Moore's defense of external relations

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September 6, 2007

Moore thinks that the doctrine of internality is clearly false. His strategy for showing it to be false is characteristic of his approach to philosophical problems: he thinks that by paying close attention to the logical forms of sentences involved in stating the problem, we can see that the arguments for the doctrine of internality are fallacious, and remove any plausibility that the thesis might have seemed to have.

Moore spends the first part of the article clarifying the nature of the thesis that all relations are internal. His first move is to distinguish the doctrine of internality from two theses with which, he says, it is often confused:

- The existence of the fact that x and y stand in some relation can never be analyzed simply in terms of the existence of x, y, and the relation. This says that facts are not analyzable into their constituents in this way; but it does not say anything about the connection between the natures of x and y, on the one hand, and the relation, on the other. (41-2)

- The idea that all relations "modify their terms", in the sense that for an object to stand in some relation is for it to undergo some real change. Moore points out that some objects don't change at all, and yet stand in relations, so that that this thesis must be false. (42-4)

Moore grants the point (familiar from our discussion of McTaggart) that for any relation in which an object stands, there is a corresponding relational property of the object. He then suggests that we can understand what it is for a relation to be internal in terms of an account of what it is for a relational quality to be internal.

Moore states his view about what proponents of the doctrine of internality have in mind when he says:

> "I want to suggest, then, that one thing which is always implied by the dogma that, 'All relations are internal,' is that, in the case of every relational property, it can truly be asserted of any term x which has that property, that any term which had not had it would necessarily have been different from x." (47)

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(Here Moore is following McTaggart and Bradley in using 'term' to express what we might more naturally express by 'object.')

But he claims that this thesis is ambiguous, and that the key to understanding the weakness of the thesis lies in seeing this. He points out two phrases in the thesis which need more clarification:

1. 'is necessary.' Moore says that to say that to say that there is a necessary connection between an object's having a pair of properties is to say that it *follows* from the fact that an object has one that it also has the other. As an example, he uses the properties of being a right angle and being an angle, and says that it follows from the fact that something is a right angle that it is also an angle. What, you might ask, does 'follow from' mean here? A good answer, though not one that Moore gives, is that one claim follows from another just in case it could not be the case that the latter is true without the former being true as well. In general, to say that a certain claim is necessary is to say that it could not be false, or that, no matter how the world had turned out, it would not have been false.

2. 'is different from.' Moore distinguishes two senses in which two things can be different from each other: either by being simply numerically distinct, or by being qualitatively distinct. Two things are numerically distinct when they are, well, two separate things. But you might think that things can be numerically distinct without being in any strong sense qualitatively distinct. (Imagine two mass-produced paper clips which are in every intrinsic way exactly the same.) But if two things are qualitatively distinct, they must also be numerically distinct. Hence you might think that it follows from the fact that x and y are qualitatively distinct than x and y are also numerically distinct, but not the other way around. (Moore seems to think this.)

This ambiguity in 'is different from' gives us two interpretations of what the denier of external relations could be saying. On the one hand, she might be saying that

> In the case of every relational property, it can truly be asserted of any term x which has that property, that any term which had not had it would necessarily have been <u>numerically</u> different from x.

Alternatively, she might be saying that

> In the case of every relational property, it can truly be asserted of any term x which has that property, that any term which had not had it would necessarily have been <u>qualitatively</u> different from x.

Moore thinks that his opponents believe both of these theses. But his argument focuses only on showing that the first of the above versions is false. And there is a good reason for this. As we have seen, the second formulation implies the first; so if the first is false, so is the second. Hence if Moore's argument is successful, that will be enough to discredit

both theses. (From here on, you can read 'different from' as 'distinct from' or 'numerically different from.')

Moore claims that some relational properties are internal, in the above sense, and some external:

> "... it is quite easy to point out some relational properties which are certainly internal in this sense. Let us take as an example the relational property which we assert to belong to a visual sense datum, when we say of it that it has another visual sense datum as a spatial part: the assertion, for instance, with regard to a colored patch half of which is red and half yellow: "This whole patch contains this patch" (where "this patch" is a proper name for the red half). It is here, I think, quite plain that, in a perfectly clear and intelligible sense, we can say that any whole, which had not contained that red patch, could not have been identical with the whole in question ... [But] it seems quite clear that, though the whole could not have existed without having the red patch for a part, the red patch might perfectly well have existed without being part of that particular whole. ... Yet this ... is one of the things which the dogma of internal relations denies. ... And in saying this it obviously flies in the face of common sense. It seems quite obvious that in the case of many relational properties which things have, the fact that they have them is a *mere matter of fact*: that the things in question *might* have existed without having them." (50-51)

So much for Moore's denial of the 'dogma of internal relations'; how does he respond to the argument for the doctrine of internality that we find in McTaggart and Bradley?

Moore is willing to concede the first and second premises of the argument outlined above. His concerns are with the third premise. He thinks that it is ambiguous. One one reading, he thinks, the argument is valid but the premise false; on the other reading, the premise is true, but the argument invalid. Either way, he thinks, the argument fails.

Moore makes this point on pp. 51-2:

> "What I am maintaining is the commonsense view, which seems obviously true, that it may be true that A has in fact got ϕ, and yet also true that A might have existed without having ϕ. And I say that this is equivalent to saying that it might be true that A has ϕ, and yet *not* true that from the proposition that a thing has *not* got ϕ it *follows* that that thing is *other* than ϕ – numerically different from it. And one reason why this is disputed is, I think, simply because it is in fact true that if A has ϕ, and x has *not*, it *does* follow that x is other than A."

Moore continues:

> "These two propositions, the one which I admit to be true (1) that if A has ϕ, and x has *not*, it *does* follow that x is other than A, and the one which I

maintain to be false (2) that if A has ϕ, then from the proposition with regard to any term x that it has not got ϕ, it *follows* that x is other than A are, I think, easily confused with one another. ...

By far the most important point in connexion with the dogma of internal relations seems to be simply to see clearly the difference between these two propositions (1) and (2), and that (2) does *not* follow from (1). If this is not understood, nothing in connexion with the dogma can, I think, be understood."

Moore thinks that premise (3) of our argument for radical holism is ambiguous between the following:

(1) For all x: (A is ϕ) entails (if x is not ϕ, then x is other than A)

(2) For all x: (If A is ϕ, then (x is not ϕ entails x is other than A.

This is important because, as we have seen, (1) seems obviously to be true. Moore is claiming that (2) expresses the claim of radical holism, and that we cannot deduce it from (1).

To get clearer on the difference between these propositions, remember that we can capture the intended sense of 'x follows from y' as 'x is a necessary consequence of y' or, equivalently, 'necessarily, if x then y.' Using this reformulation, (1) and (2) are as follows:

(1*) Necessarily (If (A is ϕ) then (if (x is not ϕ), then (x is other than A)))

(2*) If (A is ϕ), then (Necessarily (if (x is not ϕ) then (x is other than A)))

At this point, it is important to keep in mind three distinct claims that Moore is defending:

- (1) (and hence (1*)) is obviously true. This follows from Leibniz's Law.

- (2) expresses the doctrine that 'all relations are internal.'

- (2) does not follow from (1).

Let's try to get clearer on the third of these claims. After all, (1) and (2) look pretty similar; how can Moore be sure that (2) does not follow from (1)?

One way is to examine the forms of these propositions, as Moore does on the top of p. 56. It looks as though these propositions are of the following forms:

(1-form) Necessarily, (if p then (if q, then r)

(2-form) If p, then (Necessarily, (if q, then r)

(Remember that we are using 'Necessarily, if . . . then . . . ' where Moore uses '. . . entails . . . .')

Can we show that (2-form) does not follow from (1-form)? To do so, we need to find three propositions to substitute in for p, q, r such that they make (1-form) true but make (2-form) false. Moore suggests an example on p. 56, but it is not as clear as it could be. In a later version of this paper, he suggests the following example:

> $p =$ All the books on this shelf are blue.
>
> $q =$ My copy of *The Principles of Mathematics* is a book on this shelf.
>
> $r =$ My copy of *The Principles of Mathematics* is blue.

Does this succeed as a counterexample to the alleged implication from (1-form) to (2-form)? Does the counterexample assume the falsity of the doctrine of internality?

In this article, Moore provides some considerations which he thinks counts against certain arguments for the doctrine of internality. Does he provide any positive arguments *against* that doctrine? If not, does that mean that the doctrine and its denial are on equal footing? What does Moore claim that the doctrine of internality "obviously flies in the face of common sense" contribute?

In this paper, Moore does not provide any alternative metaphysical picture to the kind of idealist monism that Bradley defended. We'll get the beginnings of the articulation of such a picture with Moore's paper, 'The nature of judgement.'

In an Appendix to a later edition of *Appearance and Reality*, Bradley gave the following response to opponents of the denial of external relations:

> "And it is not hard, perhaps, at this point to dispense with a fallacy which seems somewhat common. You may take, it is said, some terms, A, B, and C, and may place them in various relations, X, Y, and Z, and through all they remain still A, B, and C. And this, it is urged, proves that A, B, and C exist, or may exist, free from all relations or at least independently. My character, for example, may be compared with that of another man, or, having first lived to the north of him, I may change to the south; and to neither of us need it make a difference, and therefore we both are unaffected and so independent. But an answer to this fallacy seems even obvious. What is proved is that a certain character may, as such and in respect of that character, exist indifferently in various relations. But what is not proved at all is that this character could exist independent and naked." (from Note B to *Appearance and Reality*, "Appearance and Quality")

There is a difference between the claim that an object's nature may be independent of the relations in which it stands, and the claim that an object could exist without standing in any relations. Bradley is surely right that Moore has not shown that objects can exist without standing in any relations at all, and so that Moore has not shown that skepticism about relations is consistent with the denial of monism. But this does not detract from the fact that Moore has shown that one kind of argument in favor of monism fails.

However, it does mean that we have at least one argument for idealist monism still unanswered: Bradley's regress argument against the reality of relations.