Idealism: A Love (of Sophia) that Dare not Speak its Name

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My first experience of philosophy at the University of Sydney was as a commencing undergraduate in the tumultuous year of 1973. At the start of that year, there was one department of philosophy, but by the beginning of the next there were two. These two departments seemed to be opposed in every possible way except one: they both professed to be committed to a form of *materialist* philosophy. One could think that having a common enemy at least might have been the cause for some degree of unanimity, but no: the traditional enemy of materialism – idealism – was regarded as having been long dead and buried. For the Marxists in the then Department of General Philosophy, it had been Marx who, in the second half of the nineteenth century, had 'inverted' Hegelian idealism into a form of materialism, while for the analytic philosophers in the Department of Traditional and Modern Philosophy, it had been Bertrand Russell and G. E. Moore who had triumphed over British idealism at the turn of the twentieth. There may have been many things that were atypical about philosophy as it was done at Sydney in the early 1970s, but its resistance to idealism was not among them.

Twenty years later, however, there were signs that old certitudes in Anglophone philosophy were changing, and in 1994, two books were published by mainstream analytic philosophers addressing issues central to analytic concern and suggesting that the philosophy of Hegel held the key to their solution. These books were *Mind and World*

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by John McDowell, which contained his Locke lectures delivered at Oxford three years before, and the mammoth work on 'inferentialist semantics' by Robert Brandom, *Making It Explicit*.[1] In the same year, a commentary on Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit* by Terry Pinkard appeared which utilized some of the ideas of Wilfrid Sellars, the analytic philosopher who had most inspired Brandom.[2] With this, Pinkard thus indirectly linked Brandom's social pragmatism to the so-called 'non-metaphysical' approach to Hegel found in Robert Pippin's 1989 book, *Hegel's Idealism*, where Hegel was portrayed as a prototypically 'modern' post-Kantian thinker in contrast to the traditional target of the criticisms of the likes of Marx or Russell.[3]

Brandom's claim for the relevance of Hegel for contemporary philosophy was not lost on his former teacher, Richard Rorty, who described *Making it Explicit* as 'an attempt to usher analytic philosophy from its Kantian to its Hegelian stage'.[4] Rorty's description was clearly intended to be provocative, but it should not be dismissed. According to Brandom, his approach to semantics, which drew on the work of Sellars, had deeper roots in the tradition of Kant and Hegel. If this claim is true it casts the relation of analytic philosophy to the idealist tradition in a wholly new light, and to understand how it could be true would require considerable re-writing of the standard accounts of both idealism and analytic philosophy.[5] I would like to suggest, in a very broad-brush way, something of what that re-writing might look like, and why it might be important.

The Myth of the Revolution

When Bertrand Russell first entered the world of British academic philosophy at Cambridge as an undergraduate in the early 1890s, it was a world dominated by idealist philosophers who saw themselves as working in the tradition of Kant and Hegel. The conventional understanding is that all this was eventually swept away by the analytic revolution which re-established a distinctively scientific form of philosophy that linked back to the earlier empiricist outlooks of John Locke and David Hume. While Kantian ideas may have retained a place in the analytic tradition, mostly within moral philosophy, the

idealists coming after Kant, such as Fichte and Hegel, were effectively exiled from serious philosophical consideration, and were more likely to be read and worked upon in departments of politics, literature, or religion, say, than philosophy. For the most part, analytic philosophers have justified their indifference or antipathy to the idealist phase of nineteenth-century philosophy with the idea that analytic philosophy marked a decisive and irreversible break with idealism at the time of its birth.

This picture is sketched in the autobiographical writings of Bertrand Russell himself. Russell's earliest philosophical development had been within that idealist framework, but, as he was later to tell the story, the revolution against idealism in which he participated was sparked in late 1898 by the then 25 year-old George Edward Moore:

> It was towards the end of 1898 that Moore and I rebelled against both Kant and Hegel. Moore led the way, but I followed closely in his footsteps. I think that the first published account of the new philosophy was Moore's article in *Mind* on 'The Nature of Judgment.' Although neither he nor I would now adhere to all the doctrines in this article, I, and I think he, would still agree with its negative part – i.e. with the doctrine that fact is in general independent of experience.[6]

Russell's choice of words in describing the break with idealism here is significant. The standard picture of British philosophy is that of a robust realism shared with common sense, with idealism being typically rejected because of its refusal to acknowledge the 'mind-independence' of 'reality' or the 'external world'. The eighteenth-century immaterialist George Berkeley for whom the outer world was, in reality, the inside of the divine mind, is held as providing idealism's standard exemplar, and the late nineteenth-century revival of idealism in British philosophy is often portrayed as the last and ill-fated attempt of a Victorian religious sensibility to guard itself against a post-Darwinian Godless view of the world and ourselves. Against the luxuriant and mystical metaphysics of the idealists, fuelled by religious longing, the 'new philosophy' affirmed the brute independence of the material world to the human mind.[7] But note that Russell does *not* refer to the mind or 'experience' independence

of 'reality' or 'the world' or 'worldly things', but rather to the independence of 'fact', and the distinctness of this way of talking can be brought out by the contrast with which commences one of the most celebrated and influential texts of the analytic movement, Ludwig Wittgenstein's *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*: 'The world', writes Wittgenstein, 'is everything that is the case. ... The world is the totality of facts [*Tatsachen*], not of things [*Dinge*]'.[8] More recently, much the same idea has been defended by David Armstrong in terms of 'a world of states of affairs'.[9] It is the idea of a world of 'facts' or 'states of affairs' rather than 'things' that I want to draw attention to here.

Contrast Russell's assertion of the independence of the world of facts to the well-known reaction of Samuel Johnson's when confronted with the ideas of Berkeley. Boswell records Johnson's refutation of Berkeley's claim about the nonexistence of matter, and the ideal nature of every thing in the universe: '[S]triking his foot with mighty force against a large stone, till he rebounded from it, Johnson declared, "I refute it thus".'[10] But does Russell's claim express Johnson's sentiment? Are 'facts' the kind of things that one can kick or trip over? Certainly P. F. Strawson, half a century later, thought not: 'Facts are known, stated, learnt, forgotten, overlooked, commented on, communicated or noticed', he claimed, '... They are not, like things or happenings on the face of the globe, witnessed or heard or seen, broken or overturned, interrupted or prolonged, kicked, destroyed, mended or noisy'.[11] I do not want to suggest that such deep philosophical questions are answered as simply as this, but I do want to bring into focus just how far from Johnsonian common sense Russell's appeal to 'fact' here actually is.

Indeed, when we look even more closely at the starting position of analytic philosophy in the early views of Russell and Moore, we see that what they meant by the world is clearly very distant from those everyday intuitions. Moore describes that which is independent of mind not as things, like rocks, or even events, but as propositions, built out of concepts.[12] 'A thing becomes intelligible fact', says Moore, 'when it is analysed into its constituent concepts.'[13] Moore was anything but loose with words, and meant exactly what he said: the world was made out of propositions, which in turn were made out of concepts.

As he wrote to friend in the same year, 'I have arrived at a perfectly staggering doctrine ... an existent is nothing but a proposition: Nothing *is* but concepts.'[14] As Thomas Baldwin notes, 'it would be a great mistake to regard Moore's early philosophy as a reaction of common sense empiricism against the excesses of idealism.'[15] One might imagine Dr Johnson, on hearing of the views of Moore, looking for the nearest large stone.

Analytic Platonism

The starting position for analytic philosophy was, as Baldwin's point reminds us, not common sense empiricism, but a form of Platonism. 'I imagined all the numbers sitting in a row in a Platonic heaven', Russell would later write of his early post-idealist thought, 'I thought that points of space and instants of time were actually existing entities .... I believed in a world of universals, consisting mostly of what is meant by verbs and prepositions.'[16] Russell soon came to see this crowded platonic universe as resulting from unwarranted assumptions about the nature of language, assumptions he was to criticize and make explicit in the course of developing a more sophisticated analysis of language and its logical structure. And we might think that it was actually these logical developments that were responsible for the 'real' revolutionary break with idealism. But I want to suggest that the significance of the 'starting position' for understanding both the subsequent course of analytic philosophy and its underlying relationship to nineteenth-century idealism cannot be easily dismissed. By focusing on the Platonist starting position it quickly becomes apparent how misleading it is to view what had happened as a simple break with idealism. I'll try do this by way of looking at some surprising juxtapositions that have become apparent in the context of recent analytic discussions of the nature of truth.

Augustine famously said of 'time' that, although we all know what it is, it is very difficult to say what it is, and much the same could be said of the notion 'true'. Attempting to say what truth amounts to has led to an array of competing theories, and among the current contenders has arisen a theory called the 'identity theory' of

truth.[17] Perhaps the theory closest to common sense is the venerable 'correspondence theory', in which it is taken that a belief or sentence is true when it corresponds to something in the world, some 'fact' or 'state of affairs'. But apart from any Johnsonian worries that one might have about the mind-independence of 'facts' or 'states of affairs', there have been other sources of worry about the notion of 'correspondence' as it is employed here. Identity theorists have responded to such concerns by the claim that a thought's content is true, not when it corresponds to some fact, but rather when it just is that fact.

As Stewart Candlish and Thomas Baldwin have both pointed out,[18] the 'identity theory' of truth seems to be just another way of stating Moore's 'startling' idea expressed in 'The Theory of Judgment' that the world is made up of propositions. The paradox that they point to, however, is that, while this view is mobilized against Bradley, it also seems to be the approach to truth actually held by Bradley. Moreover, Baldwin argues that Bradley had himself got the view from Hegel,[19] a paradox that has led him to sum up the claims in one paper with the following provocative sentences:

> My purpose so far in this paper has been to tell a tale about a largely unrecognized point of continuity between those founders of analytic philosophy, Moore and Russell, and their idealist predecessors, Bradley and, indeed, Hegel. A tendentious subtitle for the paper might even be 'A Hegelian origin of analytic philosophy'.[20]

Tendentious, certainly, but unsupportable? I don't think so – especially not if we add another piece into the puzzle surrounding the identity theory, the fact that much of the current interest generated in the theory seems to have been sparked by the a series of claims put forward by John McDowell in lecture II of *Mind and World*, the very lecture in which McDowell aligns himself with Hegel.[21] McDowell takes the idea at the centre of the identity theory from Wittgenstein's Tractarian claim that we saw before. 'When one thinks truly', McDowell writes, 'what one thinks *is* what is the case. So since the world is everything that is the case (as he [Wittgenstein] himself once wrote), there is no gap between thought, as such, and the world'.[22] The traditional 'correspondence theory' of truth presupposes there is such a gap between mind and world, asks

how that gap is bridged, and answers with the idea of something mental, a 'representation', corresponding with something worldly, some fact. But McDowell thinks there is no gap to be bridged, and hence no need of an intermediary 'representation'. To say that there is no 'gap' between thought and world, he says, is simply to 'dress up a truism in high-flown language. All the point comes to is that one can think, for instance, *that spring has begun*, and that very same thing, *that spring has begun*, can be the case'.[23] These sentences are used in support of one of the central claims of *Mind and World* that lead him to his affirmation of Hegel's 'absolute idealism' at the end of the lecture, noting 'we have arrived at a point from which we could start to domesticate the rhetoric of that philosophy'.[24] That is, peel back the 'high-flown language' of Hegel's claims, and what you will find, suggests McDowell, is a metaphysically uncontentious truism that in no way slights the 'independence' of a nevertheless thinkable reality.

Analytic philosophy was supposed to have emerged in the revolutionary overthrowing of its idealist predecessor with the starting position sketched by Moore in 'The Nature of Judgment', but the central ideas in this essay seem to be the 'Hegelian' ones that Moore shares with Bradley and McDowell. How, then, are we to make sense of this?

Here is one suggestion. What Moore intended by the 'idealism' against which he was rebelling was the position often called 'subjective idealism' and which is traditionally represented by Berkeley. The 'ideas' appealed to in this brand of idealism are what Locke had called 'ideas' – states or affections of the subjective mind that he thought of as representing, in virtue of somehow structurally corresponding to, the worldly objects that had caused them. Berkeley had brought out what he had thought to be the consequence of Locke's representationalist realism: from such a starting point, he argued, we can find no justification for the inference from the ideas to the supposed things that caused them, and his appeal to the divine mind was what resulted from this criticism of Locke's inference. But in the tradition of Kant and Hegel that had so influenced the British idealists, the term 'idea' [*Idee*] has a quite different meaning. It was

the translation of *Plato*'s 'ιδεα', not *Locke*'s 'idea'.[25] Taking Berkeley as the prototype of idealism is a bit like taking the emu as the prototype of the bird.

One of the dominant features of the continental Platonic form of idealism from Leibniz to Hegel was its opposition to nominalistic empiricism, the philosophical orientation of which Berkeley was in fact the most extreme example. Hence all the German idealists from Kant through to Hegel had rejected Berkeleyan idealism outright.[26] When early critics of Kant thought his 'transcendental idealism' similar to Berkeley's, Kant had reacted with horror, and set about rewriting sections of the *Critique of Pure Reason* to counter this reading. Moreover, further developments of German idealism with the work of Fichte, Schelling and Hegel had been, as Frederick Beiser has recently put it, a 'struggle against subjectivism', a subjectivism that they, correctly or not, saw as still haunting Kant's philosophy despite his avowed anti-Berkeleyan intentions. Beiser lists the intellectual sources of this form of 'objective' or 'absolute' idealism that took root in the 1790s as Spinozism, Platonism, and 'vital materialism'.[27] Spinoza had been the thinker who had overtly identified the ideational realm and the material realm, construing each as aspects of the one substance, and the forms of Platonism taken up by the objective idealists were also ones in which the platonic ideas were seen as immanent in worldly things, as in Aristotle, rather than residing in some otherworldly realm.[28] These elements in turn shaped the 'vital materialism' – the idea that matter was not dead and inert, as Newton had supposed, but possessed of a type of intrinsic motive force. Such views were entirely antithetical to Berkeley's 'immaterialism', but objective idealism had problems of its own, and Hegel had in turn tried to re-incorporate within the outlook of objective idealism, certain elements of Kantian idealism.

When this idealist movement was revived in Great Britain in the later part of the century, it in many ways still had this same somewhat hybrid form which combined aspects of Kant with aspects of more 'objective' forms of German idealism. The only way to make sense of Moore's early position, I suggest, is to say that rather than breaking with idealism *per se*, he was rejecting a form of idealism he saw as

Berkeleyan and Kantian, and was embracing a form of idealism more properly seen as objective, and as represented by a form of non-transcendent Platonism.[29] On the view that I am suggesting, Moore's criticism of Bradley's Kantianism was essentially that levelled against Kant by objective idealists like Schelling. From Moore's point of view, Bradley, like Kant, had not gone far enough in his critique of subjectivism.[30]

Here then is my first heretical thesis about the origins of analytic philosophy and its relation to nineteenth-century idealism, it is that which is broadly signaled by Baldwin in his 'tendentious subtitle'. At least in its starting position, analytic philosophy did not originate in a revolt against idealism and replace it with a more common-sensical, fundamentally empiricist philosophy. Rather, it started with the embrace of a form of objective idealism, and a rejection of just those 'empiricist' elements that, in the form of Kantian subjectivism, were thought of as tainting British idealism in general. A few years prior to the publication of Moore's essay, London society was transfixed by a courtroom drama unfolding at the Old Bailey – the series of trials of Oscar Wilde. At one point, Wilde's prosecutor, quoting from a poem by Lord Alfred Douglas, put to Wilde the question: 'What is "the Love that dare not speak its name"?'.[31] Wilde's answer was understandably indirect, but it included that the claim that it was the love 'such as Plato made the very basis of his philosophy'. In a somewhat different sense, I suggest, neither was Plato's philosophy able to speak its proper name in Moore's philosophising. The appropriate name for his stance was, I suggest, 'objective idealism'. But Moore's philosophy was unable to speak its name because the name 'idealism' had become, and has stayed, inseparably associated with the name of Berkeley, and the late Victorian resistance to secularism. This confusion has distorted analytic philosophy's view of nineteenth-century idealism ever since.

The Trojan horse

You might think that what I have said so far still has little bearing on the eventual outcome of the analytic revolution. Even if a case could be

made for describing Russell and Moore as initially 'objective idealists', Russell explicitly developed a criticism of what he took to be the key errors of this form of thought by criticising its logical presuppositions, and he did this in the course of playing a key role in the development of the logic used in that criticism – modern predicate calculus. Here, it might be thought, the genuine locus of the revolution behind the break of analytic philosophy with nineteenth-century idealism is to be found where Michael Dummett locates it – the revolution in mathematical logic effectively sparked by the work of Gottlob Frege, possibly the most significant formal logician since Aristotle.[32]

This part of the story is usually told along these broad lines. Moore had talked of analysing objects conceived as propositions into their component 'concepts', but both the tools for the analysis of such propositional contents into their significant parts, and an adequate understanding of the nature of the contents themselves, had to await the developments in logic and semantics that were to follow. Moreover, it was just these developments that led Russell away from the oddly Platonistic starting point he initially shared with Moore. The developments in logic allowed this to proceed in the following ways. First, modern logic was to show how misleading a reliance on the accepted and traditional 'subject–predicate' structure of sentences in fact was, and developed techniques for paraphrasing or 'regimenting' sentences into their properly logical syntactic forms. Earlier philosophies, working with pre-scientific conceptions of language, it was claimed, fell into predictable traps. Next, after having dispensed with such illusory surface forms of language, the underlying logical structure of language could then be taken as a guide to the deep ontological structure of the world. This project has been carried out up to the present with ever increasing scientific sophistication.

Something like this picture is, I think, the officially 'received view' in analytic philosophy, although it is far from being unanimously held. It is the view endorsed largely by those who see themselves as 'realists' and disendorsed by a range of critics who are often grouped together as 'anti-realists'. Critics of anti-realism often portray their opponents as having something in common with 'idealists' who, they

say, lacked a sense of the mind-independence of reality. In turn, critics of realism often portray their opponents as committed to a view of philosophical knowledge that is incompatible with a view of ourselves as natural beings. They often claim that realists aspire to a 'God's-eye view' of the world, and then call into question the relevance of such an image for a conception of our cognitive relations to the world. They even sometimes suggest that their realist opponents are themselves 'idealists': if a realist appeals to the 'propositional' structure of reality in order to secure the correspondence theory of truth, for example, this sounds as if she has projected the structure of her own sentences about reality onto reality itself.[33] Here then is my second heretical thesis – both realists and anti-realists are to a degree correct in what they say of each other, and conversely, incorrect in what they say of themselves. Realists are generally correct in linking contemporary 'anti-realists' with a certain type of nineteenth-century idealism – that of Immanuel Kant – and anti-realists are generally correct in seeing a type of idealism in their realist opponents – the idealism of the continental 'objective' idealists. I have suggested a source of this latter form of idealism in the case of the starting position. Similarly, the Kantianism of 'anti-realists' should not be seen as some type of late foreign import into analytic philosophy. My suggestion is that when Russell welcomed into the new philosophy the logical approach of Frege, he brought within its walls a Trojan horse, filled with those 'Kantian' ideas that were to become manifest in what Rorty described as analysis's 'Kantian phase'.

It is now commonly argued by historians of analytic philosophy that beneath the technical breakthroughs developed during its early heroic years there were in play quite different underlying understandings of the task of the 'analysis' enabled by those breakthroughs – differences that separated Russell and Moore from Frege and, more importantly, from Wittgenstein. As in the starting position, Russell continued to aspire to achieve distinctly ontological results by the use of analysis: the analysis of the logical form of our judgments about the world was supposed to issue in knowledge about the deep structure of the world itself. Conversely, it is often said that there was a dimension to the approach of Frege and Wittgenstein, in which moving from the

structure of 'judgments' to the structure of the world in the Russellian manner was resisted,[34] and that this resistance became more explicit in some later variants of analysis. Thus Wittgenstein himself, in his later writings, Rudolf Carnap and Gilbert Ryle were all to refuse, albeit in quite different ways, to draw ontological or, as they often put it, 'metaphysical' implications from the paraphrastic forms of analysis that the new logic had made available. Like Kant, at the end of the eighteenth-century, they refused to derive metaphysical knowledge of 'reality' from the logical structure of sentences or thoughts about empirically real things.[35]

The thesis that Frege's logic had a Kantian genealogy is held by a variety of scholars. In Germany in the last third of the nineteenth-century, Kantian philosophy had undergone a revival, and Frege is sometimes spoken of as coming from or at least influenced by this neo-Kantian movement.[36] Moreover, while once it was common to claim that Kant had made no contributions to logic and simply presupposed the correctness of Aristotelian syllogistic logic, an increasing number of philosophers have argued that Kant should be seen as the originator of a number of key logical ideas found in Frege.[37] Mary Tiles sums up this approach when she claims that that although Kant had contributed nothing towards the development of formal or symbolic techniques, he was, nevertheless, 'the architect who provides conceptual design sketches for the new edifice that was to be built on the site once occupied by Aristotelian, syllogistic logic'.[38]

In terms of the key philosophical aspects of Frege's approach to judgment, Robert Brandom, for example, regards its Kantian roots reflected in Frege's resistance to thinking of the structure of the proposition as dissolvable into atomistically conceived parts as conceived by Russell and Moore. For Brandom, this resistance to atomism is linked to Kant's radical reinterpretation of what a concept was. While early modern philosophers such as Descartes, Locke or Berkeley had thought of concepts as subjective states that purported to represent properties of objects, and while Moore had thought of them objectively as what was perceived in experience, for Kant, concepts were neither subjective states of the mind, nor entities in the world, but rather, rules for the formation of judgements about

the world, judgments which had to be consistent were they to be regarded as judgments about a single world.[39] This Kantian, 'rule-like', understanding of concepts was to become more explicit in Wittgenstein, especially in his later writings, where he advised that in order to grasp the meaning of a concept one should look to the conventional, that is, rule-guided, use of the word that expresses it.[40]

These developments are significant for the issue of the degree of continuity of analysis with nineteenth-century idealism as, following Russell, it has usually been accepted that idealism had been plagued with metaphysical assumptions consequent upon its naive acceptance of traditional Aristotelian logic. Much work would have to be done to show the link between Kant's and Hegel's logics, and their respective relations to Aristotelian syllogistic logic, for example,[41] but the shakiness of Russell's big claim about the unprecedented revolutionary implications of Frege's logic is apparent when we look at a single example in this regard.

In *My Philosophical Development*, Russell describes the significance of his having met Italian logician Giuseppe Peano at the International Congress of Philosophy in Paris in 1900. It was Peano who alerted Russell to the philosophical significance of Frege's new logic, and, Russell claims, it was Peano who conveyed to him an idea that was perhaps the key logical prototype for the paraphrastic technique that was behind his criticism of the idealists' logic.[42] This was the idea that universal affirmative judgments, such as 'All Greeks are mortal', should not be thought of on the model of a singular judgment such as 'Socrates is mortal', but rather should be regarded as having the 'if ... then' structure of 'conditionals', as in 'if something is a Greek, then that thing is mortal'. By 1905, Russell had extended this to his celebrated theory of descriptions, in which he argued that definite descriptions when occurring in the place of grammatical subject of sentences should also be paraphrased in a parallel way.[43] That is, neither should one understand a sentence like 'The present king of France is bald' on the model of a sentence like 'Socrates is bald'.

It was this type of paraphrastic reinterpretation of grammar that had given Russell the crucial tools for developing a logic of relations needed for his work on mathematics and to oppose a view that,

he claimed, was shared by all the idealists: the 'axiom of internal relations'. But just as the story of Moore's relation to Bradley was more complicated than it appears at first sight, so was that concerning Russell's.[44] The account of what he had learnt from Peano that he gives in *My Philosophical Development*, looking back over a half a century after the events, contradicts what he had written in a footnote to his groundbreaking 1905 essay, 'On Denoting', where he tells of first learning of the treatment of universally quantified judgments not from Peano, but from Bradley.[45] Bradley had indeed treated universally affirmative judgments as conditionals in *The Principles of Logic* written in the early 1890s,[46] and, moreover, he there claimed to have derived this analysis by a correction of the more psychologistic formulation found in the work of J. F. Herbart,[47] a German Kantian philosopher of the generation of Schelling and Hegel who had taken Kant's ideas in a more naturalistic, psychological direction. And as we can see from the recent reconstructive work by Tiles and others on Kant's 'transcendental logic', it is evident from where Herbart got the idea – Kant himself.

Frege's logic was a Trojan horse for the introduction of Kantian elements back into philosophy after the early Moore and Russell had tried to eject them in favour, not of empiricism, but of objective idealism. Much of the recent history of analytic philosophy with its apparently irresolvable realism – antirealism disputes has been, I suggest, driven by intuitions mobilised by these two opposing stances. And if we see these resulting struggles as struggles between opposing forms of idealism, we might start to see how suggestions of an Hegelian resolution of these struggles may have come about.

Hegel, Sellars and contemporary philosophy

In their reconstructions of nineteenth-century German idealism, Robert Pippin and Terry Pinkard have described Hegel as a post-Kantian idealist who was able to offer a Kantian way out of some of the remaining problems characterising Kantianism itself.[48] A similar formula might be adopted for the Hegelian intentions of Brandom and McDowell with respect to their relation to the ideas of the American

analytic philosopher Wilfrid Sellars. Both start from the distinctly Kantian-flavoured critique of the 'myth of the given' offered by Sellars in his 1957 lecture series *Empiricism and the Philosophy of Mind*, and then purport to show a fully Sellarsian way beyond some of the residual problems of his own philosophy, problems pervading much subsequent analytic philosophy as well. This is the move that Rorty alludes to with the idea that they take analytic philosophy from its Kantian to its Hegelian phase.

Sellars's critique had been directed at the type of 'empiricism' found in Russell's 1912 work, *The Problems of Philosophy*,[49] a traditional empiricism that clearly sat poorly within the framework of the emerging new philosophy. Like the traditional empiricist, Russell had appealed to immediate sensory experience in order to provide a certain foundation for empirical knowledge of the world, but the difficulties of doing this in the context of a philosophy being transformed by Fregean changes in logic should not be underestimated. Thus Russell had attempted ultimately to secure the certainty of perceptual judgments of world-constituting 'facts' by means of what he took to be the mind's direct 'acquaintance' with the atomic components of those facts. The mind was held to be directly acquainted not with individual tables, trees or human beings as Aristotle held, but with 'sense-data' – patches of colour, felt textures, and so on – discrete atomic sensory elements from which the 'facts' would somehow be constructed. But to so construct those facts, the mind needed access to whatever it was in the world that correlated with the logical parts of sentences, and Russell considered that they too were to be read off the world by a type of direct acquaintance. That is, the mind can also be directly acquainted with universals and the relations between them. In fact, Russell's account of 'acquaintance' with universals was much like the view of which Kant had be critical over a century before as presupposing a type of God-like power he called 'intellectual intuition', and it is the same target that many contemporary anti-realists have in view when they question the human aspiration to any 'God's-eye view' of the world. Moreover, this view had been embraced by Russell precisely as part of the initial project against Kantian idealism.[50]

Sellars, who had a detailed knowledge of the history of philosophy, was well aware that his critique of 'the given' threatened to lead from a type of Kantianism that he endorsed, towards a type of Hegelianism that he did not.[51] But I take it to be part of McDowell's intent in *Mind and World* to undermine the very image of the mind and its relation to the world that this worry relies on, an image that he see Sellars himself as having dismantled. For his part, Brandom's turn to Hegel is reflected in the context of his criticisms of the rationalistic account of perceptual knowledge that Sellars had substituted for the empiricist appeal to the mythical given, but again the resources for this were to be found in Sellars himself. Sellars had suggested that we should approach knowledge not as resulting from a process of construction from atomic components known with certainty by individuals, but from the linguistic interaction among those individuals. In Brandom's development, we should see human learning as happening within forms of social interaction in which members of a linguistic community play a peculiar type of language game centreing on assertion. This game involves not only the assertion of claims, but also the act of giving of reasons in response to challenges should they arise. In this game, the players hold themselves and each other to shared rules specifying what is to count as justifying a claim, and these rules too can be made the subject of challenge and justification. Knowledge is seen as social and self-correcting, rather than individual and in need of foundations.

The general course of the path from Kant to Hegel is not difficult to discern here. The breakthrough, according to Brandom, lay in Kant's treatment of concepts as rules rather than subjective mental items – rules that allowed the thinker to make the kind of inferences required by the practice of justifying claims. Hegel had extended this idea in various ways, but importantly, he had taken the rule-governed or normative basis of intentional behaviours like that of asserting to be grounded in social life. In particular, he had treated the normative fabric of these social interactions in terms of a notion taken from the legal philosophy of the first important post-Kantian idealist, J. G. Fichte. This normative fabric is make up of the patterns of reciprocal acts of 'recognition' or 'acknowledgement' [*Anerkennung*]

between individual subjects, such as those supporting the objective but non-natural statuses of legal 'rights'.[52] This view is idealist in the sense that a normative status, such as that of possessing a right, cannot be reduced to any empirical property or combination of empirical properties, but depends upon practices in which rights are acknowledged. But given the practice of ascribing rights, say property rights, there is nothing mysteriously mind-dependent involved in the fact that, say, a particular car is my car, despite the fact of its being mine cannot be understood on the model of its being, say, white or four-wheeled.

We might now see how this normative realm re-introduces something like that to which 'metaphysical' knowledge aspires, something more than and irreducible to the world of empirical 'things'. But this is not in the sense of some world of metaphysical objects criticised by Kant as implying the god-like capacity for intellectual intuition. Take the puzzling ontological status of 'facts' for example. In the context of my normative relations to others, I will ascribe to certain others knowledge. The content of that knowledge, we might say, is just what is the case – it is 'the facts'. But there would not be a world of facts in addition to the world of things if it were not the case that I had already adopted the appropriate normative attitudes to others and, given the normative reciprocity of these attitudes, to myself. There is a certain sense in which the normative framework of the world in which we live can be described – we can reflect on the historical origins of particular norms, and chart their subsequent development, for example. But they cannot be described as merely factual, as say, an anthropologist might hope to describe them, without ceasing to be our norms, and conflicts within them cannot be resolved without some sort of appeal to the ones we take to be most essential. They have to be described from the point of view of agents who endorse them as their own. In Sellars's apt phrase, the world from this perspective is 'fraught with ought', and it is the ineliminability of the 'ought' that I take to be the characteristic mark of Hegel's idealism. But neither do the 'oughts' issue from any supernatural agent – the divine legislator of norms typical of early modern philosophy – they come from us. This is necessary if they

are to be ours.

Here Hegel tells a story that is a type of idealist analogue of the one told by Hobbes, but the distinctive thing that marks his story from that of Hobbes is the conception of the will expressed in those imagined struggles from which Hobbes had pictured society as emerging. For Hobbes this struggle was basically over power over worldly goods capable of satisfying naturalistically conceived appetites. For Hegel it was more a struggle over who gets to assert the norms that would be the ones regulating society and, ultimately, intentional life – that is, over the norms that would be recognized as authoritative. As Hegel thought of philosophy itself as that part of culture in which a society's norms were given their most explicit, conceptually articulated expression, he thought of it too as a realm driven by a similar sort of 'struggle for recognition'.

Hegel's approach here involved the general type of cultural reconciliationism that had been a part of continental European idealism since Leibniz, a philosopher working in the aftermath of the Thirty Years War. In struggles in philosophy as elsewhere, the trick was to establish the contexts which gave the antagonists the sense of the legitimacy of their own claims – that is, to establish a type of local legitimacy that had been overreached by each antagonist in the attempt to impose its norms on the other. The standard way to think of such situations in philosophy is to conceive of a goal of an ultimate all encompassing framework in which all the local claims could be grasped as contextually legitimate in their own restricted domains. But such a conception seems to reintroduce a type of God's-eye point of view. Hegel's concept of 'reciprocal recognition', as allowing a conception of a common content among perspectivally opposed and equally 'one-sided' individual thoughts, is intended to capture just the idea of such a thinkable content without locating it in relation to any single transcendent or divine thinker.[53]

Thirty five years ago, the idea of a possible version of Hegelian philosophy in any way acceptable within contemporary philosophy was effectively unthinkable. I hope that I have given you some reason to think that perhaps that is no longer quite so obviously the case.

Notes

1 J. McDowell, *Mind and World*, Cambridge, Mass., 1994; R. Brandom, *Making It Explicit*, Cambridge, Mass., 1994.

2 T. Pinkard, *Hegel's Phenomenology: The Sociality of Reason*, Cambridge, 1994.

3 R. B. Pippin, *Hegel's Idealism: The Satisfactions of Self-Consciousness*, Cambridge, 1989.

4 R. Rorty, Introduction to W. Sellars, *Empiricism and the Philosophy of Mind* (with study guide by R. Brandom), Cambridge, Mass., 1997, pp.8–9.

5 For an attempt to relate the claims of McDowell and Brandom to the Kant-Hegel tradition see my *Analytic Philosophy and the Return of Hegelian Thought*, Cambridge, 2007. For a compelling challenge to the standard account of analytic philosophy's relation to British idealism, see S. Candlish, *The Russell/Bradley Dispute and its Significance for Twentieth-Century Philosophy*, Basingstoke, 2007. Candlish notes that one of his concerns in this work is 'to illustrate how subsequent English-language philosophy has been subject to false conceptions of its own history' (p.x).

6 Bertrand Russell, *My Philosophical Development*, London, 1959, p.42. A similar account is given in 'My Mental Development' in P. Schilpp, ed., *The Philosophy of Bertrand Russell*, Evanston, Ill., 1946.

7 Such a general account of the culture of British idealism is given by David Stove in 'Idealism: a Victorian horror-story (Part One)', in *The Plato Cult*, Oxford, 1991.

8 L. Wittgenstein, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, trans. C. K. Ogden, London, 1922, §§ 1 & 1.1.

9 D. M. Armstrong, *A World of States of Affairs*, Cambridge, 1997. Armstrong notes the link to Wittgenstein's Tractarian position, but also mentions the influence on his own views of the doctrine of John Anderson that 'reality, while independent of the mind that knows it, has a propositional structure' (p.3).

10 James Boswell, *Life of Johnson*, ed. R. W. Chapman; rev. by J. D. Fleeman; with a new introd. by P. Rogers, Oxford, 1980, p.333.

11 P. F. Strawson, 'Truth', *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*, suppl. vol. 24, reprinted in Michael P. Lynch, ed., *The Nature of Truth: Classic and Contemporary Perspectives*, Cambridge, Mass, 2001, p.453.

12 P. Hylton, *Russell, Idealism and the Emergence of Analytic Philosophy*, Oxford, 1990, pp.118–24.

13 G. E. Moore, 'The Nature of Judgment', in *Selected Writings*, ed. T. Baldwin, London, 1983, p.8. Or again, 'When, therefore, I say "This rose is red" ... What I mean to assert is nothing about my mental states, but a specific

connection of concepts.' ('The Nature of Judgment', p.4).

14 In a letter to Desmond MacCarthy dated August 14, 1898, quoted in T. Regan, *Bloomsbury's Prophet: G.E. Moore and the Development of his Moral Philosophy*, Philadelphia, 1986, p.106.

15 T. Baldwin, *G. E. Moore*, London, 1990, p.40. Moore's extreme Platonism perplexed members of the idealist establishment such as Bosanquet, who had examined Moore's thesis in 1898, complaining that this way of correcting the alleged subjectivism of Kant surely amounted to throwing the baby out with the bathwater. Bosanquet's comments are quoted in Hylton, *Russell, Idealism and the Emergence of Analytic Philosophy*, pp.120–21.

16 Russell, *My Philosophical Development*, pp.48–49.

17 See, for example, J. Hornsby, 'Truth: The Identity Theory', *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* 97 (1997): 1–24; S. Candlish, 'The Identity Theory of Truth', *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Spring 2007 Edition), Edward N. Zalta, ed., URL = http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2007/entries/truth-identity/; J. Dodd, *An Identity Theory of Truth*, London, 2000.

18 S. Candlish, 'The Truth about F.H. Bradley', *Mind* 98 (1989): 331–48, and T. Baldwin, 'The Identity Theory of Truth', *Mind* 100 (1991): 35–52.

19 Although see the criticism by Robert Stern, 'Did Hegel hold an identity theory of truth?' *Mind* 102 (1993): 645–48. The issue here is clouded by a host of interpretative questions regarding Hegel's metaphysics. My own view is that the 'identity theory' is probably better suited to the objective idealism of Schelling, but not Hegel's distinct form of idealism which I will refer to as 'absolute idealism'. But Bradley took Hegel to be an objective idealist on the Schellingian model, as do a number of contemporary interpreters such as Frederick Beiser (see fn.27 below).

20 Baldwin, 'The Identity Theory of Truth', p.49.

21 Thus both Hornsby in 'Truth: The Identity Theory', and Candlish in 'A Prolegomenon to an Identity Theory of Truth', *Philosophy* 74 (1999): 199–221, adopt McDowell as a contemporary exemplar. Specifically on this relation, see also J. Dodd, 'McDowell and Identity Theories of Truth', *Analysis* 55 (1995): 160–65.

22 McDowell, *Mind and World*, p.27.

23 McDowell, *Mind and World*, p.27.

24 McDowell, *Mind and World*, p.44.

25 Locke's 'idea' was translated as '*Vorstellung*'.

26 Thus, in relation to the criticism of idealism by Russell and Moore, Sebastian Gardner comments that 'much of what was rejected in the name of idealism consisted in an identification of idealism with a Berkeleyan subjectivism that the whole tradition from Kant onwards had strained to

refute'. S. Gardner, 'The Limits of Naturalism' in E. Hammer, ed., *German Idealism: Contemporary Perspectives*, London, 2007, p.46, note 19.

27 Frederick Beiser, *German Idealism: The Struggle Against Subjectivism, 1781–1801*, Cambridge, Mass., 2002, pp.361–68. Beiser distinguishes 'subjective' and 'objective' forms of idealism in the following way: 'In subjective idealism the ideal or rational is the subjective, mental, or spiritual; in objective idealism it is the archetypical, intelligible, and structural' (p.11). For a detailed account of the role of Platonism in German idealism see W. Beierwaltes, *Platonismus und Idealismus*, Frankfurt am Main, 2004, and Jean-Louis Vieillard-Baron, *Platon et L'Idéalisme Allemand (1770–1830)*, Paris, 1979.

28 Again, this is a broad characteristic of 'Australian materialism'. Differentiating extreme 'Platonic' realism from 'a moderate or Aristotelian realism' that 'holds that universals exist only in particulars', Armstrong notes the Aristotelian character of his 'world as states of affairs'. Armstrong, *A World of States of Affairs*, p.22.

29 In fact, such a general picture of Moore's early philosophy seems irresistible when we look to that part of his philosophy for which he is most well known – his ethical theory. Moore was in fact deeply antagonistic to forms of empiricist naturalism in ethics, in particular that of J. S. Mill. Perhaps the most well-known doctrine from the major work of his career – the hugely influential *Principia Ethica* of 1903 – was its critique of 'the naturalistic fallacy,' and far from being an anti-idealist critique, the critique of naturalism in ethics had effectively been a staple of the idealist tradition. As Thomas Hurka has pointed out, contemporary reviews of Moore's *Principia* did not think its central anti-naturalist claim particularly original, as similar criticisms of the naturalistic fallacy were common among late nineteenth century idealists. (Thomas Hurka, 'Moore in the Middle,' *Ethics* 113 (2003): 599–630.) What Moore seems to have been critical of in Bradley was the mediating role played by subjectivist, 'representationalist' considerations in his otherwise objective idealism, not his idealism *per se*.

30 Bradley had differentiated between ideas as particular psychological states and the universal non-psychological contents or meanings of those states, but had stopped short of Moore's logical realism and thought of logic as 'incomplete' and in need of psychology. 'Truth necessarily (if I am right) implies an aspect of psychical existence. In order to be, truth itself must happen and occur, and must exist as what we call a mental event. Hence, to completely realize itself as truth, truth would have to include this essential aspect of its own being. And yet from this aspect logic, if it means to exist, is compelled to abstract.' F. H. Bradley, *The Principles of Logic*, second edition, London, 1922, p.612, quoted in Steve

Gerrard, 'Desire and Desirability: Bradley, Russell, and Moore Versus Mill' in W. W. Tait, ed., *Early Analytic Philosophy: Frege, Russell, Wittgenstein*, Chicago, 1997, p.67. This dependency also went the other way. Psychology was also incomplete, and stood in need of logic.

31 H. Montgomery Hyde, ed., *The Trials of Oscar Wilde: Regina (Wilde) v. Queensberry, Regina v. Wilde and Taylor*, London, 1948, p.236. The poem, 'Two Loves' by Wilde's lover, Douglas, had been published in the Oxford student magazine *The Chameleon* in the previous year.

32 Michael Dummett, *Origins of Analytical Philosophy*, Cambridge, Mass., 1993.

33 A point made in relation to David Armstrong's factualism by Michael Morris: 'Surely propositional structure is fundamentally the structure of propositions; that is, of sentences. What (IT) [the thesis holding that sentences and facts are isomorphic] does is simply read the structure of sentences into the world. But that can only be legitimate if the nature of sentences somehow determines the nature of the world, and that is an idealist thesis.' M. Morris, 'Realism beyond Correspondence', in H. Beebee and J. Dodd, eds, *Truthmakers: The Contemporary Debate*, Oxford, 2005, p.51.

34 The characterization of the difference is from Hylton, *Russell, Idealism and the Emergence of Analytic Philosophy*, p.223, but see also the discussion in Michael Beaney, 'Russell and Frege', in Nicholas Griffin, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Bertrand Russell*, Cambridge, 2003, section VI.

35 Kant claimed to be a realist about the objects of our empirical judgments. What he was an 'idealist' about were the metaphysical judgments that went beyond the direct or indirect constraint by the senses. He was an 'idealist' about supposed entities like God, the individual mind, and the world as a unified whole. Note that with the first and second of these, he was an idealist about exactly what Berkeley had been a realist about.

36 See, for example, Hans Sluga, *Gottlob Frege*, London, 1980.

37 Revisionist readings of Kant's logic are found in M. Thompson, 'Singular Terms and Intuitions in Kant's Epistemology', *Review of Metaphysics*, 26 (1972–73): 314–43; D. Bell, *Frege's Theory of Judgement*, Oxford, 1979; B. Longuenesse, *Kant and The Capacity to Judge: Sensibility and Discursivity in the Transcendental Analytic of the Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. Charles T. Wolfe, Princeton, 1998; R. Hanna, *Kant and the Foundations of Analytic Philosophy*, Oxford, 2001, and Mary Tiles, 'Kant: From General to Transcendental Logic', in D. M. Gabbay and J. Woods, eds, *Handbook of the History of Logic: Volume 3, The Rise of Modern Logic: From Leibniz to Frege*, Amsterdam, 2004.

38 Tiles, 'Kant: From General to Transcendental Logic', p.85.

39 M. Beaney, ed., *The Frege Reader*, Oxford, 1997, p.90 (see also, p.108). A similar idea is expressed by Michael Beaney when commenting on Frege's radical ontological distinction of objects and concepts. Frege took as a model for understanding a concept the mathematical idea of a 'function', an ideal that is more *rule like* than *thing like*: 'On Frege's view' Beaney points out, 'there is a universal domain of objects, and functions (including concepts) are *mappings* of those objects onto one another: they cannot themselves be objects, but are more like *rules* for taking us around the domain'. M. Beaney, 'Russell and Frege', p.165.

40 L. Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, trans. G. E. M. Anscombe, Oxford, 1953.

41 I have made a start on this project in *Analytic Philosophy and the Return of Hegelian Thought*, chs 3 & 4.

42 Russell, *My Philosophical Development*, pp.51–52.

43 Bertrand Russell, 'On Denoting', in *Logic and Knowledge: Essays 1901–1950*, London, 1956,

44 That much of Russell's portrayal of Bradley was grossly misleading is argued by Stewart Candlish in *The Russell/Bradley Dispute and its Significance for Twentieth-Century Philosophy*.

45 Russell, 'On Denoting', p. 43.

46 Russell refers to Bradley's, *Principles of Logic*, (first edition) Bk.1, ch.II. There Bradley says that in the judgment 'Animals are mortal' 'We *mean* "Whatever is an animal will die," but that is the same as *If* anything is an animal *then* it is mortal. The assertion really is about mere hypothesis; it is not about fact.' Russell, 'On Denoting', p.47.

47 Russell, 'On Denoting', p.43.

48 See, for example, R. B. Pippin, 'Avoiding German Idealism: Kant, Hegel, and the Reflective Judgment Problem', in *Idealism as Modernism: Hegelian Variations* (Cambridge, 1997), and T. Pinkard, *German Philosophy 1760—1860: The Legacy of Idealism*, Cambridge, 2002.

49 Beertrand Russell, *The Problems of Philosophy*, London, 1912.

50 Russell, *The Problems of Philosophy*, pp.132–33.

51 Thus Sellars referred to his lectures as as his 'incipient *Meditations Hegelièrnes*' (*sic*). Sellars, *Empiricism and the Philosophy of Mind*, §20. Sellars actually advocated a hybrid of Kantian and scientific realist thought, and elsewhere invoked an image of Hegelianism as a serpent swallowing its tail, an image that fits Russell's critical depiction of the idealism of his predecessors. Thus Russell had pilloried Bradley, for example, for his alleged reduction of the notion of truth to the idea of mere coherence among beliefs, a conception of truth that it now seems unlikely that Bradley ever held. See Candlish, *The Russell/Bradley Dispute*, ch.4.

52 J. G. Fichte, *Foundations of Natural Right*, F. Neuhouser, ed., Cambridge, 2000.

53 A model of the type of common-mindedness that can preserve difference can be found in Hegel's treatment of the contract in Hegel's *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*, ed. A. W. Wood, trans. H. B. Nisbet, Cambridge, 1991, §§72–77. If I agree to exchange my A for your B, there is a way of representing what is wanted in common (the exchange of A and B), but of course we both actually want something not only different but opposed to the other. I have tried to bring out some of the peculiar 'logic' of Hegel's use of such recognitive structures in *Hegel's Hermeneutics*, Ithaca, 1996, especially chapters 8–11.