

## INTRODUCTION

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F.H. Bradley was and remains today the best known of the English idealists. For more than forty years Bradley was not only the leading voice of the British Absolutist school, he was also the most read and most influential of all English-speaking philosophers.<sup>1</sup> And still his influence—only dimly felt at times—persists.

Although Bradley's views are decidedly opposed to those that came to characterize the "analytic turn" in philosophy, he continues to fascinate a surprisingly diverse philosophical audience. And the reasons for this continuing interest are many; not the least of them, it would seem, is Bradley's philosophical style.<sup>2</sup> With subtlety and precision, his attack on an opponent's position can be ruthless. Yet, on occasion, we find the discussion approaching the poetic. And, while there can be no doubt that Bradley is capable of persuasive dialectic, to attribute his influence to mere rhetoric is to do him a great injustice.<sup>3</sup> On any serious reading one cannot come away from Bradley but with the impression that he is a man who, having deeply thought through the issues, passionately believes in what he says—even if from the perspective of common sense his claims sometimes seem far-fetched or extreme. There is always the feeling that no matter how removed from our ordinary conceptions or the received philosophical opinion the result may be, if the argument demands a controversial conclusion then Bradley is willing to entertain it. Richard Wollheim, in his influential monograph *F. H. Bradley*, describes him as a man who is "forced backwards, step by step, down a strange labyrinth, in self-defence, until at last finding himself in the comparative safety of some murky cave he rests among the shadows."<sup>4</sup> It isn't, Wollheim suggests, that Bradley is committed in advance to any philosophical program, it is that his own examination of the issues forces him to take the stand he does.

These sorts of characterizations have led some to call Bradley a “philosopher’s philosopher.” And, as accurate as such an account might be, it seems that Bradley never sees his own views as particularly problematic (insofar, at least, as we might attach this label to a position that deviates from common sense). Bradley believes that his position—although it certainly rejects the *philosophical* adequacy of common sense—is eminently reasonable and in accord with the common person’s deepest intuitions. And it is, he suggests, only through their being misunderstood that his views might seem radical or extreme. Bradley never dismisses the everyday intellectual abstractions by which we live our lives as unimportant or irrelevant. They are, each of them, necessary but limited truths (what he calls “appearances”); and each, he believes, is valid and true within its own sphere. Thus when he propounds such things as the unreality of time or the self-contradictory character of relational thought, Bradley is espousing purely metaphysical theses which claim that there exist in our ordinary conception of these matters problems; and these problems, while not apparent to our ordinary consciousness, must, if they are to be overcome, submit themselves to metaphysical scrutiny.

Although there is much truth in the description of Bradley as a “philosopher’s philosopher” it is also possible that such an understanding could cause us to ignore another side of his philosophical disposition. And I refer here to Bradley’s elevation of “feeling” (and even “instinct”) as a criterion—ultimately *the* criterion—of philosophical truth. Despite his apparent devotion to ratiocination as a means of arriving at truth, Bradley often comes down strongly on the side of what might be called “experiential knowledge,” and thus he shares with common-sense a certain distrust of purely intellectual maneuvering. It is at this primary level of felt experience, Bradley believes, that final judgment on the adequacy of any theory is made. A philosophical theory is accepted (or rejected) because it “satisfies” (or it doesn’t). And satisfaction, when and where it is achieved, largely results from grasping an issue from a broader perspective than purely ratiocinative means can provide.

This is, of course, an oversimplification that must be corrected as we proceed. However, we can say at this point that Bradley takes this view because he believes that it is at the level of feeling that we are most directly in contact with reality. Mere thought, or what Bradley calls “relational thinking,” he sees as incapable of either recognizing or correcting its own defects and limitations. However, the fact that we can somehow apprehend these limitations at all demands that conscious *experience* be acknowledged as—in some manner—already beyond relational thought and in possession of a deeper criterion of truth and real-

ity. We shall, in the chapters that follow, consider in detail Bradley's refusal to see this criterion as supplied by thought. For now, I would only mention that Bradley sees this experiential measure as one that is "suprarelational" and that, as presupposed by merely relational thinking, acts as critic of itself in a lesser form.

It was around this theme that the greatest controversies of Bradley's career developed. And it is also, I shall suggest, on this issue that some of the grossest misinterpretations of his views have arisen—misinterpretations that have allowed until only recently the man who was once the English-speaking world's "most eminent philosopher" to have fallen into neglect.<sup>5</sup> Hence, it will be my primary concern in this essay to communicate what I understand as Bradley's actual position on this point. And, although it will require the discussion of many pages to communicate the force of Bradley's philosophical vision, I would like to provide in these introductory remarks a fuller statement of the problem and the difficulties that any student of Bradley will encounter when attempting to unravel his thought.

One of the most striking aspects of Bradley's philosophy is the degree to which it concerns itself with judgment and the act of predication. Not only in his specifically logical works, but also in his more metaphysical (and even ethical) discussions, the reader is continually reminded of what it means to apprehend something, both sensuously and intellectually, as a subject and to attach to that subject a further condition that qualifies, conditions, or relates it to something else. Time and again the reader finds himself following Bradley's detailed analyses of subjects, predicates, and their various modes of relation. And virtually everything Bradley has to say about knowledge and human experience revolves around his doctrine of "judgment" or "predication."<sup>6</sup> (The two terms are synonymous here.) Indeed, it would not be going too far to say that the act of predication (judgment) is *the* focus of Bradley's work.

The central focus of this work will also be Bradley's account of judgment and the theory of systematic knowledge it entails. Of course, in order to make clear precisely what this act of predication (or judgment) is will require the discussion of the following chapters. However, even at this point we should be aware of the following. To be consciously aware is, for Bradley, to predicate (or assert) one thing of another. That is, to be aware at all is already to have judged, or at least to be experiencing the results of prior judgments. Bradley completely rejects the idea that consciousness begins with a conceptually bare, sensuous "given" that is subsequently wrapped in intellectual "interpretations." If the contents of experience have become part of my conscious life they are, according to Bradley, *already* related to one another through the act of judgment.

Judgment (predication) is thus with us from the beginning of our conscious existence. And, as we shall soon discover, Bradley sees the goal of judgment to be the complete qualification of the subject by the predicate. In other words, when we judge (i.e., attach a predicate to a subject) we seek to apprehend perfectly the sense in which the terms of our judgment relate to and qualify one another. And, while there is always a degree to which any act of predication (judgment) succeeds in realizing this goal, it is, nevertheless, always the case that the judgment also fails to achieve completely its end. Briefly stated, Bradley's claim is that whenever we attempt to qualify a subject by a predicate in the act of judgment we never fully manage to do so. For a variety of reasons (to be considered in the following chapters), Bradley remains convinced that articulate thought—even at the highest levels—remains essentially finite, limited, and unable to apprehend fully its object. It is Bradley's continual claim that, as a merely analyzing intellect, thought attempts to find satisfaction by making explicit to itself the structure of reality; but, in this it can achieve only relative success. No matter how elevated or advanced thought becomes there always exists, according to Bradley, a gap between it and its object. And, though what we desire in any cognitive act (the act of judgment) is a total seizing in thought and language of our object, this he sees as being, in principle, impossible.

The object of thought (reality) is always, Bradley remains convinced, entirely unique and individual; thought and language, no matter how augmented and specific are still to some extent, abstract, universal, and general; and in maintaining these characteristics it is incapable of grasping the unique individuality of its referent. Hence, to use a popular philosophical expression, we can never fully say (or more accurately, think) what we mean. And, since for Bradley there exists no direct intuition of reality that is entirely preconceptual, our knowledge of everything must always remain, to some degree, defective. This leads, however, to one of the most distinctive features of Bradley's philosophy.

For Bradley, so long as there exists conditions that are essential to the characterization of the subject in any judgment but that are not brought into the explicit formulation of that judgment, it cannot be said to be entirely true. Thus Bradley writes:

If there is to be sheer truth the condition of the assertion must not fall outside the judgment. The judgment must be thoroughly self-contained. If the predicate is true of the subject only by something omitted and unknown, such a truth is defective. The judgment therefore, as it stands, is ambiguous and it is at once true and false, since in a word it is conditioned.<sup>7</sup>

We may illustrate his point, at this stage only in an approximate fashion, by the following example. When I judge, let us say, "Mary is happy" I have predicated of the subject something that does not intrinsically and necessarily belong to it. Indeed, the fact that "happiness" and "Mary" are now, through the act of prediction, brought together at all presupposes many conditions (time, place, etc.) that allow for their union but that fall outside my conscious apprehension. And this externality of conditions to the union of subject and predicate provides us with, Bradley claims, an "unstable" and hence defective assertion.

This is, in effect, a condemnation of contingent truth by Bradley. A truth in order to be fully true must, on his analysis, be universally true. True, that is, not just now under these circumstances—circumstances that partially conceal the conditions of the actual judgment—but true anywhere and always. However, when it comes to our actual judgments we find that there must necessarily attach to them a degree of contingency from which they cannot escape. Not only must there exist conditions that are external to the judgment and upon which it depends for its truth; but these conditions must remain largely unknown. Bradley is committed to the position that not only can there not exist a contingent judgment that is fully true, neither can there exist a judgment—at least as it is understood by us—that is absolutely necessary.<sup>8</sup> Hence, every judgment is to his mind at least partially false. And the act of asserting a predicate of a subject is, in failing to realize complete necessity and universality, always a partial failure.

It is this aspect of Bradley's theory of predication that has frequently led commentators to describe his position as "sceptical." However, what is so often missed is that all is not a loss. Despite Bradley's claim that the truth of any judgment relies on conditions that are external to it (and that thereby make the judgment subject to falsification), he still believes that judgment can, so to speak, improve its lot. Bradley is convinced that we can, in a progressively increasing but never complete manner, include the conditions that had previously remained external to the judgment. Thus, any assertion can lessen its propensity to falsification and thereby secure for itself a greater *degree* of truth. But yet he writes:

Can the conditions of the judgment ever be made complete and comprised within the judgment? In my opinion this is impossible. And hence with every truth there still remains some truth, however, in its opposite. In other words you can never pass wholly beyond degree.<sup>9</sup>

This passage expresses the conviction that lay behind his doctrine of "degrees of truth and reality" (the subject of chapter 6). And we may say

at this early point in our discussion that, for Bradley, although thought can elevate itself through the use of "higher" or more "developed" concepts (which, as we shall see, come about through increased "systematization"), it is still condemned to fail in its effort to show how a predicate completely qualifies its subject, and how any specific judgment actually relates to the unique reality to which it refers. Although implicitly at work in his first book (*Ethical Studies*) this view explicitly emerges in the first edition of the *Principles of Logic* and is maintained by Bradley throughout his career.<sup>10</sup> And it is the explication of this point that will constitute the greater part of my discussion.

I would also mention here that this aspect of Bradley's philosophy—an aspect that lies at the very heart of his system—was, during Bradley's career, rejected by a variety of critics. Realist philosophers rejected the doctrine because it denies the existence of independent facts that are externally related to one another and that are thereby capable of being either true or false.<sup>11</sup> Bradley's theory—a theory that sees the facts about which we judge to consist ultimately in the "one great Fact" (the universe-as-a-whole)—is diametrically opposed to any view of truth as either the relation between a state of the judging subject's mind and a wholly external object, or the apprehension of "timelessly subsisting propositions." For these writers Bradley's theory was unacceptable because it views the universe and its relation to the knowing subject in a manner that fails to do justice to what they believed is the independent manner in which subjects and objects stand to one another.

The more orthodox idealist writers, on the other hand, felt that Bradley had committed the opposite error. They argued that Bradley lets thought and its object become too independent and that he erects an unreal (and unnecessary) impediment to the attainment of the higher reaches of objective truth and knowledge. The thrust of their criticism was that Bradley allows thought and reality to fall apart to such an extent that their separation is incapable of being overcome in any act of judgment.

My claim, however, is that Bradley commits neither of these errors. Hence, one of my fundamental objectives in this essay is to consider the relevancy and force of the arguments against Bradley on this point. But in order to understand Bradley's central claim (and the attacks by his critics) we shall be forced to consider his views on a number of interrelated topics. Not only must his specific views on predication be examined, but also his controversial critique of "relational thought," his understanding of the role of "feeling" in judgment, his views on

“degrees of truth” and even the nature of the “Absolute.”\* However, by focusing on the act of predication (i.e., the general nature of judgment) we shall maintain a perspective on Bradley’s philosophy that possesses significant advantages. First, there is no issue more characteristic of Bradley’s thought from his earliest work to his latest. And second, through an explication of this area of Bradley’s philosophy we shall also bring into sharp relief some of the major ambiguities of the *Principles of Logic*; ambiguities whose influence—even after they are eliminated in the mature writings—still, to some of his readers, taint much of what Bradley says in his later years.

I speak here of what was known as the “doctrine of floating ideas,” a theory that—although quickly abandoned—continued to cloud the understanding of many when considering the general theory of predication (a theory Bradley maintained and developed). These were seen in the minds of some as complementary theses that were indicative of a “latent empiricism.” It shall be my claim, though, that the two doctrines are—if properly understood—in no way aligned, and that to see them as such is to misinterpret Bradley’s philosophy. Through a thorough examination of the theory of predication as it evolves over the course of Bradley’s career we should be in a better position to separate fully these issues and to come to an accurate understanding of his mature thought. But how did the doctrine of floating ideas relate to his theory of judgment or predication? And how were the two conflated in the minds of some critics?

In short, the troublesome doctrine of the floating idea is a theory in which significant or meaningful ideas are seen as capable of “floating” or “wandering” in the consciousness of a judging subject without being simultaneously affirmed as real or true. In other words, it contains a central thesis of traditional empiricism: namely, that an idea is the result of a derivative act of abstraction made on given sense data, and that this idea (which can “float” unattached) is fundamentally prior to the act of judgment and (ontologically) different from the object to which it refers. Not only on this theory does an idea become a mere representation, but it leads to a position in which the knowing subject is essentially estranged from and forever an Other to its object. Bradley’s occasional comments that suggest such a view alarmed his idealist colleagues as it apparently put him in an alliance with traditional empiricist doctrine to

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\* Bradley often capitalizes “Reality,” “the Real,” and “the Whole” when they are used as synonyms for “the Absolute.” I have followed his convention only for the term “the Absolute.”

such an extent that he was suspected of perpetuating both radically dualist and sceptical theses.<sup>12</sup>

It is true, of course, that the doctrine of floating ideas is closely aligned with the position that the general thrust of Bradley's *Logic* is intent on overcoming. And it is also true that when and where such a theory raises its head it constitutes a profound inconsistency within the pages of his book. However, it is decidedly false, I shall claim, that this doctrine is implicated by the larger theory of predication (judgment) at any stage in Bradley's career. Even after the doctrine of the floating idea is purged from his philosophy, Bradley continues to believe that in every judgment (the basic act of knowledge) there exists an effort—ultimately unrealizable—to say something about reality in such a manner that it is completely and unconditionally true.

However, in light of scattered comments found in the 1883 edition of the *Principles of Logic* some readers seriously misunderstood the import of Bradley's theory of predication. For some, the reason why, on Bradley's view, thought can never accurately grasp its object is because it becomes, in his hands, mere thought—thought that is fundamentally different from the reality of which it is asserted. On one interpretation—the one that inaccurately characterizes his position—thought is seen as a merely formal activity that can in no manner get concrete reality within its grasp.<sup>13</sup> Thought, on this reading, deals with merely abstract universal concepts that when combined through the act of judgment exist in external (and ultimately irrational) relation to one another and their ultimate subject—reality as a whole.

Now, on such an interpretation the characterization of Bradley as a sceptical empiricist is accurate. However, as we shall see, such an understanding of the mature Bradley is entirely without foundation. Although he grants that there is always an aspect of thought that can be characterized as a mere "thinking about" its object, Bradley is equally insistent that in every act of judgment, thought and its object partially coincide (in the literal sense); and, that to think is to get closer to reality—not further from it. This is, however, a complex topic, and to appreciate this problem fully we must await the discussion of later chapters. At this stage I would merely point out that the portrayal of Bradley as either a mystic or a sceptic calls into question the identification of his philosophy with any species of traditional idealism. And, though it is usually conceded that "absolute" or "objective" idealism has at least an answer to the sceptic (if one is willing to accept certain of its metaphysical claims), it has been unclear to what extent Bradley's position is consistent with the antisceptical doctrine of this school.



The idealist doctrine that some of Bradley's statements in the *Principles of Logic* seem to threaten is one that views the questions of dualism and scepticism as intimately related and capable of being overcome only through a properly formulated theory of thought and its object. Although the precise meaning of this statement must remain at this stage somewhat unclear, I think it not inaccurate to say that the traditional idealism avoids the problem of scepticism because, at some level and in some sense, thought is seen as at least partially coextensive with its object—at least in the sense that subject and object, knowledge and reality are generally understood as poles or aspects of a larger unified experience within which both fall. However, in the case of Bradley, it has often been asked whether or not his theory of floating ideas and his subsequent condemnation of thought as too abstract to fully apprehend its object divorces him from this tradition. But, before considering in any detail how Bradley's theory might break with the idealist tradition, let us consider the extent to which his early work appears to be in harmony with it. Some of the most unambiguous statements of Bradley's early metaphysical views are found in the final chapter of his work on moral philosophy. And I quote at length one such statement as it provides as clear an indication of Bradley's position as could be desired. There Bradley writes:

It is forgotten that when mind is made only a part of the whole, there is a question which *must* be answered; 'If so, how can the whole be known, and for the mind? If about any matter we know nothing whatever, can we say anything about it? Can we even say that it is? And, if it is not in consciousness, how can we know it? And if it is in and for the mind, how can it be a whole which is *not* mind, and in which the mind is only a part or element? *If the ultimate unity were not self or mind, we could not know that it was not mind:* that would mean going out of our minds. And, conversely, if we know it, it cannot be not mind. All in short we can know (the psychological form is another question) is the self and elements in the self. To know a not-self is to transcend and leave one's mind. If we know the whole, it can only be because the whole knows itself in us, because the whole is self or mind, which is and knows, knows and is, the identity and correlation of subject and object."<sup>14</sup>

That there exists a commitment to an idealistic monism in this passage (and many others in *Ethical Studies*) is, I think, undeniable.<sup>15</sup> And when I say this I want to emphasize Bradley's belief that all experience presupposes an essential unity between subject and object, and that the con-

tents of any subject's thoughts are—while not an entirely accurate duplication of the object—nevertheless, continuous with and, at some level, of the same stuff as it. While it is true that we find Bradley's characteristic reservation about the finite subject's ability to experience its object perfectly (a view that always keeps him from identifying thought and reality *tout court*), the degree to which Bradley rejects all versions of dualism is striking. And this, we shall see, is a theme he is to maintain throughout his career.<sup>16</sup> We find it in 1874 with the "Presuppositions of Critical History" and in his last, posthumously published, work—an unfinished article entitled "Relations."<sup>17</sup> And over the course of this essay I shall supply what I believe is compelling evidence that this commitment to such thoroughly holistic views, although at times not fully worked out, never actually wavers.<sup>18</sup> Indeed, it is one of the principal theses of this essay that any empiricist tendencies in Bradley's *Principles of Logic* are, so far as they actually exist, an aberration; and, I shall argue, the main thrust of the mature work represents not only a refinement of his earlier views, but also a continuation and development of British post-Kantian idealism.

The point we must be sensitive to, however, is this: Although Bradley believes that the ultimate continuity between thought and its object can be established beyond doubt (since it is a presupposition of all experience and directly apprehended at the level of feeling), the *details* of their unity is something that can only be progressively—and never fully—apprehended. Ultimately, it is because thought cannot fully envisage its deeper identity with the whole that it is condemned as intrinsically defective. And it is this contrast between feeling (which *can* sense its identity with the whole or Absolute) and the finite judging self that lay behind virtually all of Bradley's harsh statements regarding predication and relational thought.<sup>19</sup> But this doctrine is worked out—sometimes tortuously so—over many volumes. And in order to develop an understanding of Bradley's larger theory (and his commitment to monistic idealism) we must now begin to unravel the theory of judgment and significant ideas that first appears in the *Principles of Logic*. Before embarking on this project, though, let me say something about the material we shall be considering.

The title of this essay suggests that we are concerned with Bradley's theory of knowledge; and this is certainly correct. But we shall soon discover that what philosophers today call the "theory of knowledge" was understood by Bradley and his contemporaries to fall within the purview of "logic." And certainly it is in Bradley's *Principles of Logic* that we find the topics with which we shall be most concerned first discussed. However, we must remember that, while the theory we shall be examining is first developed in the 1883 text of Bradley's *Logic*, it is not fully articulated until 1922 when, after a lifetime of elaboration

and refinement, it receives its final—and we must assume most authoritative—formulation in the “Terminal Essays.”<sup>20</sup> Hence, I shall have much to say about the intervening works and the apparently sceptical side of Bradley’s thought as found in the works of his middle years: *Appearance and Reality* and *Essays on Truth and Reality*. Indeed, it is in these works that the shortcomings of cognitive experience receive their most exhaustive treatment. The problems dealt with in the original edition of the *Principles of Logic* are the problems that Bradley considers throughout his career, and it is not as though we are leaving Bradley’s logical-epistemological theory behind when we consider his more explicitly metaphysical writings. Thus it is essential that we consider his views as developed in these other works if we are to understand the “Terminal Essays,” which constitute the greater body of the 1922 revisions to the *Principles of Logic*. In these “Terminal Essays” Bradley makes continual reference to *Appearance and Reality* and the *Essays on Truth and Reality*; and any tolerably complete understanding of the final edition of the *Logic* cannot be had without some familiarity with these books.<sup>21</sup>

Based upon Bradley’s own evaluation, then, we shall consider the *least* informative volume (because at times misleading) to be the first edition of the *Principles of Logic*. It is here that, by his own admission, unresolved metaphysical difficulties (i.e., the floating idea) lead to what is at times a faulty account. However, it is only through an understanding of the position contained therein (and Bradley’s reasons for repudiating portions of the first edition *Logic*) that we can fully appreciate the evolution of his thought and the final position he is to take.

It is my intention in this essay, then, to explicate Bradley’s larger theory of knowledge as found in the two editions of the *Principles of Logic*, *Appearance and Reality*, and *Essays on Truth and Reality*. I shall trace the development of Bradley’s views on these issues and attempt to provide a coherent account of the mature position that claims to have effected a reconciliation between abstract thought and concrete reality, between thinking subject and given, recalcitrant world. It is here, I shall argue, that we encounter what *appears* on first look to be an essentially sceptical position. However, on closer examination, we shall see why Bradley himself understands it as the only effective response to radical scepticism. Bradley, I shall argue, remains thoroughly convinced that only by declaring all knowledge to be inherently relative to the greater whole within which knowledge, will, and feeling coexist in an interdependent manner, can the various philosophical puzzles regarding the subject-object relation and the development of inference be found. Only by sacrificing its claim to *complete* knowledge of anything, Bradley

argues, can philosophy avoid an account of the world wherein a self-refuting scepticism is the result.

It will also be my claim that, despite his rejection of certain aspects of orthodox post-Kantian idealism, Bradley's mature position remains, nevertheless, firmly within the idealist tradition.<sup>22</sup> And, I shall suggest, Bradley ultimately does overcome that "cheap and easy monism" that he thinks characterizes so much of the idealist literature.<sup>23</sup> Bradley, I shall claim, takes the traditional position and through an indefatigable effort to "push the question to the end," brings to light what he sees as the Achilles heel of idealist doctrine—the inability to reconcile fully the abstract character of thought with the concrete nature of reality as it is experienced in perception, feeling, and will.<sup>24</sup>

I should also, perhaps, say in these introductory remarks something about the structure of this work and the role of "feeling" in Bradley's theory of knowledge. While I begin, as do most writers on Bradley, with a general discussion of judgment, significant ideas, and inference, at numerous places in the early chapters I also make reference to Bradley's doctrine of feeling—a theoretical device that assumes a role of great importance in his account of knowledge (and an aspect of his thought which has received little attention in the work of many commentators). However, it is not until chapters 8 and 9 that this theory is treated in any detail. Now, given the role in Bradley's theory of knowledge that the doctrine of feeling finally takes, it might seem reasonable to deal with it at the outset. However, a number of considerations suggest that this is not the best approach.

The first of these is that Bradley's logical-epistemological views do not in their early appearance appeal to the idea of feeling (at least not as it is finally formulated). Indeed, the epistemological difficulties that the doctrine of feeling attempts to overcome are ones that only progressively force themselves on Bradley—and this only after his general theory of judgment and inference are quite developed. Hence to discuss the issue in detail at the outset would be to discuss a solution without the problem it was meant to solve. A second (but closely related) reason for delaying the discussion of feeling is this: any account of feeling that I might provide early on would require my making frequent reference to general logical-epistemological concepts such as "subjects," "predicates," "judgments," "ideas," and "inference." And should I appeal to these notions without having first considered in detail Bradley's understanding of them—an understanding which is, by contemporary lights, highly idiosyncratic—confusion would most likely result. Hence I think it the more prudent course to approach these difficulties in the same order as did Bradley.<sup>25</sup>

I would also mention here that, in addition to explicating the general theory outlined above, this essay will comment on several historical points. First, I hope it will quickly become apparent that it is a serious error to identify Bradley's "idealism" with the sort of subjectivist-empiricism to which the term has sometimes been applied;<sup>26</sup> second, I shall argue, that it is a also mistake to identify Bradley's thought with any variety of Bergsonian mysticism in which reality is intuited but not thought;<sup>27</sup> or (third) as a type of modern Spinozism in which distinctions disappear as relational thought is transcended.<sup>28</sup> Although each of these interpretations of his theory of experience is occasionally put forth, each, I shall suggest, can be taken seriously only by ignoring large sections of the Bradleian corpus.

More importantly, though, I hope to make clear that, despite recent efforts by analytic philosophers to "salvage" his views, Bradley's thought is greatly removed from much of twentieth-century English-speaking philosophy.<sup>29</sup> And, although there are, at times significant, similarities between the views of Bradley and writers like Frege, Russell, and Wittgenstein, this similarity can be (and often has been) taken much too far.<sup>30</sup> If Bradley is right, then a good deal of twentieth-century philosophy must be seen as either misguided or anachronistic. And I hope to show that those philosophers who are inclined to defend Bradley should, if they are to continue in their defense, be prepared to abandon some of the most cherished ideas of mainstream philosophical analysis.<sup>31</sup>

My principal goal, however, is to communicate to the contemporary reader the general rationale of Bradley's position. While his views remain at some distance from our ordinary understanding, they are not at all unreasonable. And I hope to show that his holism is, though unlikely to be embraced by contemporary philosophy, still suggestive of solutions to our philosophical concerns that may prove to be, in the end, unavoidable. In my concluding remarks I shall also attempt to make clearer the relation of Bradley's thought to these concerns. There I shall consider why Bradley's metaphysics cannot be accurately portrayed as either realist or antirealist, nor his epistemology as either foundationalist or antifoundationalist (at least as these terms are understood today). And, while my discussion may not win any new converts to absolute idealism, I hope that, by clarifying Bradley's position on some important issues, I can at least help to illuminate the historical darkness that has plagued English-speaking philosophy's awareness of itself for so much of this century.