

**Bradley's Account of Judgment:  
Between Metaphysics and Epistemology**  
Damian Ilodigwe

**Abstract**

Bradley's account of judgment advances at least two fundamental theses. First is the thesis that every judgment is a judgment about reality. Second, that no judgment is a judgment about the whole of reality. So that while a judgment always expresses a fact, no judgment expresses a fact, whole and entire. Since judgment is always conditional, to this extent, reality is more than what judgment articulates. The paper aims to show that in developing his account of judgment, especially with respect of the two theses that constitute it, Bradley larger purpose is to moderate the claims of realism and idealism relative to the problem of knowledge. Because of the common perception of Bradley as an idealist, the tendency is to take his theory of judgment as an attack on merely empiricism or realism, but we contend that Bradley's theory of judgment is no less an attack on the tradition of rationalistic idealism.

**Keywords:** *Bradley, Judgment, Idealism, Psychologism, Empiricism*

**Introduction**

Bradley's account of judgment advances at least two fundamental theses. First is the thesis that every judgment is a judgment about reality. Second, no judgment is a judgment about the whole of reality. Hence, while judgment expresses a fact, no judgment expresses fact in its entirety. So, given that judgment is always conditional, the reality is more than what judgment articulates (Bradley, 1922, p. 1; Bradley, 1930, p. 324). The first thesis is about the referentiality of judgment. It serves to secure the objectivity of judgment. In contrast, without prejudice to the first thesis, the second thesis is about the conditional nature of judgment and serves to specify the modality of judgment, that is, the sense in which judgment could be said to be true

concerning what it asserts (Bradley, 1995, pp.1-15; Ferreira, 1999, p.15).

The twin issue of objectivity of judgment and modality of judgment are recurrent in the history of philosophy, especially in its modern moment, against the backdrop of the challenge of scepticism and the emergence of epistemology as first philosophy, in a bid to justify the possibility of knowledge (Ilodigwe, 2005; Ilodigwe, 2013). Indeed, these issues are at the heart of the vexed conflict between rationalism and empiricism. It dominated the whole of modern philosophy and preoccupied the attention of its key protagonists such as Descartes, Kant and Hegel.

In what follows we aim to show that in developing his account of judgment, especially with respect of the two theses that constitute it, Bradley's larger purpose is to moderate the claims of realism and idealism relative to the problem of knowledge. The thesis that all judgments are about reality moderates the empiricist account of judgment as a mental phenomenon. For the neo-Kantian doctrine of judgment as a synthesis of ideas, the thesis that no judgment is whole and complete to what it asserts moderates it. It holds especially on the assumption that absolute identity subsists between the subject and predicate of judgment (Bradley, 1922, p. 591; Bradley, 1930, pp. 419-495).

The common perception that Bradley is an idealist paves for the tendency to take his theory of judgment as a mere attack to empiricism or realism. However, we contend that Bradley's theory of judgment is more than that, especially given Bradley's claim that all judgments are

conditional and that existence is irreducible to thought (Allard, 2005; Ferreira, 1999). In this regard, Bradley emerges as a transitional figure in quest of a more holistic position that transcends the dualism of realism and idealism. It is one that affirms the possibilities of thought concerning reality. It is made possible without denying the limitations of thought as far as the question of the relationship between thought and reality is concerned (Bradley, 1922, Chapters 1-3; Bradley, 1930, Chapters 14-15; Ilodigwe, 2018, pp.1-18).

For the sake of convenient exposition, we develop our argument in several steps. First, we offer a critical exposition of the two theses at the heart of Bradley's account of judgment. Second, we consider how both theses enable him to moderate the claim of realism and idealism. Our final step concludes with a reflection of the contemporary relevance of Bradley's account of judgment.

### **Judgment and the Question of Reference**

Let us delve into the heart of Bradley's account by considering the first thesis in question, namely, the claim that every judgment is a judgment about reality. In introducing this claim in the PL, Bradley (1922) states,

Judgment, in the strict sense, does not exist where there is no knowledge of truth or falsehood; and, since truth and falsehood depend on the relation of our ideas to reality, you cannot have judgment proper without ideas.... Not only are we unable to judge before we use ideas, but strictly speaking we cannot judge until we use them as ideas.... Ideas are not ideas until they are symbols, and before we use symbols we cannot judge (p. 1).

Bradley maintained that we do not judge until we use

ideas as symbols; hence, he is accentuating the referential capacity of judgment. It means we use ideas in judgment to qualify reality beyond the act, so that every judgment, inevitably, refers to reality (Cf. Bradley, 1922, pp. 4-5). Given that judgment involves the use of ideas, the subjectivity of judgment is beyond question. Nonetheless, the overall point is that judgment is not a merely subjective phenomenon but is always about reality (Bradley, 1922, p. 4). Thus, without transcending the mental act, we cannot speak of judgment. The transcending of the mental act in reaching out to reality outside the subjective domain is precisely what defines the referential capacity of judgment (Bradley, 1922, p. 4; Bradley, 1995, pp.1-15).

However, while Bradley says that we cannot have judgment proper without ideas, it is another matter altogether how ideas are used in judgment. Both considerations represent different aspects of the claim in respect of the referentiality of judgment. On the one hand, it amounts to the denial that judgment is merely a mental phenomenon, while on the other it amounts to the affirmation that every judgment refers to reality (Bradley, 1995, pp. 29-30).

A clear understanding of both considerations and their import for the nature of judgment requires twofold fundamental discrimination of ideas -- ideas can be used in judgment either merely as ideas or as symbols. As Bradley states in the PL, "In all that is we can distinguish two sides, (i) existence and (ii) content. In other words, we perceive both that it is and what it is. But in anything that is a symbol we also have a third side, its signification, or that which it means." (Bradley, 1922, p. 4). Consequently, unlike a mere idea, "a symbol is a fact that stands for



something other than itself.... In its use as a symbol, it forgoes individuality and self-existence ... and becomes an adjective that holds of another" (Bradley, 1922, p. 4).

On Bradley's view, therefore, we do not use ideas in judgment proper as ideas. However, we use ideas as symbols in a sense they point beyond themselves, to a reality beyond the mental act. So that when we have appropriately judged our judgment is about reality and we are not in any way caught up in a subjective circle relative to which what is asserted in judgment is merely subjective (Bradley, 1922, pp. 9-10).

The above point has an essential bearing on Bradley's contention that "judgment in the strict sense does not exist where there is no knowledge of truth and falsehood." (Bradley, 1922, p.10). In other words, we cannot say we have correctly judged unless what our judgment asserts has a truth value. However, from the standpoint of the referential capacity of judgment, the weightier point is that the truth value of an assertion is a function of the relation between idea and reality (Bradley, 1922, pp.41-43).

Consequently, when I assert that the table is black, the assertion must be open to being either false or true for the assertion to count as true judgment. More importantly, if the assertion is true or false, the assertion is true or false because the table is black or not black. In other words, it is always the reality that validates or falsifies the truth of what the judgment asserts (Bradley, 1922). To this extent, the claim that the table is black will be true if indeed the table is black; otherwise, it will be false to assert that the table is black.

The point here reminds us of the classical analysis of knowledge

into three basic components, particularly the correlation between the belief component and the truth component. On the traditional analysis, belief is a necessary condition for knowledge but is not a sufficient condition, meaning that it is not enough to believe *p*, but *p* must also be true in order to guarantee the possibility of knowledge (Hamlyn, 1970). The requirement that *p* be true is a recognition that unless we transcend the subjective domain, what is asserted enjoys merely a subjective value.

Nevertheless, if what is asserted is merely subjective, it means we cannot speak of truth or falsehood in any objective sense as we are stuck in the realm of mere belief. Consequently, *p* must be true if we are to transcend the domain of mere belief. Thus, insisting in paragraph 10 of Chapter 1 of PL that "judgment proper is the act which refers an ideal content (recognized as such) to reality beyond the act," Bradley makes the analogous point that judgment proper is not a mental phenomenon but an objective phenomenon that relates to a state of affair beyond the mental act (Bradley, 1922).

Perhaps the crucial point is that it is the reality that makes what we assert either true or false and not the mental state of the one who makes the assertion. So, in the case of the assertion that the table is black, the table is black is not necessary because the subject making the judgment says so but because the table is black. The assertion is an assertion about a state of affairs that obtains in the objective world (Bradley, 1922, p. 41).

On Bradley's view, therefore, a commitment to referentiality of judgment is a commitment to the objectivity of judgment, so that in claiming that every judgment is a judgment about reality, we imply that such judgment is not subjective but objective. In accentuating the

importance of objectivity as a condition for proper judgment Bradley (1922) tells us in the PL that,

The consciousness of objectivity or necessary connection, in which the essence of judgment is sometimes taken to lie, will be found in the end to derive its meaning from a reference to the real. A truth is not necessary unless in some way it is compelled to be true.... And compulsion is not possible without something that compels. It will be hence the real, which exerts this force, of which the judgment is asserted. We may indeed not affirm that the suggestion S-P itself is categorically true of the fact, and that is not our judgment. The actual judgment asserts that S-P is forced on our minds by a reality x. And this reality whatever it may be is the subject of the judgment. It is the same with objectivity. If the connection S-P holds outside of my judgment, it can hardly hold nowhere or in nothingness. It must surely be valid in relation to something, and that something must be real. No doubt as before, S-P may not be true directly of this fact; but then that again was not what we asserted. The actual judgment affirms that S-P is in connection with x. And this once again in an assertion about fact (p. 1).

### **Judgment and the Question of Conditionality**

Bradley's point here concerning objectivity as a condition for judgment proper enables us to consider now in what follows the second thesis that drives Bradley's account of judgment, namely, the claim that no judgment is a judgment about the whole of reality. The second thesis is obviously without prejudice to the first thesis, which states that every judgment is a judgment about reality. Indeed, the second thesis builds on the first thesis so far as while it does not deny that judgment is about a fact, it tells us how judgment is about the fact.

Whereas in answering the question as to how ideas are used in judgment the first thesis insists that ideas are used as symbols to qualify

reality, the second thesis takes on the additional burden to determine how, as symbols, ideas qualify reality. In other words, without denying the fact of reference, it specifies the mode of reference. Once we grasp the nature of the continuity that binds both theses, it emerges that judgment involves an act of predication. It exhibits a subject-predicate structure, one in which the predicate objectively qualifies a reality beyond the subjective act. So, while the subjectivity of ideas is incontrovertible, predication is nonetheless objective, and it is due to the referential capacity of ideas.

From the standpoint of the second thesis, therefore, the challenge is to determine how the predicate qualifies the subject. Against this backdrop, the second thesis claims that every judgment is conditional. In other words, while every judgment is about a fact, no judgment expresses the fact about which it is an assertion whole and entire. Thus, always, there is something of the fact that escapes representation. Hence, the predicate falls short of a full articulation of what is before it.

The point is that in qualifying the reality beyond the mental act, ideas as symbols do not qualify reality categorically. They qualify it conditionally, meaning that the qualification is always subject to conditions so that what the judgment asserts cannot be said to be categorically true. The judgment cannot be categorical unless it includes within itself all the conditions upon which its truth and falsity depend. To the extent that the truth conditions of the judgment are not included in the judgment, the judgment is incomplete in respect of what it asserts (Bradley, 1930, p. 321).

Nevertheless, aside from the fact of the incompleteness of

judgment, there is a further fact that the judgment, if conditional, is also inevitably selective. The predicate qualifies an aspect of the whole but not the whole of reality (Hylton, 1990, p. 64). The point is that judgment involves some definition; it requires focusing. When we focus on something, we narrow ourselves to a specific consideration in the context of a mass of several other considerations implicated in the entire background of our operation. In this context, we isolate what is essential from what is unimportant, and this process of discrimination plays a role in conditioning our judgment. Thus, judgment cannot conceivably occur without some extrapolation from this broader background in which the object of our consideration is enmeshed. Indeed, as Bradley says explicitly in respect of the selective nature of the judgment, "as soon as we judge, we are forced to analyze, and forced to distinguish. We must separate some elements of the given from others. We sunder and divide what appears to us as a sensible whole. It is never more than an arbitrary selection, which goes into judgment." (Bradley, 1922, p. 94).

In presenting his case for the conditional nature of judgment in the PL, Bradley leaves us in no doubt that he intends his thesis to apply to all forms of judgment without any exception. Given his intention that the thesis is applicable in respect of all judgment, Bradley proceeds by way of a typological survey of possible judgment types, the aim being to consider whether there is any judgment at all that can be said to be categorical. The point is simple: if the survey uncovered any counter-example, it means that Bradley's thesis cannot enjoy the universal scope of validity. he wants to claim for it.

In carrying out his exploration, Bradley recognizes two broad

categories of judgment which are representative of the traditional division of judgments into universal and singular judgment. Universal judgments such as "Animals are mortal" does not constitute any formidable challenge to Bradley's case for the conditional nature of the judgment. It agrees with what most contemporary logicians grant - Bradley maintains that universal judgments are hypothetical in their form (Bradley, 1922, p. 48).

Unlike universal judgments, the situation of singular judgments is much more challenging when it comes to demonstrating that they are conditional. If there is any candidate likely to yield a counter-example, it must surely come from this category of judgment, which on all hands is generally treated as a categorical assertion. In scrutinizing individual judgments, Bradley distinguishes three different species. First is the analytic judgment of sense. It is the most basic type of individual judgment. Its peculiarity consists in the fact that it analyzes what is given in the present perception and in doing, so it does not affirm any ideal content that is not immediately given. Example of an analytic judgment of sense would be, according to Bradley, "There is a wolf" or again, "I have a toothache".

The second species of individual judgment is what Bradley calls the synthetic judgment of sense. Although like the analytic judgment of sense, the synthetic judgment of sense begins with what is given in sensuous experience, it involves a fundamental extension of what is given in perception by way of inferential articulation of the matter. Examples of a synthetic judgment of sense Bradley cites are: "Yesterday it rained" and "tomorrow there will be a full moon."

The third species of individual judgment is an unnamed division (Bradley, 1922, p. 41). In contradistinction from the first two species, the peculiarity of this unnamed instance of individual judgment is that its ideal content is neither given in perception as in the case of an analytic judgment of sense nor is it merely the case that we have an explicit articulation of this content by way of inferential construction. On the contrary, they are never sensible reality in time. Examples of the third species of individual judgment would be "the history of man or a nation;" or those judgments about such non-sensible realities as "god" or the "universe" (Bradley, 1922, p. 49).

Despite the apparent categorical form, the various species of individual judgment exhibits, Bradley maintains in the PL that, like universal judgments, individual judgments are also conditional. The result, in turn, implies that Bradley's search for categorical judgment does not yield any counter-example, so that the thesis that all judgments are conditional remains unassailable.

The pertinent question at this juncture is: what support does Bradley provide for his claim that all judgments are conditional, or that, by implication, they are incomplete and selective in respect of what they assert about their object? Bradley offers two reasons in the PL to ground the conditional nature of judgment. The first reason pertains to the epistemic inadequacy of ideas. Ordinarily, the function of ideas in the context of judgment is to qualify reality. However, by their very nature, ideas are limited about what they can capture. Considering the concreteness of the ontological situation, there is always a gap between idea and reality. In this sense, the inadequacy of judgment is a function

of the mechanism in terms of which judgment proceeds, namely, the fact that it must qualify concrete reality in terms of ideas, which are abstract in the final analysis. Thus, the Achilles heel of every judgment is the abstract nature of ideas so that no matter how sophisticated the ideas may be, it will always fall short of the concrete reality it qualifies.

Nevertheless, beyond the epistemic limitation of ideas, Bradley grounds the conditional nature of judgment on a more ontological consideration. For, on his view, judgment is not conditional merely because of the abstract nature of ideas. More importantly, judgment is irreparably conditional because of the over-determined nature of the reality which ideas seek to qualify unconditionally in judgment. Consequently, to understand why judgments are incomplete and selective concerning what they assert about their object, we must interrogate not only the nature of predication but also the nature of Reality itself. The implication is that, even if it were possible to envisage a scenario in which we overcome the burden of the epistemic inadequacy of ideas, judgment would still turn out to be conditional, since in trying to be categorical, judgment seeks to accomplish a metaphysically impossible feat. Given the over-determined nature of Reality, the effort of judgment to become the whole of Reality will always end in frustration. Bradley expresses this frustration thus,

We saw that you cannot ascribe to the real one part of what is given in present perception. And now we must go further. Even if you could predicate the whole present content, yet still you would fail unless you asserted also both the past and the future. You cannot assume (or I, at least, do not know your right to assume) that the present exists independent of the past, and that, taking up one fragment of the whole extension,



you may treat this part as self-subsistent, as something that owes nothing to its connection with the rest. If your judgment is to be true as well as categorical, you must get the conditions entirely within it. And here the conditions are the whole extent of spaces and times which are required to make the given complete. The difficulty is insuperable. It is not merely that ideas cannot copy facts of sense. It is not merely that our understandings are limited, that we do not know the whole of the series, and that our powers are inadequate to apprehend so large an object. No possible mind could represent to itself the completed series of space and time; since for that to happen, the infinite process must have come to an end, and be released in a finite result. And this cannot be. It is not merely inconceivable psychologically; it is metaphysically impossible (Bradley, 1922, p. 99).

Bradley believes that the conditional nature of judgment ultimately derives not merely from the epistemic limitation of ideas but above all from the nature of reality. The tenet points to the crucial importance of Bradley's metaphysics to his overall account of the nature of judgment. In theorizing the nature of judgment, Bradley may have wanted to stay out of metaphysics, and focused on the issues surrounding the logical dimension of the nature of judgment. However, his interrogation of the ground of the conditional nature of judgment clearly shows otherwise. More importantly, it indicates a specific interface between Bradley's logic and his metaphysics. For, if on Bradley's view, "no judgment can express fact whole and complete" because of the over-determined nature of the reality judgment attempts to qualify, it is arguable that Bradley resolves the question of the ground of judgment in terms of his metaphysics rather than epistemology, albeit with full recognition of the continuity between both considerations (Ilodigwe, 2013).

Thus, in keeping with the privileged importance Bradley attaches to the ontological dimension of the issue of the ground of the conditional nature of judgment, it is not surprising that Bradley devotes considerable attention to clarifying the status of the subject in judgment in the PL (1922, p. 40-50). On Bradley's view, the subject in judgment is always the reality - Reality as a whole; what in his explicitly metaphysical, AR, he refers to as the Absolute, that is, the all-inclusive reality (Bradley, 1930, p. 324; Ilodigwe, 2006).

Against this backdrop, Bradley introduces the distinction between logical subject and grammatical subject, all to clarify the status of the subject in judgment. The grammatical subject is the ostensive subject, while the logical subject is the real subject (Bradley, 1922, pp. 41-68). Consider the case of the proposition, "this table is black". The table is the grammatical subject in this judgment since it is qualified by the ideal content black. However, the table is not the logical subject. The logical subject is Reality which includes the table but is more than the table (Allard, 2005).

The import of Bradley's metaphysical grounding of the conditional nature of judgment for his overall account of judgment is evident. Given the over-determined nature of the subject in judgment, the subject will always be more than the predicate, so that no judgment can ever fully represent what it qualifies (Bradley, 1922, pp. 40-60). It is clear therefore that while an essential continuity subsists between the two theses that drive Bradley's account of judgment, both theses find their ultimate anchor in Bradley's metaphysics of the Absolute. If a judgment is always about a fact, and if no judgment expresses fact in its entirety, it is all because judgment is conditioned by reality.

So that given the over-determined nature of reality, there will always be a gap between idea and reality, entirety between appearance and reality (Desmond, 1987; 1995). Relative to this framework, Bradley presses his case for the irreducibility of existence to thought, thus accentuating the interface between metaphysics and epistemology as far as the question of the nature of judgment is concerned (Bradley, 1930, pp. 491-495; see also Ilodigwe, 2018, pp. 1-18). In what follows, we shall examine how Bradley's account of judgment serves to moderate the debate between realism and idealism.

#### **Bradley's Account of Judgment and the Question of the Moderation of the Claims of Realism and Idealism**

To appreciate the contributions of Bradley's account of judgment to the debate, we must immediately retrieve the core issue in the debate, namely, the question of how to articulate the relationship between idea and reality (Bradley, 1922, p.1). This issue conditioned the unfolding of modern philosophy from Descartes to Hegel and perhaps even beyond (Descartes, 1980, Meditations 1-3; Kant, 1993, BXV; Kant, 1977, p. 10). Against this backdrop, the challenge of scepticism has been recurrent in modern philosophy (Hamlyn, 1970, Pp. 69-89; Hamlyn, 1984). For, the sceptic adamantly insists that the correlation between idea and reality cannot be objectively grounded, so that the possibility of knowledge is immediately threatened.

#### **Idea-Reality: Scepticism and the Odyssey of Epistemology from Descartes to Kant**

As the first philosophy, the point of epistemology is finding a way

on how to groundly secure the objective correlation between idea and reality. Thus, saving knowledge from the attack of scepticism. Paradoxically the situation is such that unless the problem of knowledge is sorted out by providing an adequate answer to the challenge of scepticism the problem of metaphysics remains suspended or even becomes irrelevant if the challenge of scepticism proves insuperable in the end (Wolff, 1998; Homer & Westacott, 2000). Given the privileged importance of epistemology in containing the menace of scepticism, epistemology in the modern context assumes the canonical status of first philosophy. Thus, it serves as an introduction to metaphysics (Wolff, 1998, p. 56).

The debate between realism and idealism must be placed in this broad context. In the modern parlance of the tradition of epistemology as first philosophy, we have several theories of justification which address the issue of the relation between idea and reality. Pre-eminent among these theories of justification perhaps is the Cartesian philosophy of the Cogito, which grounds the objective connectivity of idea and reality in God. In effect, Descartes maintains that given that God endowed us with our faculties and since God is good and cannot deceive us our representations are true representations of reality provided we make proper use of our faculties. (Descartes, 1980, Meditation 1). Descartes' theistic idealism is also known as a child of the solipsistic crisis that the Cogito suffers in the wake of Descartes' dualistic conceptualization of the relation between the object and subject of knowledge (Descartes, 1980, Meditation 2).

If an object is *res extensa*, as Descartes maintained and the mind,

res cogitans, it remains to be seen how there can be any cognitive contact between the two realms. So that even in the certainty of its representations, the Cogito finds itself caught up in a solipsistic cul-de-sac which immediately makes nonsense of the possibility of objective knowledge of the external world (Flew, 1979, pp. 38-45). Descartes' appeal to God as a guarantor of the objective link between the ideas of the cogito and external reality is because of the stemming tide of scepticism concerning our knowledge of the external world.

Of course, unless Descartes' appeal to God is accepted as philosophically cogent the theory of justification it supports is bound to disintegrate. Many of Descartes' successors did not endorse his appeal to God in resolving the epistemic issue of the relation between idea and reality so that scepticism persisted in the wake of Descartes. Locke, in reaction to Descartes' theistic idealism, develops a sort of representative realism that grounds the connection between idea and reality in a peculiar concept of the object. Locke divides the object into primary and secondary qualities, with the argument that, as objective qualities, ideas of primary qualities resemble the object and so give us access to the object by way of inference from idea to object (Solomon, 1979, pp. 12-15). Reacting to Locke, Berkeley's philosophy of immaterialism reconceptualizes object as a collection of ideas and maintains they are sustained by God, who is the infinite perceiver (Berkeley, 1996). Of course, it is Hume who brings the Cartesian initiative to consummation by reducing it to scepticism based on his epistemology of impression (Hume, 1978, BK.1, Pt.1, Sec.1).

Kant's ingenuity in dealing with the entire Cartesian legacy is to

have seen that the project of epistemology is vulnerable to scepticism so far as the relationship between the object and subject of knowledge is conceptualized dualistically (Kant, 1993, BXV; Kant, 1997, p. 10). If Hume can reduce the whole of modern philosophy to scepticism by arguing that the idea-reality relation cannot be objectively validated, it is thanks to the dualism of object and subject that the Cartesian paradigm promoted. To overcome this situation, Kant will jettison Cartesian dualism and reinvent epistemology in terms of the transcendental ideal (Mander, 1994, pp. 124-132). In other words, he will reconceptualize the relation between object and subject transcendently. Hence, it results with the transcendental relation between idea and reality becoming a transcendental condition for the possibility of knowledge.

At a certain level, this transcendental move is effective and constitutes a transcendental refutation of scepticism. At another level, however, Kant's initiative witnesses the rebirth of scepticism so far as his Copernican revolution leads to a sort of cognitive dualism in which we know the object only as appearance but not as it is in-itself (Jones, 1970, pp. 8-28). In this scenario, the divide between idea and reality re-emerges, for albeit idea and reality are transcendently related, in the actual situation of knowledge, a cognitive gap subsists between idea and reality such that we cannot have cognitive access to reality as it is itself (Jones, 1970, pp. 8-28).

The resurgence of scepticism within the scheme of the Critical Philosophy is a phenomenon that troubled many of Kant's successors (Sedgwick, 2000, pp. 1-18). In response to the scepticism of the Critical philosophy Hegel, for instance, will reinvent epistemology in terms of the

dialectical ideal by abandoning Kant's cognitive dualism and reconceptualizing the relationship between object and subject dialectically. While he applauds Kant for jettisoning Descartes' substantive dualism, he takes issue with the residue of dualism that infects the critical philosophy (Hegel, 1969; Hegel, 1977, p. 10; Rockmore, 1992, pp. 72-76).

On Hegel's view, Kant's cognitive dualism is evidence that Kant is not entirely true to the fundamental insight of the Copernican revolution in respect of the transcendental activity of the subject in the constitution of the object of knowledge. A true transcendental philosophy cannot maintain any opposition within consciousness. Hegel claims in effect that his dialectical philosophy is the true successor to Kant's transcendental philosophy. It appropriates and completes Kant's transcendental method by maintaining that the concept of object is not only identical with the concept of the subject but more importantly that object and subject are also identical (Stern, 1990, pp. 30-40; Maker, 1998, pp.87-98).

The implication is that the sort of cognitive gap that subsists between idea and reality on the Kantian scheme is unsustainable in dialectical philosophy. With Hegel, there can be no final opposition between the object as it is in itself and object as known by consciousness. We get to a point in the process of knowledge where there is absolute identity between the object of knowledge and subject of knowledge, even if we come to this through a complex process of mediation in which appearances are sublated and included into reality (Hegel, 1969; Hegel 1977).

From our account so far, at least three possible models of explicating the idea-reality relation have emerged. There is the dualistic approach which exemplifies itself in rationalism (Descartes) and Empiricism (Locke, Berkeley and Hume). There is also the transcendental approach exemplified by Kant. Finally, there is the dialectical approach exemplified by Hegel. Bradley's positive account of judgment in the PL considers the claims of these approaches, but more importantly, it is a result of his critical engagement with them.

### **Idea-Reality Relation: Bradley's Engagement with the Tradition of Epistemology**

In engaging with these models, Bradley is aware of the interface between epistemology and metaphysics. While Bradley is interested in both dimensions of the matter, his primary concern in the PL is the epistemological dimension of the matter. In AR Bradley will address the metaphysical side of the matter explicitly, albeit he will struggle as we have noted in the PL to keep both dimensions apart.

Whether it is in PL or AR, Bradley's response to the matter tries to chart a position that lies somewhere between Kant's transcendental idealism and Hegel's speculative idealism (Bradley, 1930, p. 341). The two theses that drive his theory of judgment play a crucial role in helping him to moderate the debate between rationalism and empiricism or realism and idealism and thus arrive at his positive account of judgment. Summarily Bradley's position is that the whole of Reality is the subject of judgment. The predicate in judgment aims to qualify the whole of reality. However, in the end, the subject is more than the predicate so that judgment is inexorably conditional and incomplete in respect of what it



asserts.

A cursory interrogation of the two theses at the heart of Bradley's account of judgment immediately reveals that they form part and parcel of Bradley's critical appraisal of the various voices in the conversation regarding the idea-reality relation as it occurs in the context of the problem of the general nature of judgment. On the one hand, Bradley sides with Kant in rejecting Cartesian dualism, while on the other hand Bradley also goes along with Hegel in abandoning Kant's cognitive dualism (Bradley, 1930, p. 341).

On Bradley's view, none of these models guarantees an adequate resolution of the issue of idea-reality relation. Specifically, from the standpoint of Bradley's account of judgment, the point is that both models undermine the referential capacity of judgment in various ways, so far as they fail to recognize that ideas necessarily qualify reality. Thus, in intervening in the conversation, Bradley intent is to recuperate the referential capacity of judgment. This is the underlying motivation behind Bradley's critique of the empiricist account of judgment as a mental state (Bradley, 1922, pp. 2-10).

### **Dialectic of Empiricism, Neo-Kantianism and Idealism**

In criticizing this view of judgment which is associated with Hume and Mills, Bradley points out that the empiricist account of judgment not only confuses judgment with mere belief in treating judgment as a mental state, but it also makes it difficult to sustain the notion of truth and falsehood (Bradley, 1922, pp. 2-10). Moreover, and above all, it blurs the boundary between psychology and logic by reducing the question of the nature of ideas to the question of the origin of ideas (Hume, 1977, Bk. 1,

Pt. 3). Thus, in emancipating logic from psychology, one of the key objectives of PL, Bradley counter-point is to invoke the thesis that all judgments are about reality. The Achilles heel of empiricist psychologism is its failure to understand how ideas are used in logic. Bradley promptly corrects it by insisting that ideas are used as symbols and not merely as ideas.

Indeed, as Bradley says in respect of how this conflation has affected the whole of English philosophy, "We have lived too long in the psychological attitude. We take it for granted and as a matter of course that, like sensation and emotion, ideas are phenomena. Furthermore, considering these phenomena as psychical facts, we have tried (with what success I will not ask) to distinguish between ideas and sensation. However, intent on this, we have as good forgotten the way in which logic uses ideas." (Bradley, 1922, p. 3).

The point of Bradley's criticism of the empiricist account of judgment, therefore, is the need to recognize that ideas are always about reality; otherwise, we misunderstand the true nature of judgment.

When we turn to Bradley's criticism of the Neo-Kantian account of judgment as a synthesis of ideas, a view associated with Herbart, we find at work the same motivation to recuperate the referential capacity of judgment. Unlike the empiricist account of judgment, the view of judgment as the synthesis of ideas undermines the referential capacity of judgment via a different but problematic means, namely, by assuming that the subject in judgment is not reality, but ideas. If the subject is not reality but ideas, it is easy to see how Herbart arrives at the thesis judgment is a synthesis of ideas (Bradley, 1922, pp. 40-50). Anyone

familiar with Kant's transcendental method and indeed the primary thrust of his Copernican revolution in epistemology knows that this view of judgment is Kantian in inspiration. Indeed, it is parasitic on the cognitive dualism of the critical philosophy so far as it places an embargo on any locution of the object of judgment as reality but instead passes off the object as an idea without any in-itself dimension.

Although Bradley's critique of empiricist psychologism and his positive theory of symbol as universal allows him to recuperate the referential capacity of judgment, he understands that it is provisional until the interplay between idea and reality is adequately worked out. If the subject of judgment were indeed idea, and judgment, mere synthesis of ideas, it is difficult to say that judgment is about actualities. Real situations are concrete facts and not fictions of the judging mind. The same is not true of ideas. The pride of ideas is the fact of their generality, their abstract nature. Thus, ideas can refer to so many things simultaneously, but without referring to any of them uniquely-at least, so far as their sensuous particulars are concerned (Bradley, 1922, p. 3).

This Achilles heel of ideas means that the view of judgment as a mere synthesis of ideas constitutes a fresh difficulty for the referential capacity of judgment. For, by ascribing a referential capacity to all judgment, Bradley is not merely saying that the ideal content describes possibilities. Instead, he makes a stronger claim; namely, that judgment is about actual situations, that is concrete situations (Bradley, 1930, p. 329).

Thus, in combating the error of the doctrine of judgment as a synthesis of ideas, Bradley follows Hegel's criticism of Kant's cognitive

dualism. By endorsing Hegel's dialectical re-conceptualization of the relationship between object and subject of knowledge which effectively restores the in-itself dimension of the object as accessible to cognition, so that the object is no merely object for the subject but is genuinely objective in a non-reductive sense. The result, then, is that even within the transcendental framework that the doctrine of judgment as the synthesis of ideas operates ideas cannot but be about reality, so that dualism of idea and reality, or object and subject, or appearance and reality, is simply unsustainable in the end. Indeed, without this dialectical proviso, Herbart's conclusion concerning the hypothetical nature of all judgment is problematic. However, thanks to the inspiration of Hegel, Bradley reinterprets Herbart's conclusion in such a way as to recuperate the referential capacity of judgment (Ilodigwe, 2006, pp.174-192).

**Question of the Nature of Judgment and Idea-Reality Relation:  
Bradley's Critique of Hegel**

From our account so far, it is evident that in moderating the empiricist account of judgment as a mental phenomenon and the Neo-Kantian doctrine of judgment as to the synthesis of ideas, Bradley appeals to his view that all judgments are about reality apparently in a bid to secure the referentiality of judgment. In respect of the doctrine of judgment as to the synthesis of ideas, Bradley, as we have seen, draws from the provisions of Hegel's dialectical philosophy in securing his case that all judgments are about reality. His dependence on Hegel in this regard does not in any way suggest that he is at home with Hegel for Bradley thinks that the idealist account of judgment is no less problematic in maintaining that there is an absolute identity between the subject of

judgment and the predicate of judgment.

True subject and predicate are identical. However, it is not the case that we deal with a case of absolute identity. Instead, it is a case of identity in difference. Of course, Bradley does not object that the difference between subject and predicate can be mediated dialectically by supplementing the predicate such as to include what it originally excludes. What Bradley objects to is that the difference can be made away within the final analysis, so that we have a judgment in which the predicate is identical with the subject (Bradley, 1922, p. 591). In claiming that there is an absolute ( categorical) judgment in which the predicate is perfectly reconciled with the subject of judgment, the idealist account of judgment falsifies the true nature of judgment.

Bradley's thesis that no judgment is whole and complete serves to moderate the excesses of the idealist account of judgment. Bradley's thesis moderates the idealist account of judgment from twofold angles. First, it clarifies the nature of the subject in judgment, and second, it clarifies the nature of the ideal content. As we have seen, given that the subject of judgment is not merely the grammatical subject but the logical subject, that is, the whole of Reality, it means that the subject of judgment is ideal in the final analysis. Hence, it cannot be captured by the predicate whole and complete, no matter how sophisticated the predicate may be (Bradley, 1922, pp. 40-55).

Bradley does not deny that the predicate can also expand in respect of its ideality. However, Bradley maintains that, because of the ideality of the subject and the ideality of the predicate, the difference between subject and predicate is insurmountable. Invariably it is because

of this irreparable difference between the subject and its predicate that Bradley maintains that all judgments are conditional. Given this consideration, it amounts merely to exaggerating the claims of speculative dialectics to assume that it has the power to heal the difference between subject and predicate without reservation.

Obviously, of the two theses that drive Bradley's account of judgment, the most crucial is the thesis concerning the conditional nature of judgment, that is, the view that no judgment is complete and whole concerning what it asserts (Ferreira, 1999, pp. 4-13). If properly understood and the continuity between the theses recognized, the second thesis presupposes the first. Seen in this light, it emerges that in maintaining that all judgments are conditional, Bradley is already pointing in a direction that is beyond Hegel in protest of the pan-logistic pretensions of the latter's account of judgment.

True, as we have maintained, Bradley sides with Hegel in rejecting the cognitive dualism of the critical philosophy. Nevertheless, in recuperating the object as it is in-itself a legitimate matter for cognitive determination, Bradley is at pain to reject the sovereignty of dialectical reason by maintaining the difference between subject and predicate of judgment. Bradley's antipathy to the pan-logistic pretension of the dialectical approach to knowledge is already implicit in the PL as the following passage makes clear:

When in the reason's philosophy the rational appears dominant and sole possessor of the world, we can only wonder what place would be left to it, if the element excluded might break through the charm of the magic circle, and without growing rational, could find expression. Such an idea may be senseless and such a

thought may contradict itself, but it serves to give voice to an obstinate instinct. Unless thought stands for something that falls beyond mere intelligence, if "thinking" is not used with some strange implication that never was part of the meaning of the word, a lingering scruple still forbids us to believe that reality can ever be purely rational. It may come from a failure in my metaphysics, or from a weakness of the flesh which continues to blind me, but the notion that existence could be the same as understanding strikes me as cold and ghost-like as the dreariest materialism (Bradley, 1922,p. 591).

It is instructive that these statements which mirror Bradley's antipathy to panlogism occur in the concluding sections of the PL in which Bradley is supposed to refrain from an excursion into metaphysics. That they occur here indicates the importance Bradley attaches to the metaphysical issues arising from the question of the nature of judgment. In this respect the continuity between PL and AR is undeniable for in his more explicit metaphysical essay as well as ETR, Bradley's antipathy to the pan-logistic pretensions of speculative dialectics remains a prime focus.

From this standpoint, Bradley's claim that all judgments are conditional is Bradley's most single significant contribution in the PL to the debate between realism and idealism (Bradley, 1922, p. 591). Indeed, when he returns to this issue in AR and ETR in the context of the metaphysical issue of the dilemma of thought's relation to reality, he will continue to appeal to the resources provided by his general account of the nature of judgment in the PL in moderating the excesses of speculative dialectics. (Bradley, 1930, Chapter 14; p. 491). He says in AR,

Reflect upon any judgment as long as you please, operate upon the subject of it to any extent, which you desire, but then (when you have finished), make an actual

judgment. And when that is made, see if you do not discover beyond the content of your thought, a subject of which it is true, and which it does not comprehend. You will find that the object in the end must be ideal, and that there is no idea, which as such contains its own existence. The "that" of the actual subject will forever give a something which is not mere a mere idea, something which is different from any truth, something which makes such difference to your thinking, and without it you have not even thought completely. (Bradley, 1930, p.149)

Bradley's continues in anticipation of a typical idealist counter-objection:

But, it may be answered, "the thought you speak of is thought that is not perfect. Where thought is perfect there is no discrepancy between subject and predicate. A harmonious system of content predicating itself, a subject self-conscious in that system of content, that is what thought should mean. And here the division between existence and character is quite healed up. If such completion is not actual it is possible, and the possibility is enough. But it is not even possible I must persist, if it really is unmeaning. And once more, I must urge the former dilemma. If there is no judgment, there is no thought; and if there is no difference, there is no judgment nor any self-consciousness. But if, on the other hand, there is difference, then the subject is beyond the predicated content (Bradley, 1930, p. 150).

### **The Question of the Contemporary Relevance of Bradley's Account of Judgment**

From our discussion of the two theses that drives Bradley's theory of judgment, Bradley does not side with either realism or idealism. While he wants to save what is true in both positions, Bradley is also painfully aware that none of them offers us a satisfactory resting place. In this sense, Bradley could be regarded as a transitional figure, which, is in quest



of a more holistic view that transcends the dualism of realism and idealism.

### **Beyond Idealism: Bradley and Theory of Judgment**

The quest for a holistic viewpoint is informed by the realization that it is unacceptable to deny the referentiality of judgment. Since it is unacceptable to annul the difference between the subject and predicate in judgment, denial of the referentiality of judgment and the difference between the subject and predicate in judgment can only lead to a falsification of the true nature of judgment. Bradley's double claim that all judgments are about reality and no judgment is complete and whole serves precisely to obviate these problematic emphases.

Bradley's concern to balance between all the competing interests at issue in the problem of the nature of judgment reflects his understanding that there can be no obvious solution to the problem of objectively grounding the connection between idea and reality. The sceptic may be right in saying that such objective validation of the idea-reality connection is a condition for the possibility of knowledge (Hamlyn, 1970, pp. 58-65). Nevertheless, the point is that unless there is a fundamental recognition that even before we come to know, knowledge is already part and parcel of reality, we cannot question whether we can know qua know. Although, it is appropriate to demand for evidence for what we claim to know we should also not rule out the fact that lack of such evidence may not necessarily invalidate what we know in fact (Sayers, 1985, pp.10-21; Sayers, 1991, pp.15-21).

The point then is that as important as rational evidence may be, it need not constitute the exclusive criterion of knowledge as is often the

case within the tradition of epistemology as first philosophy. The equation of knowledge with epistemic justification in this tradition reveals an underlying tension between epistemology and scepticism such that both are exclusive opposites (Gettier, 1963). This dualistic opposition between epistemology and scepticism is at the heart of the crisis of modern philosophy. For having assumed as an essential requirement for knowledge the healing of the rift between idea and reality, there is then the quest for specific knowledge, so that epistemology is apparently under pressure to satisfy the demand of the sceptic that knowledge cannot co-exist with doubt (Hamlyn, 1970, pp. 34-39).

In this respect, epistemology's task is then seen as one of offering a justification for the link between idea and reality that is as watertight as possible. It is either we obtain such watertight justification or give up the entire project of knowledge. From Descartes to Hegel, epistemology's ambition is to provide such a watertight reconciliation of the idea-reality connection to save knowledge from the sword of the sceptic.

Perhaps the most sophisticated version of that reconciliation we are yet to see is the one provided by Hegel. The merit of Hegel's dialectic lies in the fact that it considers the challenge of scepticism and the various efforts to deal with it. It is within this continuum of initiatives to contain the challenge of scepticism that it presses its case for the possibility of absolute knowledge (Kant, 1993, BXV and Kant, 1990, p. 10). As we have seen while Bradley journeys with Hegel to a point he disapproves of the alleged perfect reconciliation Hegel's dialectic purportedly accomplishes in respect of the idea-reality relation (Bradley, 1930, p. 390).

This solution may be an answer to scepticism. However, it is arguably an over-reaction which overestimates the challenge of scepticism so that on the one hand it temporarily pushes back the tide of scepticism, while on the other hand the position ultimately deconstructs itself, with scepticism pressing its demand afresh with an unbridled vengeance. In the wake of the Hegelian synthesis, we witnessed the resurgence of scepticism in the form of nihilism in contemporary philosophy (Jones, 1970, pp. 8-28).

### **Beyond Idealism, Theory of Judgment and Rethinking of Epistemology**

The perennial significance of Bradley might still lie in the fact that he calls us back to common sense. In the aftermath of the disintegration of the Hegelian synthesis, by inviting a weakening of the tension between epistemology and scepticism through transcending the dualistic opposition between epistemology and scepticism, we witness the entire unfolding of modern philosophy. While Bradley remains in sympathy with the project of epistemology as first philosophy, he is nonetheless convinced that epistemology needs to be rethought if it is to survive in the aftermath of the collapse of the Hegelian synthesis.

Paradoxically epistemology seems to have many lives as should be evident from its history. Following the collapse of the medieval synthesis and the wave of scepticism it unleashed, Descartes rose up to invent epistemology as first philosophy through his philosophy of the cogito (Descartes, 1980, Meditation 3). When Hume reduced to scepticism the whole of modern philosophy under the aegis of Cartesian dualistic epistemology, Kant rose up to reinvent epistemology in terms of

the transcendental ideal (Kant, 1993, BXV; 1990, p. 10). Similarly, when Kant's initiative broke down following the resurgence of scepticism within his transcendental scheme, Hegel rose up once more to reform epistemology in terms of the dialectical ideal (Hegel, 1969; 1977).

Interestingly rather than solve the matter of scepticism once and for all, Hegel's dialectical account of knowledge provokes it afresh. Against this backdrop, Bradley reinvents epistemology, one that re-anchors epistemology in metaphysics. By rethinking the idea-reality relation in such a way that there is a moment of identity as well as a moment of difference (Bradley, 1930, p. 390).

Arguably, the persistence of a gap between idea and reality within Bradley's scheme unleashes a new wave of scepticism. However, the truth is that even if it does, it is a new species of scepticism that must be distinguished from its predecessors by the very fact of the recognition that epistemology and scepticism are no longer seen as exclusive opposites. However, instead, they are essential allies in the common task of the quest for knowledge (Westacott, 2001, pp. 50-56).

### **Conclusion**

Perhaps here lies the broader significance of Bradley's theory of judgment. By maintaining the double theses that all judgments are about reality, and no judgment is complete and whole concerning what it asserts, Bradley upholds rational evidence as a standard of knowledge. At the same time, he signals the limit of rational evidence as to the standard of knowledge, thus instituting a fundamental rapprochement between reason and other sources of knowledge validation such as faith (Bradley, 1914, p. 123).

In other words, by affirming the possibilities as well as limitation of reason, Bradley's theory of judgment reconnects epistemology to metaphysics. Such that as systems of knowledge, both metaphysics and epistemology are incomplete in the end (Bradley, 1930, Preface). While such a scheme as Bradley's is not without its difficulties, it certainly fares better than many contemporary theories of judgment that deny the referentiality of judgment or make too much of the modality of judgment.

Its enduring attraction lies in the delicate balance- it holds together epistemology and metaphysics without proclaiming either the death of metaphysics or the death of epistemology. Because of the gap that persists in the idea-reality relation and given that the over-determined nature of the real legislates the gap between reality and idea, Bradley recuperates a sense of the universe. A sense of the universe in which the legitimate voice of reason is recognized without prejudice to the claim of faith. Since, in the end, it is all beyond us (Bradley, 1930).

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