

Candlish, Stewart, *The Russell/Bradley Dispute and its Significance for Twentieth Century Philosophy* (New York, Macmillan Palgrave, 2007), pp. xix + 235

With this book, Stewart Candlish has given us a philosophically fascinating tour through the decades-long argument between Bradley and Russell. But it is much more besides.

As is well-known, Bradley's philosophical prose can be bewildering to a contemporary reader. Fortunately, the opposite is true of Candlish's writing. The first two chapters of the book offer an introduction to Bradley's thought that is at once subtle and engaging -- it is the best attempt I know of to present Bradley's philosophy as the consequence of a set of plausible philosophical commitments. Candlish sets the stage with a list of 18 theses that characterize the 'stereotypical picture' of the disagreement between Russell and Bradley. This picture is no caricature of the 'received view' -- I think that most readers who have taught Bradley and Russell will recognize more than a few of the 18 theses from their own lectures. (I know that I did.) Candlish's main aim is not simply to debunk the 18 theses; instead, he takes a more circuitous route that is, in the end, more satisfying. Candlish expounds Bradley's thought over the course of the book by contrast with Russell's; by seeing how Bradley did and could have resisted Russell's arguments, the contours of his thought emerge gradually, and by the end of the book the reader is well-positioned to see how and why the real nature of the Bradley/Russell dispute diverges from the stereotypical picture of it.

Candlish presents Bradley's philosophical views as flowing from the idea that all genuine truths must ultimately be made intelligible via explanations in terms of necessary or conceptual truths. This refusal to countenance brute contingencies is then presented as the basis for Bradley's attacks on predication and the reality of relations, and so in turn for his monism.

If this reading of Bradley makes plain the motivation for his monism, it also suggests an opposed position which is immune to Bradley's arguments: a pluralist metaphysics which accepts the reality of properties and relations alongside the existence of ultimate -- i.e., inexplicable -- contingent truths. Russell, of course, held just such a view during the period in question, and so Candlish turns next

to an examination of the viability of this sort of alternative to Bradley's position.

The result is one of the real highlights of the book: a vivid and insightful analysis of Russell's decades-long struggle with the problem of judgement, from the simple propositional theory of the *Principles of Mathematics* through the various incarnations of the multiple relation theory of judgement. Candlish argues that Russell was never able to give a satisfactory account of the nature of judgement; on this point, though, Candlish's arguments are less than convincing.

As Candlish says, Russell became dissatisfied with his analysis of judgement as a relation to a proposition because of a number of related difficulties concerning the nature of propositions. On the one hand, the recognition that, for example, the proposition that A loves B is something other than a list of its constituents --- A, love, and B --- suggests that the terms of the proposition must be united by some relation. But, on the other hand, the obvious remedy --- that the proposition is A and B standing in the relation of love --- seems to collapse propositions into facts, and make the existence of false propositions impossible.

Russell's response to this dilemma was the multiple relation theory of judgement. On (one version of) this view, there is no such thing as the proposition that A loves B, though there is such a thing as the judgement that A loves B. Of course, one can raise the same 'problem of unity' about judgements as about propositions, noting that the judgement that A loves B is more than the series of items judgement, A, love, and B. But here Russell can say that judgement is a relation which genuinely holds between the judging subject, A, love, and B, and hence supplies the needed unity --- and saying this does not collapse the judgement into the fact that A loves B (if such there is), since that would be a matter of A and B standing in the relation of love rather than the subject, A, love, and B being related by judgement. Hence on the multiple relation theory there is no analogue of the worry about false propositions becoming, per impossible, false facts.

Candlish in effect poses a dilemma for this theory. He asks: how are we to explain the difference between the judgement that A loves B and the judgement that B loves A? If we explain it via the difference between 'A loves B' and 'B loves A', we're back at our

original problem of explaining the unity of the proposition. But, Candlish says, “[t]he sole alternative ... is to specify that the relation *judgment* is special: in this context, it is the sole relation which combines its *relata* into a judgment, rather than a mere collection ...” (68) But it is not obvious what is objectionable here. Russell’s theory does not make the relation of judgment special in any metaphysical sense; *all* relations combine with their *relata* to form relational facts, and many relations will, like judgment, be nonsymmetric.

Perhaps the worry is not that the theory makes the relation of judgment special not in any metaphysical sense, but that the relation is not sufficiently analyzed for the theory to have any explanatory power; Candlish seems to have this in mind when he suggests that the theory is simply a way of “impos[ing] a new jargon on the expression of what we knew already.” But this seems unfair. The question of whether judgment is a relation between a subject and a proposition or between a subject and the two or more objects, properties, and relations is surely a substantive one, and not simply a matter of terminology. Russell’s multiple relation theory may not tell us everything about the nature of judgment -- neither, for that matter, does the theory that judgment is a binary relation between a subject and a proposition -- but it surely does tell us something. Perhaps the multiple relation theory of judgment is, in the end, a failure; but I don’t think that Candlish succeeds in showing that it is.

This is important, because one of the principal points of contention between Russell and Bradley concerned the reality of relations; and Candlish suggests in several places that it is doubtful that Russell’s view of relations can yield a consistent view of judgment. The problem of judgment, however, is only one aspect of the many-sided disagreement about relations which forms the unifying theme of Candlish’s book. Candlish’s view about the outcome of this dispute is both clear and surprising: on the topic of relations, Bradley was “unanswerably correct” (xi). Setting aside alleged internal difficulties in Russell’s view of judgment, we can separate out two lines of defense of this view: an argument that Russell’s attempted refutations of Bradley’s skepticism about relations fail, and a defense of Bradley’s well-known argument in *Appearance & Reality* against the reality of relations.

One of Russell’s central arguments against Bradley was that various sentences involving relational predicates cannot be paraphrased by sentences which don’t involve such predicates. Candlish would have Bradley ask the following pointed question: So what? Bradley might well grant that there are no paraphrases of the relevant sort, but deny that there is any ready inference from this point to the conclusion that there exists a relation corresponding to each of the relevant relational predicates. Russell, of course, given his view that every meaningful symbol corresponds to an entity which is its meaning, would have been perfectly happy with this sort of inference; but it is hardly one which a monist like Bradley could accept. It is now so common to take paraphrase as a guide to ontological commitment that this point is easy to miss; but Candlish makes a convincing case that Russellian arguments for the reality of relations simply assume claims about the nature of the relationship between language and world which, far from being common ground between Bradley and Russell, were the real source of their disagreement.

Candlish’s defense of Bradley’s argument against the reality of relations begins with an attempt to explain what, exactly, Bradley was arguing for; here as elsewhere, Candlish rightly emphasizes that Bradley’s arguments can only be understood in terms of the world-view those arguments were meant to defend. According to Candlish, when Bradley argues for the conclusion that relations are not real, we can understand his intended conclusion as the claim that relations are not substances. (167) Given this understanding of his conclusion, a standard reply to Bradley’s regress argument -- that it ignores the fact that relations are things different in kind than the objects they relate -- is less an objection to that argument than a concession that Bradley’s argument is successful.

Though Candlish’s interpretation of this crucial argument does fit with much of what Bradley says, one worry is that it makes its conclusion implausibly tame. Many philosophers would endorse the claim that substances and relations both exist, but that substances and relations belong to fundamentally different metaphysical categories. These philosophers would therefore deny that relations are substances. Can it really be right that these philosophers share the view about relations that Bradley intended to be the conclusion of his argument in Chapter 3 of *Appearance & Reality*?

One consequence of this interpretation of Bradley's skepticism about relations, which Candlish recognizes, is the view can do less work in his argument for monism than is usually supposed. This is another sense in which Candlish's view of Bradley's philosophy is out of step with the 'stereotypical picture': in Candlish's view, Bradley's attack on the coherence of our ordinary conception of objects is more fundamental to his thought than his attack on relations.

At the end of the book, it is tempting to regard the Russell/Bradley dispute as a bit of a standoff, in the sense that neither provided valid arguments against the other's views using only premises to which his opponent was committed. Proponents of Russell's side in the dispute will likely find it tempting to then break the tie by appeal to Moorean considerations: isn't Russellian belief in the reality of relations, for example, to be favored on the grounds that it is the 'common sense' view of the world?

Candlish is unconvinced by this line of argument, because common sense thought about the world already involves abstraction of objects from properties and relations, so that "this appeal to common sense is plainly circular." (154) In one sense, Candlish is correct: the common sense beliefs in question are clearly ones which Bradley would have rejected. But the point of the appeal to common sense is not to provide an argument which would have convinced Bradley, any more than the point of Moore's proof of an external world was to convince the skeptic. The idea is rather that, given that we inevitably come to philosophy with some beliefs about the world, philosophical investigation is always a matter of updating our beliefs rather than starting from scratch. Supposing that Russell's view that there are a plurality of objects which stand in relations to each other -- though not other aspects of Russell's metaphysics -- is one of the beliefs we bring to philosophy, one might think that the right response to the sort of standoff described above is sticking with this pluralist view. One might disagree with this view of the role of prior beliefs in philosophical argument; but it does provide one model of the relevance of common sense which favors Russellian realism about relations and it is not undermined by Candlish's objections.

This is a rich book, and this review does not do justice to the variety of topics about which Candlish has interesting things to say: it is at once a valuable contribution to our understanding of the dispute

between Russell and Bradley and to our understanding of the philosophical subject matter of that dispute.

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