

## Article

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### "F.H. Bradley's Objections to the Ontological Proof"

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*Laval théologique et philosophique*, vol. 56, n° 2, 2000, p. 367-381.

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## F.H. BRADLEY'S OBJECTIONS TO THE ONTOLOGICAL PROOF

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*RÉSUMÉ* : La critique que fait Bradley de la preuve ontologique nous aide à comprendre l'importance de la preuve par l'auto-réflexion, par opposition à ses formes traditionnelles, et les objections de Bradley à la version auto-réflexive de la preuve nous aident à comprendre le besoin de distinguer les sens de la distinction concret-abstrait dans l'idée d'absolu.

*ABSTRACT* : Bradley's criticism of the ontological proof helps us to understand the importance of the proof from self-reflection, as opposed to its traditional forms, and Bradley's objections to the self-reflective version of the proof help us to understand the need to distinguish senses of the concrete-abstract distinction in the idea of the absolute.

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Francis Herbert Bradley criticized the ontological proof of the perfect being<sup>1</sup> on grounds it assumes that the idea of the perfect being contains its complete reality, which contradicts Bradley's doctrine of degrees of truth and reality among ideas. According to this doctrine, our ideas can never completely contain the reality of the absolute, and their degrees of truth and reality are determined by comparing the extent to which they systematically explain their own reality within their contents. Bradley's criticism of the ontological proof bears on its traditional forms in the work of Anselm and Descartes ; however, Bradley also considered a version of the proof that derives from self-reflection and depends on a development of the early-modern Cartesian "idea of idea," a development found in Hegel. The objective of this paper is to determine a precise sense of the idea of the perfect being needed to respond to Bradley's criticism.

The traditional forms of the proof developed by Anselm and Descartes attempt to derive the existence of God from an idea with no reference to the idea's thinking subject. The proof from self-reflection refers to the thinking subject. It meets, we will find, Bradley's objections to the traditional forms of the proof, but Bradley also developed the doctrine of degrees of truth and reality among ideas against the proof from self-reflection, and this will be the subject of further discussion.

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1. F.H. BRADLEY, *Appearance and Reality* (1893), Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1897. See p. 131-132 and 349-354. This work is referred to as AR in what follows.

## I

Anselm constructed the traditional forms of the proof in the 11th century, in the *Proslogion*, Ch. 2-4.<sup>2</sup> This proof has, as Charles Hartshorne and Norman Malcolm remark, two forms.<sup>3</sup> The first is a *reductio ad absurdum* on the supposition that the perfect being, or God, has existence only *in intellectum*, where God is defined as a being than which nothing greater can be conceived. This supposition implies that God is not God, or that God is not a being no greater than which can be conceived. For if the perfect being does not exist outside the intellect, then a greater being is conceivable, namely, one with all the perfections, including existence *extra intellectum*.

The second traditional form of the proof is likewise a *reductio* argument but based on the eternity of the perfect being and the impossibility of an eternal being having a beginning or end. Because an eternal being can have neither beginning nor end, the affirmation of its nonexistence would be self-contradictory, and thus God's existence is a rational truth. The idea of God in these versions of the ontological proof — as infinite, or beyond limitation — is employed in Descartes' 5th Meditation — God's existence is at least as certain, in Descartes' view, as the truths about the essence, say, of a triangle, and this "existence can no more be separated from the essence of God than [...] the idea of a mountain can be separated from the idea of a valley" (AT, 66-67).<sup>4</sup> The idea of God in each case is that of an infinite reality, crossing over all forms of being-nonbeing or subject-object distinctions; indeed, because this is the idea of a being containing every conceivable frame of reference, any form of its negation, including the negation of its existence, is inconceivable.

In the transition from the traditional forms of the proof to the proof from self-reflection, the idea develops into an idea of idea and incorporates the thinking subject. The ontological proof after Hegel demonstrates the existence of the absolute from self-reflection as an idea containing itself. Hegel developed this version of the proof from the idea of thought. The idea of thought demonstrates the existence of thought because the reality of thought is involved in even the attempt to deny it; the idea of thought necessarily satisfies itself.<sup>5</sup> The ontological proof after Hegel is developed in this century by R.G. Collingwood and Errol Harris,<sup>6</sup> and by Leslie Ar-

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2. M.J. CHARLESWORTH, trans., *St. Anselm's Proslogion*, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1965.

3. C. HARTSHORNE, *The Logic of Perfection*, LaSalle, IL, Open Court Publishing Co., 1962, Ch. 2; and N. MALCOLM, "Anselm's Ontological Arguments," *Philosophical Review* (1960), also in *Knowledge and Certainty*, Englewood Cliffs, NJ, Prentice-Hall, 1963.

4. See John COTTINGHAM, trans., *René Descartes, Meditations on First Philosophy: With selections from the Objections and Replies*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1986. For those without the Cottingham translation or, perhaps, any translation at all, the citations in parentheses are to the standard ADAM and TANNERY, ed., *Œuvres de Descartes*, 12 vol., Paris, Vrin, revised ed. 1964-1976, referred to as AT. The references are to volume VII. This is also the pagination in the margin of the Cottingham translation.

5. W. WALLACE, trans., *Hegel's Logic*, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1975. See sec. 51.

6. See R.G. COLLINGWOOD, *An Essay on Philosophical Method*, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1933, Ch. 6; and Errol E. HARRIS, "Mr. Ryle and the Ontological Argument," in John HICK and Arthur C. MCGILL, ed., *Many-Faced Argument*, New York, Macmillan, 1968, p. 261-268.

mour in his examination of the notebooks of Cardinal Newman.<sup>7</sup> The proof from self-reflection has several forms, depending on the specific reference of the self-reflective idea, whether spontaneity, as in Hegel ; the orders of logic and ethics, as in Collingwood ; systematic order, as in Harris ; or the other subject of a "dual-consciousness," as in Armour. Another version of the proof from self-reflection, which I develop as a model for use in this paper, makes specific reference to the idea of the perfect being as a community of thinking subjects. This version of the proof contends that the idea of a community of thinking subjects is a necessary condition for rational thought ; therefore, a denial that there is such a reality would be self-refuting, and the community of thinking subjects exists necessarily ; in other words, because the community of thinking subjects is essential to any reasoning subject, the subject's denial of the existence of the absolute would be a denial of its own existence, which would be self-defeating, and by *reductio ad absurdum* the idea of the absolute as a community of thinking subjects necessarily exists. In what follows, the idea will be understood to involve a "thinking subject" from the viewpoint of psychology and personality, which is always considered the consciousness of the one who conceives of the idea, and a "subject" from the viewpoint of logic, which is considered the reality contained in the idea ; and the idea in the thinking subject is always considered the predicate of the subject from the viewpoint of logic.

One reason for saying that the community of thinking subjects is essential to the thinking subject is that the reasoning process is necessarily objective, or universal, if it is to be a reasoning process at all. There must be other thinking subjects for whom the products of one's reasoning are possible, and this implies a community of thinking subjects. The reasoning process, moreover, involves alternatives or debate, or again a community of thinking subjects. I also argue, with Armour, that "my existence is meaningful to me only in some context" and that "if it [this context] is outside it [one's own consciousness], it is irrelevant to the claims of direct experience."<sup>8</sup> The context for consciousness cannot be other than consciousness, as otherwise the interaction of consciousness and its consciousness of itself cannot be explained. But this argument does not immediately, or on its own, imply a dual-consciousness involving God. The idea of the community of thinking subjects may satisfy the argument ; moreover, the idea of God's consciousness is subject to the same need for a context. This requirement, therefore, also implies the community of thinking subjects ; unless each one of a dual-consciousness is conscious of the other as it is of itself, or forms a community of thinking subjects with the other, each fails to provide the requisite context for the other's consciousness.

The further development of this version of the ontological proof, however, gives the necessary existence of God in the theistic sense : the need for a consciousness to serve as a context for the community of finite consciousnesses and the inability of finite consciousnesses to adequately serve this purpose imply an infinite conscious-

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7. Leslie ARMOUR, "Newman, Anselm and proof of the Existence of God," *International Journal of the Philosophy of Religion*, 19 (1986), p. 87-93.

8. *Ibid.*, p. 89.

ness, God's. However, Bradley explained the contradiction inherent in religious consciousness ; it is a desire of the imperfect for unity with a perfect being and it is an insatiable desire, as an imperfect being would become something else when united to a perfect being. God has to remain something other than one's self, but as separate, or finite, God is not the absolute (AR, 395). Our religious consciousness contains a contradiction, to be explained in the absolute, and therefore our idea of God, that is, our religious consciousness, only partially contains reality or truth. In discussions like Bradley's, in which the finitude of the theistic God is emphasized, the ontological proof is directed to establishing the reality of the absolute, and I interpret this as a community of which the theistic God is a member.

Community provides an idea of identity in difference enabling us to understand how we might be united to, but also distinct from, such a God. Bradley's critique of the religious consciousness can be accommodated if the absolute can be said to be a community of thinking subjects. God is then the one subject in which this community is most fully and intuitively grasped. Finite consciousness comprehends the absolute and is united to God, in this view, when finite consciousness understands the idea of this community, and the finitude of finite consciousness is then explained through a qualitative difference in the intuition of the idea. This is also an idea of the various ways of its being intuitively grasped. Because the idea is an idea of the more complete intuitive grasp of itself, the finite thinking subject has, with this idea, an idea of the infinite, while the thinking subject's finitude is maintained through its limited intuition of the idea.

An infinite consciousness would be subject to further difficulties, such as that the insecurities and limitations of finite consciousness would be unknown to it. For example, an infinite consciousness would know each moment in time as the present. Thus, such a consciousness would be unaware of being in time as a finite consciousness is, and the infinite consciousness would be unconscious of this experience, which is absurd. But difficulties such as these can be overcome if God's consciousness is also distinguished by a difference in empirical intuition (taken in the sense of qualities, or intuitions, finite with respect to the relational reality of the absolute), that is, if God is thought to enter the world through a body, or, as in the Vedantic conception, several bodies. On either view, empirical intuition distinguishes finite consciousnesses and makes it possible for an infinite consciousness to have the experiences considered problematic for an infinite consciousness.

This argument for a theistic God is in some respects like the second formulation of the cosmological proof developed in Descartes, which works by demonstrating the existence of the perfect being as a necessary condition for that of a finite thinking subject, that is, in as much as this subject has an idea of God. "The cogito, as a finite thinking subject, has its existence assured" is the minor premise, and, therefore, so does the absolute subject. Descartes' demonstration of the existence of a thinking subject, the *cogito*, justifies the minor premise of the argument (AT, 25). What is found in the thinking subject, however, is an idea of the infinite, or perfect, being, and the major premise is, as in Descartes' first formulation of the cosmological proof, "there must be at least as much in the cause as in the effect" (AT, 49) ; in other

words, the perfect being is needed to contain, or give a context to, a finite thinking subject in as much as it has an idea of an infinite subject. If the finite thinking subject's idea of the infinite is the idea of the community of thinking subjects and this is a true idea of the finite thinking subject's nature, then the argument is valid. This proof takes the form of a *modus ponens* : if I exist then God is needed to exist to explain my existence, and I exist ; therefore, so too must this God. The finite thinking subject in Descartes intuits its self-certain reality as the *cogito*, and its existence and nature are only explained through the reality of the community of such subjects. Its sister takes the form of a *reductio ad absurdum* argument for the absolute. Whereas the *modus ponens* establishes the existence of the infinite subject of the idea of the absolute on grounds that the *cogito* exists and has this true idea of itself, the *reductio* argument demonstrates the reality and truth of the idea from its mere given appearance within the thinking subject, independently of the reality or truth of the *cogito* ; indeed, it provides an independent basis for the reality of the *cogito* as one thinking subject in the community of the absolute.

Although Kant held that the cosmological presupposes the ontological proof, this was due to our inability to conceive of the idea of the ground for finite reality except through the idea of a self-sufficient being, and Kant's objection to the ontological proof, that the existence of a thing cannot be contained in the idea as a property, derives from the idea of this idea as something distinct from reality as the "thing in itself."<sup>9</sup> This problem is implicit in Descartes' formulation of the argument. The independence of thinking substance from extension invites the question regarding the reality within which their coordination and the separate reality of each are explained, thus suggesting the inability of ideas to contain the reality of their ground. Holding the thing in itself to be inconceivable and the reality of thought to be contained in itself, Hegel put the ontological proof on a new footing, although the absolute is now taken as the focus of the proof and God is no longer considered a transcendent being.

In many ways a follower of Hegel, Bradley nevertheless addressed the ontological proof from self-reflection with a concern to substitute the sober doctrine of degrees of truth and reality among ideas for the rational mysticism of Hegel. The proof from self-reflection suggests that the absolute is known to the thinking subject as it knows itself, thus suggesting a mysticism in which reason is capable of uniting the reasoner to divine reality as a result of having rationally demonstrated it. Bradley's doctrine of degrees supports his objections to the proof by reintroducing, in effect, Kant's thing in itself as the absolute, effectively contextualizing reason and thus undermining the validity of the proof. In both Bradley and Hegel, there are no brute facts, and the absolute is for them self-explanatory and, in this sense, self-sufficient. Hegel followed the insight of Spinoza in regarding the self-sufficiency of the absolute as one of a rationally self-determining idea ; it is self-sufficient in the form of the ontological proof. Bradley viewed the absolute more as Aquinas did, in holding ideas to be necessarily distinct from reality, and for Bradley, we encounter the reality of the

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9. Immanuel KANT, *Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. N. Kemp Smith, New York, St. Martin's Press, 1969, Bk. II, Ch. 3, sec. 4.

absolute at least to some extent in our immediate experience. Although we cannot form an objective idea of immediate experience and ideas are never self-determining, some ideas are more true and real than others, in Bradley's view, as they are more self-explanatory and thus more intuitively satisfying.

## II

The conceptual knowledge of the absolute is explained through the doctrine of degrees of truth and reality among ideas. On this view, any degree of truth and reality among ideas depends on their content. Ideas have reality and truth to the extent that they are self-explanatory. At the same time, it is impossible for us to fully understand the self-explanatory character of the absolute, as our ideas and their reality are always distinct. They are always distinct because, as finite thinking subjects we need to establish the truth of our ideas with reference to an independent reality. As well, the abstractness, or universality, of ideas is needed to ensure their objectivity, whereas concrete experience as the ground for ideas is singular, or individual. Despite the impossibility of forming a complete idea of the absolute, we can in Bradley's view distinguish degrees of truth and reality, employing as a standard the self-explanatory character of the absolute. We might, Bradley supposed, try otherwise to make the standard for degrees of truth and reality our immediate experience, or feeling. Yet, feeling as it is found in finite consciousness always points beyond itself. Its reality depends on something other than itself, and the standard for truth and reality should be self-sufficient. The absolute, or self-sufficient reality, should be the standard for the truth and reality of ideas (AR, 330-331).

Without the idea of the absolute as the standard for all ideas, moreover, we would fall into one or other of two errors of abstraction — we would fall into the error of holding either 1) the series of events in time is self-explanatory or 2) we arrive at the detailed nature of things on *a priori* grounds. These are errors of abstraction, as they each focus on only one aspect of the absolute. And the reason for this is the same in each case: ideas of these aspects of the absolute set up relations — for example, relations of before and after — and if this relational thinking is applied to itself, it merely sets up another relation, which in turn needs to be explained. Relational thinking is, thus, never self-sufficient. These aspects of the absolute, that is, time and the *a priori* ideas of rationalism, are on their own inadequate to stand for the whole; each stands in some more or less distant relation to the complete reality of the absolute (AR, 334-336).

The point regarding *a priori* ideas pertains to the ontological proof. Bradley argued that "mere thought could never, as such, be completed," that is, completely contain the reality of the absolute as in the *a priori* demonstration of its existence, since 1) to contain the complete reality of the absolute, an idea "has then to become one thing with sense and feeling," whereas the idea of the absolute would be abstract. Moreover, 2) ideas are conditional. Their identity with reality depends on experience, and if idea and reality are conceived as being in relation, one can ask the same question again. So, an idea, as such, is never complete (AR, 339), and the idea of the ab-

solute can never contain the existence, or complete reality, of the absolute. Also, 3) the ontological proof is a form of wishful thinking (AR, 131-132), and this is in some respects like Gaunillo's objection to Anselm, where Gaunillo suggested that the problem with the proof is that the same reasoning could be used to prove the existence of a perfect island. These are Bradley's three objections to the *a priori* demonstration of the existence of the absolute as given in the traditional forms.

On this reasoning, an ontological proof of the absolute is misguided. The cosmological proof takes the appropriate turn according to Bradley, who inferred the self-sufficient reality of the absolute from the incomplete content of ideas. We encounter the independent reality of immediate experience and know, on this ground, that the relativity and incompleteness of our ideas of immediate experience must be somehow overcome. While this reasoning was not intended to inform us of how exactly our inadequate ideas of experience are completed in the absolute, the ontological proof attempts to demonstrate the existence of the system contained in a finite thinking subject's idea, and the perfect being would then exist "as such," or as displayed in the idea's content. This is mistaken, according to Bradley, as absolute "reality is concrete while the truest idea is abstract" (AR, 351), which is the first of Bradley's three objections, and it is the form of the objection most often cited to refute the traditional forms of the ontological proof. This objection is developed in various forms in the works of Kant, Hume and Russell. The reality of ideas, or their existence, must be independent of the idea, rather than a property contained in the idea.

Anselm's traditional forms of the ontological proof are open to this and the next of Bradley's three objections — that the idea is conditional — in ways suggestive of contemporary debate. A necessary truth is abstract. It is compatible with any contingent state of affairs and is, in other words, difficult to put to an empirical test. This seems to be the meaning of J.N. Findlay's remark that the old forms of the argument "laid bare something that is of the essence of an adequate religious object, but also something that entails its necessary non-existence,"<sup>10</sup> that is, if the idea's reality depends on its empirical meaning, its existence cannot be a rational truth without this undermining its existence. Also, even a necessary truth is conditional. The relation of the idea to its object is indeterminate, which is what Plantinga appears to mean in saying that the idea of the necessary being may itself be contingent.<sup>11</sup> Its truth depends on the ways we understand language and the relation of a rational truth to reality.

One can meet the third objection, it seems, in the same way at it is traditional to respond to Gaunillo, which is to point out that the ontological proof applies only to a perfect being, not to an island. But Bradley would be correct to point out that if the argument is intended to establish a certain conception of a personal, theistic God, then this God is in some relevant respects finite, and the objection holds. One would

10. J.N. FINDLAY, "Can God's Existence Be Disproved?," in A. FLEW and A. MACINTYRE, ed., *New Essays in Philosophical Theology*, London, William Clowes and Sons, Ltd., 1968, p. 55.

11. A. PLANTINGA, *God and Other Minds*, Ithaca, NY, Cornell University Press, 1967, p. 90-94.



have to say that the personality of God is in some way compatible with the metaphysical properties of infinity and perfection, and the idea of the community accomplishes this, although the question would then remain of how an idea is to reflect this infinity, and this response to the third objection would therefore rely on adequate answers to the first two, as these put the self-sufficiency of ideas into doubt by demonstrating their finitude.

As rational truths in a formal linguistic sense of the rational, the traditional formulations cannot be said to contain an answer to Bradley's objections. On the self-reflective proof, however, denying the reality of the absolute is not only incoherent but is incoherent because it involves denying the reality of the intuition of being in the idea's thinking subject. Because it is an idea of subjective experience, it has the requisite concreteness. As a rational truth, it meets Bradley's own criterion for the truth of ideas about the absolute, or metaphysical truths: "it is only that which for thought is compulsory and irresistible — only that which thought must assert in attempting to deny it — which is a valid foundation for metaphysical truth" (AR, 133). Accordingly, its truth should be absolute, even on the further criterion that "its truth will be the degree up to which any predicate, when made real, preserves its own character" (AR, 335). The idea of the absolute's existence established by *reductio ad absurdum* can be expected to correspond to the absolute if the nature of the absolute is comprehensible, and the truth and reality of the idea of the absolute are compatible with any addition of reality or true content to their subject's understanding.

One may object that although metaphysical truths are unconditional, they are abstract ideas (AR, 480-483). This objection can be taken in two ways. One of these would be to say such truths are sound but incomplete, and this is answered by remarking that the idea of the community of thinking subjects can accommodate any amount of further detail. The objection to the truth of the idea of self-reflection might be that it lacks the immediacy of feeling. An objection like this can be answered by showing that the unity of reality and metaphysical truth is accomplished through an intuition of being, rather than a relation (and I develop this response in the next paragraph in terms of Bradley's theory of the practical perfection of the absolute). One may also object that Bradley's criterion of truth in metaphysics would hold for the most terrible delusions, and this is the objection developed in C.D. Broad's review of Bradley's *Essays on Truth and Reality*.<sup>12</sup> However, it remains the case of this standard that it is involved in any attempt to deny it. Those who are genuinely oblivious to the moral issues weighing against their delusions must be taught to understand them, and in each such case overcoming a delusion would involve applying the same standard for these ideas as for metaphysical truths.

As the only adequate idea of self-reflection for thinking subjects the idea of the absolute is also a concrete experience of the "good" in Bradley's own terms, as it is the closest possible union of an idea and its object. The absolute, in Bradley's view, must satisfy our need for not only theoretical but also practical perfection, as any

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12. C.D. BROAD, "Mr. Bradley on Truth and Reality," *Mind*, 23 (1914), p. 349-370.

unsatisfied desire would be reducible to a disagreement between an idea and its object. Theoretical perfection in the absolute precludes any actual disagreement between idea and object (AR, 137). Bradley set up a challenge to this argument for the practical perfection of the absolute, observing that there is pain in reality in so far as we do feel it. But in the absolute, this pain should be mixed in some way with pleasure, and the balance should be in favour of pleasure, as in the absolute there is the imperfect reality of our ideas and there is the reality of the ideas in which these imperfections are overcome. An understanding of the purpose of the pain might, for example, enable one to experience it differently, and the caveat Bradley observed for his own proof of the practical perfection of the absolute is that the idea given in its conclusion is abstract: it gives us no concrete conception of which of our practical desires we may expect to be realized in the absolute (AR, 140).

Two senses of "abstractness" are apparent in Bradley's criticism: a lack of feeling and a lack of detail. It is unclear whether the two senses of abstractness are each applicable to either the idea of the practical perfection of the absolute or the idea of the absolute in the proof from self-reflection: the idea of the absolute can never make it present to us in every detail. There is a role for degrees of truth and reality among our ideas in so far as there are degrees to which our ideas contain this detail: the specific time or place or the person in whom the absolute is experienced. This concrete experience of the absolute is defined by an idea, not independently of this detail, but as the principle through which it is generated. The idea of the community of thinking subjects can fill this role, as it is the idea of everything coherently experienced. But the idea of the absolute as self-reflection touches us as a state of feeling, as well as being a rational truth, and this idea is thus concrete and true.

The first of Bradley's objections to the *a priori* demonstration of the absolute is therefore answered by showing that the idea of self-reflection through the community of thinking subjects is a "concrete," or intuitive, idea of the self. The second is also answered because, although the argument demonstrates a subjective reality, it is a rational truth and is in this sense self-sufficient. Moreover, one can now give two responses to Bradley's third objection: the proof from self-reflection only directly applies to the idea of the community, whereas it applies indirectly to the consciousness of a theistic God. The other response is that, from Bradley's own considerations of the good, if the idea of the absolute as community satisfies the argument from self-reflection, then it may not be unreasonable to call this a perfect being with respect to the satisfaction of the concerns we normally think of as appropriately satisfied in religion.

### III

The proof from self-reflection seems open to Bradley's two objections to "a kind of bastard use of the ontological proof" (AR, 352), a proof that the idea of the perfect being contains its truth and reality as the idea of immediate experience, or in Bradley's term, the simple idea of the "this." Given the objections are applicable to this construction of the argument, they are also applicable to any version of the self-

reflective ontological proof, because each of these contends that the reality of the immediate experience of thought is in some aspect impossible to deny.

The first of Bradley's objections to this version of the proof is that it presupposes another term or element to explain the actualization of the idea's content. The idea is not, then, self-sufficient. Bradley saw a concrete example of how an idea of immediate experience is distinct from reality as the ground of its truth. Consider the idea of a horse in the field: "the horse," Bradley wrote, "as judged to exist, cannot live in the same field with the actual horse image" (AR, 352). The idea of the horse, as judged to exist in reality, can only constitute a true idea in as much as it is related to an actual horse as the ground for its truth. The objective idea of the horse must therefore differ from the actual horse, and the explanation of its truth and reality depends on another element. Bradley developed this reasoning with respect to immediate experience in the *Principles of Logic*<sup>13</sup>; in this work, he observed that the subject's experience seems an incorrigibly true idea, as it immediately satisfies itself. But this idea cannot be true unless it qualifies a subject; if the intuitive subject's immediate experience is taken to refer as predicate to a subject, they differ, as the idea of a horse differs from an actual horse. As a result, the subject is no longer immediately identical to its predicate, and the judgement is no longer incorrigible, as another term is needed to explain the actual being in a subject of this predicate.

The idea of self-reflection in the form of the community of thinking subjects unquestionably qualifies the subject of self-reflection, as its relation to its subject is given in the idea as the idea of a thinking subject in a community of thinking subjects. The idea does not have a reality, or subject from the viewpoint of logic, independently of itself. So, one needs no further element to explain the actuality of the idea outside of itself. But this response to the objection may seem to make the ontological proof from self-reflection establish the existence of only a finite consciousness, and the proof then appears open to the second of Bradley's objections. Whereas the subject of the idea of self-reflection is in a remote sense absolute, self-reflection can only establish itself as a finite element in the absolute (AR, 353-354). So, an idea of self-reflection, as such, cannot demonstrate the existence of the absolute.

One can answer this objection in terms of Bradley's own doctrine of the identity in difference of ideas and their subject. Ideas must be in some respect identical to their object for us to know reality, and the idea and its object have also to differ in some way — abstract identity does no work. To say it is the same cup is to say nothing unless it is, for example, the same cup on the table as was yesterday on my desk. One of the terms in the relation of the identity in difference of the idea of the absolute and the absolute must be the same — the absolute — throughout difference. We must allow either the content of the idea or its intuition to be the same while the other differs, if this is to satisfy the criterion of identity in difference. Otherwise an idea is not identical in any acceptable sense to the absolute, as the element of identity with the

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13. F.H. BRADLEY, *Principles of Logic*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1928<sup>2</sup>, t. 1, p. 67-69.

absolute would have to be infinite and these are the only candidates in experience to meet the criterion of infinity.

The absolute is infinite, and no aspect of the idea is conceivably infinite other than 1) the content of the idea, that is, a system of relations, or 2) a thinking subject's intuition of being. As these aspects of the idea are mutually exhaustive, it follows that if either of them is made absolute, the difference must lie in the other, not in something else. Although the difference is going to make us finite, it has to be a difference in something affecting every finite consciousness. Consequently, our idea of the absolute is either 1) a diversity of ideas used in interpreting one intuition of being or 2) one idea diversely intuited, that is, each of the community of thinking subjects has a different immediate experience of this system while the system of relations is understood in each the same.

On the view of the absolute as one system of relations diversely intuited, the idea of finite thinking subjects having each an infinite idea is comprehensible in terms of McTaggart's *exclusive*, as opposed to *sufficient*, description: a sufficient description contains all the detail, but the exclusive description of the absolute is only sufficient to distinguish it from anything else,<sup>14</sup> as, for example, the description of the absolute as an infinite community of thinking subjects. This idea, or description, of the absolute could be in the finite thinking subject but be adequate to the infinite, as the description accurately designates its object. However, if this response is developed from the view of the absolute as one intuition diversely interpreted, then the question can be raised, "how does any one subject know the absolute?" On the view of the absolute as one intuition of being with diverse interpretations, or ideas, one can argue that in so far as these interpretations are distinct finite views of the absolute, no one of them can constitute knowledge of the absolute, which would differ from any one of these in being 1) infinite and 2) the entire community of such viewpoints. Other possibilities would be to view the absolute as one intuition with diverse nuances or one order diversely interpreted, but the former would involve relations among diverse nuances of feeling and reduce itself to the alternative of interpreting the absolute as one intuition with diverse interpretations, and the latter would be subject to the difficulty about knowing the absolute. Consequently, although a proof of the absolute from self-reflection can answer Bradley's second objection, its defence relies on the idea of the absolute as one order diversely intuited. In other words, one needs to develop the idea of the absolute as one system of relations diversely intuited to meet Bradley's second objection to the proof. Otherwise, the idea of the absolute as that of self-reflection establishes the reality only of a finite consciousness.

Whereas finite consciousness uniquely intuits the idea of the absolute with a certain intuition of being, it is an idea of all the intuitions of being within the absolute: a variety of empirical intuitions to distinguish one finite consciousness from another and the intuitions of being considered "infinite in their kind" to distinguish the idea of the absolute from its reality. An example of an intuition infinite in its kind is the af-

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14. John MCTAGGART and Ellis MCTAGGART, *Nature of Existence*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1921, t. 1, sec. 102.

firmation of ideas, or a “rational intuition,” as distinct from motion, for example. One may ask how separate intuitions of the whole system are possible, and the answer to this question is indeed that they are a function of the ways finite thinking subjects are related to the absolute. Where the idea of community contains empirical intuitions as elements in a system, the thinking subject’s intuition of being is one of the affirmation of ideas, whereas if this structure stands above them as an independent frame of reference, the intuition is one of the motion of objects in experience. Although these relations of finite subjects to the absolute are arbitrary and no one of them defines the complete reality of a finite thinking subject, they can indirectly define for this subject the infinite reality of the absolute. As such relations are applicable to all finite thinking subjects, the qualities of being resulting from them must be definitive of the experience of the entire community, and because they are qualities infinite with respect to any conceivable subject of consciousness, each one defines the conceivable relational reality of the absolute. One can therefore understand how it is possible for a finite subject to grasp the idea of the infinite while remaining finite, as the finite thinking subject has an idea containing all these elements constituting the complete intuition of being while grasping the reality of the absolute through only one or a few of these elements.

These elements are qualities in experience, and it is worth considering an argument that the qualities we experience are a function of objects existing independently of consciousness. G.E. Moore argued that the qualities we experience, such as the colours of objects, must be a function of their independent reality, as “the moment we try to fix our attention upon consciousness [...] it seems to vanish ; it seems as if we had before us a mere emptiness.”<sup>15</sup> We would be unable to genuinely specify an “emptiness” or an object that really vanished in turning our attention to it, however ; and it is best to regard this emptiness as the intuition of being. On this account, the object of consciousness is the same order of the idea as is experienced but intuited through a rational intuition of being. Consequently, although qualities in experience are a function of the object of consciousness, this object has the reality of subjective experience.

Granted, then, the idea of the absolute and its reality differ only qualitatively, if it is to be meaningfully asserted that the absolute necessarily exists then the absolute’s quality of being must differ from the rational intuition of the idea of its nature. With this qualitative difference, moreover, a relation is implied. In other words, the response given above to Bradley’s first objection assumes the issue is about the idea and the independent reality of its “subject” in the sense of its object in the world, but the issue can also be developed in terms of the relation within subjective experience of the idea’s predicate to its subject. The first of Bradley’s objections to the proof from self-reflection derives from general principles of the reality of relations developed in the early chapters of *Appearance and Reality*, and the objection can also be developed, therefore, in terms of Bradley’s arguments in these chapters of the work

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15. G.E. MOORE, “The Refutation of Idealism,” in Thomas Baldwin, ed, *G.E. Moore : Selected Writings*, London, Routledge, 1993, p. 40-41.

against the ultimate reality of relations — against the reality of ideas, insofar as ideas involve a relation of a subject to a predicate — and in these terms the objection, although answerable, is much more effective. According to one of these arguments, any relation of terms is distinct from its terms. Otherwise, the relation does no work, or it is meaningless to assert the relation of its terms, and, therefore, a further relation is required between any set of terms and their relation, and this requirement is also applicable to any resulting relations. So, a relation between a relation and its terms would have a relation and that relation would have a relation to its terms, *ad infinitum*, with the result that relations are incomprehensible as relations ; rather, relations are interpretations of concrete experience. Consequently, as qualitative differences imply a relation, our idea of the absolute as such a community of differences would lack self-sufficiency and fail for the purposes of the ontological proof of the absolute.

In this connection, it is also argued that the relation of terms must be internal in some respects (that is, their relation makes a difference to its terms, or the nature of terms stems from their relation). Otherwise, a relation does no work. The same relation must also be external in some respects (that is, their relation stems from the nature its terms, or the terms enjoy a nature independently of their relation). When people marry, for example, each brings something of their character into the marriage, and the marriage must also change each of them in some respects. The respects in which terms in relation are internally related have to be related to the respects in which they are externally related. But these aspects will be related, having, again, respects in which they are internally and externally related. There is another infinite series of questions ultimately unanswered. The relation is, again, never entirely explicable as relation, and the idea of the absolute as one order diversely intuited involves this paradoxical reality of ideas.

To answer the objection constructed in each of these two ways, one can distinguish three elements in the subject's self-reflection : 1) the idea, that is, subjective experience ; 2) the idea of idea, that is, an interpretation of subjective experience as one of the community of thinking subjects ; and 3) each subject's intuition of being, or the quality of subjective experience. Given the view of the absolute as one order diversely intuited, 1 and 2 differ only qualitatively, according to 3, the subject's intuition of being, and the idea contains the difference as a relation intuited rationally, as opposed to being intuited in every respect. This is similar to the situation in which someone is walking down a dark hallway and knows the door at the end of the hall is closed : the structure of reality contained in the idea of the closed door is capable of being intuited in more respects, but the structure of consciousness would be roughly the same, and the visual intuition of the door and the mental intuition only differ qualitatively, as it is after all the concept through which the visual perception of the door is made possible.

According to this model, the idea and intuition of being are identical. However much the idea is enriched in developing itself through the idea of idea, it is one intuition of being informed by diverse structures. One needs to view them in time or with consideration of the subject's history of self-development to see them in this way, whereas within any given moment, the idea of idea and the idea contain the same

system of relations. Within the given moment, the idea is thus related to the idea of idea as a unique intuition of the same order of the concept. Their relation, or this difference, is in turn comprehended in the idea of idea. Subjective experience is related to objective, in other words, as the same order more richly grasped in intuition ; subjective experience is a way of experiencing the idea or structure of objective reality, and the difference is comprehended in this explanatory structure. Self-reflection develops its idea of idea with any addition of its relational reality compatible with the subject's intuition of being, and these changes in relational reality enrich the subject's self-feeling, with the result that these elements form a progressive and independent reality. As much or little as the experience of consciousness is enriched through self-reflection, one's self-reflective idea is sufficient to explain its own reality as the idea of one's self in the community of the absolute.

While each of these elements depends for its character on its way of functioning with the other two in the system of self-reflection its character is also original. It is the original intuition with a more encompassing structure or it is the original idea with diverse qualitative aspects. One therefore wishes to understand how the intuition of being is affected by an idea, and the effect is a quality of being. One then wishes to understand how an intuition is related to a quality of being, and the only answer available seems to be through a relation, or order, of being, although this order would itself be altered through interaction with intuition and be then the intuition's object. Thus, at every stage of self-inquiry, such questions would have to be answered by citing another intuition or another relational reality, or idea ; no intuition can appear in consciousness without the structure of an idea and the thinking subject is aware of an idea only as intuited. The interaction of the intuition of being and the structure of ideas gives rise to qualities within experience, and it is always possible to ask for the further relation of the quality and the original intuition or idea, and this in turn gives rise to a further quality of the complex as experienced. Nevertheless, as all ideas are determined through a rational intuition and the idea of community, a certain clear meaning is attributable to all ideas emerging at any stage in the processes of self-inquiry.

With these responses to the difficulties, one may argue, only one aspect of the general issue about the ontological proof is resolved. It is also possible to construct Bradley's second objection to the self-reflective proof in terms, not of the opposition of subjective experience to a reality supposed to be independent of the self, but of the subjectivity of immediate experience in itself. The quality of being, as apparent in immediate experience, cannot, Bradley argued, be abstracted from experience without being distinct from the whole and this distinction would be grounded in a difference of quality, and the quality of being is thus never as such abstracted in the form of an idea. One needs to transcend immediate experience with the idea of idea, or the idea of the absolute, to understand it, but then the unity of feeling and the idea of the absolute is never comprehensible (AR, 103). William Mander remarks that it is impossible to ground the idea of the absolute on immediate experience, as it is, without ideas, inconceivable and fails to explain its own deficiencies or the move from feeling, to thought, to the absolute. On Bradley's account, the inadequacies of ideas are

apparent through comparison with the identity in difference of idea and reality seen to some extent in immediate experience. As well, however, one needs on Bradley's account to know the discrepancies of thought to infer the reality of the immediate experience of the absolute. Given immediate experience as the ground for truth, therefore, a circle emerges in Bradley's thought. Mander concludes it is more apt to locate the ground for truth, not in feeling or immediate experience alone and in opposition to the concept, but in Bradley's notion of "intellectual satisfaction,"<sup>16</sup> a satisfaction always with a given concept. But this satisfaction is discovered in immediate experience and provides no *a priori* ground for determining the reality of the absolute. On the self-reflective model, this type of satisfaction is found in the rational intuition of a metaphysical truth, such as the idea of the community. As a type of immediate experience, rational intuition meets the difficulties raised for the objective specification of immediate experience. Whereas it is important for the success of the ontological proof to abstract this quality of being and include it in the idea of the absolute, one cannot hold that this idea of immediate experience is therefore distinct from immediate experience and thus a distortion of it.<sup>17</sup> Because it is abstract in the sense of being qualitatively unique and is infinite with respect to the system of finite consciousnesses within the idea of the absolute, the intuition of the affirmation of ideas constitutes an adequate objective ground for determining its reality.

A certain real being is thus established in the proof from self-reflection, as it demonstrates the necessary existence of the absolute as a community of thinking subjects. This meets Bradley's objections and provides a reason to believe in a personal, theistic God. Bradley's criticism of the ontological proof helps us to understand the importance of the proof from self-reflection, as opposed to its traditional forms, and Bradley's objections to the self-reflective version of the proof help us to understand the need to distinguish senses of the concrete-abstract distinction in the idea of the absolute and the need to view the absolute as one system intuited in a diversity of ways, as opposed to viewing it as one intuition interpreted in a diversity of forms, which would leave everyone with an inadequate conception of the perfect being.

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16. W.J. MANDER, "Levels of Experience in F.H. Bradley," *Southern Journal of Philosophy*, 33 (1995), p. 493-497.

17. This difficulty arose as an issue for *Appearance and Reality* and is discussed in the greatest detail in Bradley's work in "Our Knowledge of Immediate Experience," *Essays on Truth and Reality*, Oxford, Clarendon, 1914, p. 159-191.