essentially that they had not gone *far enough* in their critique of psychologism. Bradley had differentiated between ideas as particular psychological states and the universal non-psychological contents or meanings of those states, but had stopped short of logical realism and thought of logic as 'incomplete' and in need of psychology.²¹ In this, Bradley just

¹⁷ Bosanquet's comments are quoted in Hylton, *Russell, Idealism and the Emergence of Analytic Philosophy*, pp. 120–1.

¹⁸ Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. and ed. Paul Guyer and Allen W. Wood (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), A86–7/B119.

¹⁹ John Passmore, *A Hundred Years of Philosophy* (London: Duckworth, 1966), p. 49. On the relevance of Lotze to Frege in particular, see Gottfried Gabriel, 'Frege, Lotze, and the Continental roots of Early Analytic Philosophy', in Erich Reck (ed.), *From Frege to Wittgenstein: Perspectives on Early Analytic Philosophy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002).

²⁰ Thomas Hurka (in 'Moore in the Middle', *Ethics* 113 (2003), 599–630) points out that contemporary reviews of *Principia* did not think its central anti-naturalist claim particularly original. Hurka agrees with the gist of these claims, placing Moore in the middle of a tradition stretching from predecessors such as Sidgwick, Rashdall, Brentano and McTaggart, to successors including Prichard, Broad, Ross, Ewing, and, in the continent of Europe, Meinong and Nicolai Hartmann.

²¹ 'Truth necessarily (if I am right) implies an aspect of psychical existence. In order to be, truth itself must happen and occur, and must exist as what we call a mental event. Hence, to completely realize itself as truth, truth would have to include this essential aspect of its own being. And yet from this aspect logic, if it means to exist, is compelled to abstract'. F.H. Bradley, *The Principles of Logic*, second edition (London: Oxford University Press, 1922),

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seems to repeat Kant's rejection of any notion of 'intellectual intuition' as a form of cognition of which finite human beings were capable. For Kant, the only *immediate* representations of which we humans were capable were ones based on our sensory, causal interaction with the world, and these could only be given epistemic status by being made the contents of non-conceptual forms of representation ('intuitions') to which further general representations ('concepts') could be applied. To see ourselves as capable of knowing things in themselves, unmediated by our sensory affections, was to attribute to ourselves the god-like powers of an infinite, non-embodied mind, the powers of 'intellectual intuition'. But the step beyond Kant and Bradley to something like intellectual intuition was precisely the step that Moore and, following him, Russell, seemed prepared to take.²² The project of rendering ethics autonomous was one shared by Moore on the one hand, and the idealists on the other; the belief that this could only be done by a Platonic realist ontology was what separated them.²³

The other major factor at play in the years around the turn of the century in the development of the new philosophy was, of course, Russell's rapid assimilation of the radical changes in logic and mathematics that had been developing in continental Europe for two decades. In *My Philosophical Development*, Russell describes the significance of learning, from Peano at the *International Congress of Philosophy* in Paris in 1900, of two technical innovations. The first was that universal affirmative judgements, such as 'All Greeks are mortal', should *not* be thought of on the model of a singular judgement such as 'Socrates is mortal', but should be analyzed as conditionals, as in 'for all things, if something is a Greek, then that thing is mortal'. The second was that a class consisting of one member cannot be equated *with* that member itself. These ideas gave him crucial tools for developing a logic of relations needed for his work on mathematics and with which he could oppose the 'axiom of internal relations'. Using these tools he quickly drafted much of *The Principles of Mathematics* which came out in the same year as Moore's *Principia Ethica*, making 1903 the official birth date of analytic philosophy. But just as the story of Moore's relation to Bradley

p. 612, quoted in Gerrard, 'Desire and Desirability', p. 67. This dependency also went the other way. Psychology was also incomplete, and stood in need of logic.

²² Hylton, *Russell, Idealism and the Emergence of Analytic Philosophy*, ch. 4.

²³ As is made clear by Christian Piller: 'What distinguishes Moore from Sidgwick and Kant is that Moore tries to secure the autonomy of ethics ontologically: its most fundamental object, the property of being good, is unique'. Christian Piller, 'The new realism in ethics', in Thomas Baldwin (ed.), *The Cambridge History of Philosophy, 1870–1945*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), p. 279.

was more complicated than it appears at first sight, so was that concerning Russell's. While in 1959 he tells of first learning of the treatment of universally quantified judgements as conditionals from *Peano*, he also tells of his having read and assimilated Bradley's *The Principles of Logic* in the early 1890s, the significance of which lies in the fact that there Bradley had himself treated universally affirmative judgements as conditionals.²⁴ Moreover, Russell had already acknowledged this in a footnote in his groundbreaking essay of 1905, 'On Denoting'.²⁵ As will be seen below (Chapter 3), Bradley's understanding of universal affirmations as having the structure of *conditionals* is hardly surprising as it is implicit in Kant's own transcendental logic.²⁶

Recent work on the origins of analytic philosophy has started to replace the myth with historical truth, but, as earlier idealists such as Schelling and Hegel had suggested, and as social scientists like Durkheim were coming to learn from empirical studies at the time of analytic philosophy's birth, myths are more than sets of mistaken beliefs about the world, they are cultural products which play constitutive roles in the formation and maintenance of group identities, exemplifying and reflecting back to their members the shared fundamental norms and values binding them as a group. To the extent that philosophers were starting to form a relatively coherent professionalized group, it would be unrealistic to think that they were free of such influences. Richard Watson has argued that Russell's 'shadow Hegel', a literary creation with little resemblance to the actual historical philosopher, had played a crucial role in the development of analytic philosophy: 'Russell's Hegel made some obvious errors that the developing philosophy of the day could correct. The shadow Hegel is the rock that logical atomism could

²⁴ Russell refers to Bradley's, *Principles of Logic*, (first edition) Bk. 1, ch. II. There Bradley says that in the judgement 'Animals are mortal': 'We *mean* 'Whatever is an animal will die', but that is the same as *If* anything is an animal *then* it is mortal. The assertion really is about mere hypothesis; it is not about fact'. Ibid., p. 47. Earlier Bradley notes that his account is derived by a correction of J. F. Herbart's more psychologistic way of taking all judgements as hypotheticals. Ibid., p. 43.

²⁵ Bertrand Russell, *Logic and Knowledge: Essays 1901–1950* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1956), p. 43.

²⁶ Not only that, the gist of Russell's other great lesson from Peano, that a class with one member cannot be identified with that member was also implicit in Kant's transcendental logic, appearing there as the difference between the notions of 'singularity' (*Einzelheit*) and 'particularity' (*Besonderheit*), a difference deriving from Aristotle that had been lost in the nominalistic English tradition, but not in the German tradition. This issue is explored below in Chapter 3.

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take as a jumping-off place . . . The shadow Hegel's system authenticates the philosophy that casts off from and corrects it'.²⁷

Philosophers may be just as prone to mythologize their collective existence as members of any other social group, but it should also be said that one of the values to which philosophy attempts to give expression in its myths is that of being consistently *critical* of such myths. In any case, we are fortunate now to have available a body of historical work about the tradition of philosophical analysis to counter the standard Russellian account. In contrast to the Russellian creation myth with its simple opposition between analytic philosophy and Kant-derived idealism, the actual picture presented in such works is much more complex. Many of the different strands that have been woven into analytic philosophy throughout its history can be characterized just as much in terms of their affinity to Kantian and Hegelian idealism, *rightly understood*, as they can be in terms of the radical opposition foregrounded in Russell. Russell's caricaturing of idealism, however, was so successful at a rhetorical level that generations of analytic philosophers, largely unconcerned with its history, have uncritically accepted the gist of Russell's account. Such an attitude is in turn expressed in the general easy dismissal of the idealist period of philosophy that goes beyond justifiable complaints about the density and unclarity of the prose in which it was often expressed, a density and unclarity that perhaps reached its apotheosis in the writings of Hegel. If a thinker is regarded as having something important to say, of course, then the project of trying to make that something clearer will generally be regarded as worthwhile. For the most part, however, the attitude within analytic philosophy for much of its history has been to regard such effort as largely a *waste* of effort. Given the fundamental and obvious philosophical errors *known* to lie at the heart of the idealist tradition – that is, those errors learnt about from Russell – what *could* be possibly learned from them? Thus, to a remarkable extent, post-Kantian idealism has been written out of the range of viable approaches to philosophy.

Kant's influence within the analytic tradition has, of course, endured to a much greater extent than has Hegel's – Kant's idealism generally being regarded as marking the outer limit of that which is assimilable from the Germans. Most obviously, Kantianism has remained a viable position within analytic *practical* philosophy, largely because of the fact that Moore's version of rational intuitionism never really succeeded in

²⁷ Richard A. Watson, 'Shadow History in Philosophy', *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 31 (1993), 95–109, 99.

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displacing the two rival nineteenth-century traditions of Kantian ‘deontology’, as it came to be known, and the type of ‘consequentialism’ that could be traced back through utilitarianism to Hume. But it could also be argued that Kantianism, understood in a particular way, was never far from the core theoretical issues of mainstream analytic thought, despite Russell’s efforts. This was largely due to the impact of Wittgenstein’s *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, in which Wittgenstein introduced a version of Frege’s ‘context principle’ into philosophical semantics: ‘Only the proposition has sense; only in the nexus of a proposition has a name meaning’.²⁸ This Frege–Wittgenstein context principle was clearly in tension with the atomistic approach of the early Russell, but many have argued that it was also in tension with Russell’s approach *after* he had absorbed and introduced *Tractarian* elements into his own work. Thus it has been argued that this principle marked a deep distinction separating the approaches of Frege and Wittgenstein on the one hand and those of Russell and Moore on the other, the former pair’s approach to metaphysics being more ‘judgement based’ and, because of that, ‘Kantian’, the latter pair’s, more ontological or ‘object based’.²⁹

A similar complexity concerning the relation of analytic philosophy to the nineteenth-century idealist tradition has been suggested by Michael Friedman. Friedman has reconstructed the neo-Kantian background presupposed in the approach of the logical positivists,³⁰ again marking their work off sharply from the Platonic realism of early Russell and Moore. According to Friedman, the main philosophical impetus of the logical positivists came from late nineteenth-century work on the foundations of geometry, which brought into question Kant’s analysis of geometric truth in the first *Critique*, and on the basis of this the positivists rejected Kant’s key concept of the ‘synthetic *a priori*’. What the positivists essentially did was to redefine the nature of the Kantian *a priori*, by axiomatizing it, and relativizing and historicizing it, to fit the contemporary sciences. Now some equivalent non-empirical structure, such as

²⁸ Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, trans. C.K. Ogden (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1922), § 3.3. Frege had introduced this idea in *The Foundations of Arithmetic* as the second of three fundamental principles: ‘The meaning of a word must be asked for in the context of a proposition, not in isolation’. Michael Beaney (ed.), *The Frege Reader* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1997), p. 90 (see also, p. 108).

²⁹ The characterization of the difference is from Hylton, *Russell, Idealism and the Emergence of Analytic Philosophy*, p. 223.

³⁰ Michael Friedman, *Reconsidering Logical Positivism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999). See also Alan W. Richardson, *Carnap’s Construction of the World: The Aufbau and the Emergence of Logical Empiricism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998).

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Reichenbach's 'non-empirical axioms of coordination' or Carnap's logical syntax of scientific language, would come to replace Kant's synthetic *a priori*.³¹ But on Friedman's account, the positivists were Kantians in an even deeper way, in that while Russell and Moore were essentially *ontologists*, who read Kant and his successors likewise *as* ontologists, the positivists resembled Kant as he was understood by the late nineteenth-century *neo*-Kantians, who took their ontology from the best science of their day, and forewent the claim to any further philosophically-based ontology. The Newtonian science of Kant's day had been superseded, and so in shaping their account of the *a priori* to their contemporary science, the positivists were doing essentially what Kant *would have* done had he lived at the start of the twentieth century, and had he, like the neo-Kantians, seen beyond the troublesome dichotomy of appearances and 'things-in-themselves'. And by directing their attention to the non-empirically given framework conditions of scientific inquiry, the positivists were drawn into the distinctively holistic structures of language use. For them it was a proposed language of the physical sciences, but substitute the patterns of language use of *everyday life*, and much the same could be said of the later Wittgenstein and post-Second World War Oxford philosophy. Again, in contrast to the approach of Russell and Moore, there was a preservation of the Kantian impulse against what he had termed dogmatic metaphysics, and with it a turn to a reflection upon the forms in which we represent reality to ourselves.

But some of these movements might be described as equally Hegelian in spirit. Kant himself had lacked a sense of the historicity of the models of knowledge taken as authoritative, and just as he thought Aristotle had definitively established the basic forms of right inference, and Euclid the basic structures of geometric knowledge, so too he thought that Newton had definitively established the science of the phenomenal world. Looking back from the twentieth century, however, we see enough historical change in the objects of the sciences to incline

³¹ Friedman, *Reconsidering Logical Positivism*, pp. 7–8. For his part, Richardson (*Carnap's Construction of the World*, chs 4 & 5) describes the Positivists as retrieving a distinctly *methodological* dimension of the Kantian synthetic *a priori* by separating it from the further *epistemological* (as in its claims for the necessity of Euclidean geometry, for example) and *representation theoretic* (in its distinction between the formal properties of intuitive and conceptual representations) dimensions that it had in Kant's Transcendental Idealism. In their respective accounts, both stress the mediating role played here by contemporary neo-Kantians, such as Ernst Cassirer and Bruno Bauch, and point to the divergences between the Positivists, on the one hand, and the traditional empiricists, with whom they have been usually associated, on the other.