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***Collected Essays in Speculative Philosophy,***  
**by James Bradley, ed. Sean J. McGrath,**  
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Reviewed by Francis K. Peddle

James Bradley was an Anglo-British philosopher who spent his professional career teaching at Memorial University of Newfoundland from 1988 to his untimely death from cancer in 2012. Though his written output is not as substantial as many of his contemporaries, he has nonetheless achieved, through reputation and a fecundity of ideas, something of an iconic status in the idealist community in Canada. Dominican University College awarded him an honorary doctorate posthumously. This collection of essays, long time in the making and edited by his protégé Sean J. McGrath, will be the litmus test for the staying power of Bradley's speculative philosophy in the coming years. The Bradley Memorial Lectures or the James Bradley Lectureship, which began at Memorial University in October 2012, is an ongoing annual event, or at least it was until the beginning of the pandemic.

The ten essays in this volume (hereafter *Essays*) are ordered chronologically from an early essay on F. H. Bradley in the 1980s to "Philosophy and Trinity," published in the *Canadian Journal of Philosophy* in the year of his death. Bradley's "path to the Trinity is the theme of this book," and

the editor uses this as his criterion for inclusion in the collection.<sup>1</sup> There is an extensive introduction by Sean J. McGrath, a preface by fellow Memorial University philosopher Peter Harris (1931–2018), and a postscript by Bradley’s friend Helmut Maassen. Together the contributions by Harris and Maassen add some poignant personal touches to Bradley’s character and *modus vivendi*. There are two appendices: Appendix A is “James Bradley’s Tables of Triads and Trinities,” which will be critically examined later, while Appendix B is a very helpful “Complete List of James Bradley’s Publications.” Overall, the manuscript is in good shape, with few errors and inconsistencies. Thankfully, Edinburgh University Press tolerates the use of footnotes instead of mandating irksome endnotes.

In contemporary philosophy the term *speculative* has no particular meaning. Tracking from crass materialism to various amalgams of the cult, it is suspiciously eyed, usually dismissively, by professional philosophers in the Anglo-American world. There are philosophers who present technical definitions of the term, see G. W. F. Hegel, *The Encyclopedia of the Philosophical Sciences* (§ 82)—but for the most part, you would have to be in a sustained and careful dialogue with a speculative *aficionado* to garner its special meaning and associated clusters of concepts and motivations. It is clear that Bradley likes the term *speculative*. He infuses it with much significance and force. It is therefore incumbent upon us to discern its basic underpinnings in his philosophy. I take Bradley’s understanding of “a strong theory of existence,” and his trinitarianism (in a non-confessional, non-theological sense), to be the fundamental hallmarks of his speculative philosophy. There are many other closely aligned ideas in Bradley’s work, but if you want the basic pivots, these two orientations cannot be argued away or buried in the foibles of the history of philosophy.

### **James Bradley’s Big Four: F.H. Bradley, Alfred Whitehead, C.S. Peirce, R.G. Collingwood**

Bradley wrote his doctoral dissertation on F. H. Bradley’s (no relation) “theory of feeling,” which he takes as the illuminating portal into the latter’s absolute. His basic interpretation of the British Neo-Idealist is that if such considerations as a “non-relational continuum” and the “historical-critical” are understood in light of a metaphysics of feeling, then the philosopher’s particular brand of neo-idealism would have had much more traction in

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<sup>1</sup> Sean J. McGrath, “Introduction: James Bradley’s Path to the Trinity” in *Collected Essays in Speculative Philosophy*, by James Bradley, ed. Sean J. McGrath, (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2021), 7.

twentieth-century philosophy.<sup>2</sup> Privileging relations over substances is the non-Aristotelian game plan of much of contemporary philosophy, both speculative and analytical (or, indefinitely, neither). Some well worked out recent examples of this privileging are Peter McCormick's *Relationals: On the Nature and Grounds of Persons*,<sup>3</sup> especially chapter 5 "Speculative Relations" under the heading "Persons and Relations," and *The Metaphysics of Relations*,<sup>4</sup> especially Jeffrey Brower's "Aristotelian vs. Contemporary Perspectives on Relations."

The theory of feeling in F. H. Bradley, as maturely expressed in "On Our Knowledge of Immediate Experience," in *Essays on Truth and Reality* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1914), is a way of creating a post-Kantian subject-object identity that dispenses with the transcendental "I" and Hegelian dialectical logic. For Bradley's speculative philosophy, this approach to the older Neo-Idealist does not inform his later thought in any significant way, except insofar as it is a springboard into a post-idealistic metaphysics that is still fundamentally speculative without being a speculative materialism (Quentin Meillassoux), a transcendental nihilism (Ray Brassier), or a blogger's world of pan-psychist metaphysics. Bradley would probably have some sympathy with Gilles Deleuze's view of the basic task of philosophy as impeding stupidity.

Jump ahead to a few years after his doctoral work, and Bradley finds much to advance his own thinking in Alfred Whitehead's process philosophy. The twin themes of "self-realisation" and the "temporalizing" of time, i.e., radical novelty, occupy chapters 2 to 4 of this collection. If the notion of the temporalizing of time sounds like a bloated pleonasm, then it is not. Much of twentieth-century philosophy hinges on the irreducibility of time. So much for it being Plato's moving image of eternity. Hence, time becomes principally "event time" that must privilege time-concepts or orientations. Time is not to be explained in terms of a contrasting eternity, or somehow constructed or synthesized out of non-temporal elements. Bradley's preferred term here is *event-concepts*. This is as much the philosophical agenda of Heidegger as of Wittgenstein. In Whitehead, event-concepts are "occasions," while Heidegger's term is "*Ereignis*." Bradley himself finds more hefty philosophical fare in the work of Whitehead. Event-concepts follow the theme of radical novelty.<sup>5</sup> Unpacking the implications of this for the self-repudiating tendencies of modern philosophy is the crux of chapter 2, "Whitehead, Heidegger, and

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<sup>2</sup> Bradley, *Essays*, 49.

<sup>3</sup> Peter McCormick, *Relationals: On the Nature and Grounds of Persons* (Kraków: Copernicus Center Press, 2020).

<sup>4</sup> See Anna Marmodoro and David Yates, eds., *The Metaphysics of Relations* (Oxford: University Press, 2016).

<sup>5</sup> Bradley, *Essays*, 52.

the Paradoxes of the New.”

Bradley uses the contrast between Whitehead and Heidegger to reveal his far greater empathy toward the metaphysics of the former than toward the “wholesale repudiation and destruction of the entire enterprise of philosophy” in the anti-metaphysics of the latter.<sup>6</sup> I take Bradley’s philosophical motivation to be basically soteriological. He wishes to “save” philosophy from its pervasive self-destructive tendencies in the twentieth century, hence his allegiance to a strong or positive theory of existence and its associated structures in triads and trinities, which he buttresses through rich re-interpretations of Whitehead, Peirce, and others that reveal their often-hidden speculative reams of gold. Ultimately he must, like all speculative philosophers, maintain that only his version of “speculative philosophy” can do this saving. The last chapter in this collection, “Philosophy and Trinity,” is his remedy, his final *apologia*: “With this, I rest my case for speculative philosophy.”<sup>7</sup>

The much-neglected metaphysics of Whitehead, though not as neglected as Bradley would lead us to believe, is a thoroughgoing re-working of the nature of metaphysics in terms of radical novelty. How it does this is one of the more substantive projects in Bradley’s speculative philosophy, and hence the importance of chapter 2 in this collection. The paradoxes of the new, though some would certainly quibble with their newness, take the familiar conceptual form of self-defeating propositions, like “all is relative,” or “all is self-realizing,” or “all is new.” I would call the internal logical contradiction in these statements “soft paradoxes.” They are not new, are easily sidestepped, and are definitely not what Bradley is talking about. The radical novelty of the anti-metaphysicians reduces all conceptual or logical abstraction to a deeper immersion in unrepeatable and unique content, variously described as “occasion,” “event,” “process,” or “clearing.” Radical novelty cannot be brushed off by logical fiat. If so, then philosophy cannot save itself. “There is only literature now.” The harder paradox in this situation is that there cannot be literature either, or history, or sociology, with its ever-shifting identities of social constructs. Even Joyce’s *Finnegans Wake* is not the end of literature, or grammar, or communication, or comprehensibility, or everything. There is, after all, a popular Chinese translation to refute those who thought any translation of *Finnegans Wake* impossible. For Bradley, Whitehead provides a way out of the whole unsettling mess with an “analogical algebra” of the new.<sup>8</sup> Analogical relations between categories and the empirical world constitute the power of a scheme, and such schemes are inherently speculative.<sup>9</sup>

The categorical, the mathematical, the schematic, the coordinate, the

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<sup>6</sup> Bradley, *Essays*, 53, 59, and especially 76–81.

<sup>7</sup> Bradley, *Essays*, 263.

<sup>8</sup> Bradley, *Essays*, 59.

<sup>9</sup> Bradley, *Essays*, 67.

methodological, the logical, the patterned, the general, are all retained in Whitehead's "algebraic method."<sup>10</sup> Radical novelty in Whitehead does not put an "anti" in front of all of the foregoing, but asks the oft-asked question, "How do the categorical and the empirical stand to each other?"<sup>11</sup> For the Whiteheadian process philosopher, empiricism is all-inclusive and unlike anything the tradition has served up—from the givens of classical British empiricism, to the reconstructed indeterminate immediacies of the idealists, to the lived experience of the phenomenologists.<sup>12</sup> Whitehead bows sufficiently to the philosophical tradition of rational connection and structure—i.e., to Platonism (after all, he said that all of Western philosophy is a footnote to Plato) for Bradley to make him instrumental to his speculative project. Is this enough? Clearly not. Speculative philosophy has to deal not only with the schematizing or generalizing of categorical thought processes, but with the ever-nebulous individual. In fashionable rejections of the philosophical tradition anti-metaphysicians always grumble about the cavalier, or veiled and unintentional, dismantling of the individual.

This is where polyadic propositional functions come into play. Imaginative generalization uses analogy to functionally coordinate the experiential by using words to correct each other. Whitehead's analogical algebra is thus the meat and potatoes of speculative philosophy, which is elaborated on extensively by Bradley in chapter 4, "The Speculative Generalisation of Function: The Key to Whitehead." Contemporary philosophers usually picture relations as polyadic. There are one-place or monadic properties and there are multi-place or polyadic properties. At least some of the latter are not reducible to the former. For a good contrast, see, Sydney Penner, "Why Do Medieval Philosophers Reject Polyadic Accidents?" in *The Metaphysics of Relations*, mentioned above. Analogical algebra dissolves the "Hegel–Heidegger disjunction," according to Bradley.<sup>13</sup> In other words, "the true speculative proposition" transcends the "mutual inversions of univocity and equivocity" so prevalent in the philosophical tradition by means of the "analogical proposition of schematic analysis."<sup>14</sup> For a luxuriant treatment of the speculative proposition in Hegel's philosophy, see Jeffrey Reid, *Hegel's Grammatical Ontology* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2021).

Chapters 3 and 4 should be read as further elaborations on the foregoing themes in F. H. Bradley and Whitehead. One of the key considerations for speculative philosophy is "non-relational unity." Bradley recognizes, although tantalizingly does not develop, the importance of internal

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<sup>10</sup> Bradley, *Essays*, 59–63.

<sup>11</sup> Bradley, *Essays*, 63.

<sup>12</sup> Bradley, *Essays*, 95.

<sup>13</sup> Bradley, *Essays*, 70.

<sup>14</sup> Bradley, *Essays*, 70.



versus external relations for the whole enterprise.<sup>15</sup> I will take up this issue later in Bradley's treatment of triads and trinities. It is not really helpful to articulate the concept of internal relations in terms of monism, which Bradley himself implicitly acknowledges.<sup>16</sup> Whitehead's "many-to-one" analysis of relations is definitely a counterthrust to Russell's doctrine of asymmetrical serial relations that for contemporary philosophy is the paradigm of external relations. The bottom line is that philosophy cannot be speculative unless it deals with absolutes, and absolutes cannot be absolutes unless they have a developed theory of internal relations. It is Whitehead who successfully brings together, or speculatively melds, the idealism of F. H. Bradley and Russellian empiricism.<sup>17</sup>

The other basic concept in all of this, and one that is fundamental to Bradley's own philosophy, is "self-actualisation." Hegelians could be forgiven for having to go over old ground on this score. The "activity of actualisation" is self-explanatory.<sup>18</sup> A strong theory of existence requires that absolutes, such as God, substance, spirit, love, feeling, cannot have anything derived from outside themselves. Weak theories of existence are always in some sense episodic and thus susceptible to the externally derived. As one tries to piece together the common threads in these *Essays*, the thought frequently comes up that if Bradley had developed a coherent and transparent theory of internal relations, coupled with a quadratic capping off of his secularized trinitarianism, the case for speculative philosophy would have been considerably advanced. As things stand in these *Essays*, there is far too much of an *embrouillement* in specific philosophers and issues in the history of nineteenth- and twentieth-century philosophy to reach common ground on what might be, in all its purity, Bradley's speculative philosophy. This might bode well for future research agendas, but speculative philosophers tend to wrap themselves more around finality than never-ending revisionism.

A good example of this problem is Bradley's comment:

that the hitherto unrecognised significance of A. N. Whitehead resides in the fact that he fuses together a speculative philosophy of activity and logical analysis by drastically reinterpreting the nature of mathematical function and redefining the self-explanatory in terms of the applicability of descriptive adequacy of his functional analysis to the nature of things.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Bradley, *Essays*, 85–86, 93.

<sup>16</sup> Bradley, *Essays*, 93.

<sup>17</sup> Bradley, *Essays*, 93–98.

<sup>18</sup> Bradley, *Essays*, 100.

<sup>19</sup> Bradley, *Essays*, 100.

It is not possible to unpack the significance of this without a thorough immersion in Whitehead and his reworking of mathematics in terms of de-quantification and the relevance of this for the task of speculative philosophy. Bradley clearly wants to use “function” and the “concept of mapping” to flesh out the self-explanatory.<sup>20</sup> This is a thoroughly relational exercise. But what kind of relation? And how are these functionally shifting relations to be anchored? Most of Bradley’s language, and critical shibboleths are aimed at what he sees as traditional failings in the history of speculative philosophy, such as getting caught up in the search for “grounds,” or dialectical straitjacketing, or over-universalizing things like declaring the “fact of absolute freedom,” which is Whitehead’s aside.<sup>21</sup> Unfortunately, Bradley seems to suffer the fate of most speculative philosophers from Plato onwards. Their tantalizing ideas and wide-eyed insights only hint at the glories to come. James Lowry’s *Mentaphysics* and *Spirit of the Ages* is one of the few examples in the speculative tradition of a no-holds-barred, finished system.<sup>22</sup> Lowry and Bradley knew each other, but there was no interaction between them. Canadian philosophy, especially of the speculative variety, is definitely not a seamless dialogue. Leslie Armour’s and Elizabeth Trott’s *The Faces of Reason* could certainly use an update.<sup>23</sup>

The next big piece in the puzzle of Bradley’s speculative philosophy centers on triads and related concepts of trinities and triune events. This is first taken up in chapter 5 of this collection, “Triads, Trinities, and Rationality,” constitutes pretty much the core of the remaining five chapters. I see the chief task here to be one of drawing connections between Bradley’s rich discussion of triads and trinities, and his strong theory of existence discussed in chapter 7, “What is Existence?” The basic question of rationality, and speculative philosophy, is the intelligibility of the triadic principle of order or “the triadic order of order.”<sup>24</sup> Any rational determination of order involves at least two terms and their relation. Whether the relation is prior or subsequent to the determination of the terms or variables; is irrelevant at this point of the inquiry. Generally, though, a theory of internal relations would make it prior, while a theory of external relations would make them subsequent. Relations can be given. They can be imposed. A relation can be a process. It can be a product. It can be a tool. Relations construct and de-construct. They can also be thought away, e.g., non-relational unities, or the first hypothesis of Plato’s *Parmenides*.

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<sup>20</sup> Bradley, *Essays*, 104.

<sup>21</sup> Bradley, *Essays*, 111.

<sup>22</sup> See James Lowry, *Mentaphysics: The Life of Spirit as Love* (Ottawa: Ailouros Inc., 2020) and *Spirit of the Ages* (Ottawa: Ailouros Inc., 2020).

<sup>23</sup> See Leslie Armour and Elizabeth Trott, *The Faces of Reason* (Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 1981).

<sup>24</sup> Bradley, *Essays*, 116.

Is there some system in which relations can be self-explanatory? Or is there no such system, and relations must be simply accepted as inexplicable givens? For Bradley, these are the ultimate questions of speculative philosophy.<sup>25</sup>

There are a number of thought-directions fundamental to the speculative consideration of ordered triadicity, activity, and the self-explanatory. Bradley lays this out in an orderly fashion in chapter 5, “Triads, Trinities, and Rationality,” especially at *Essays*, 117–123. There are five key orientations identified on these pages. Abstractly put, they are: (i) activity;<sup>26</sup> (ii) the principle of reason; (iii) self-explanatoriness;<sup>27</sup> (iv) the investigative;<sup>28</sup> and (v) seriality.<sup>29</sup> Wedged between (iv) and (v) is an even more revealing summary. The “speculative” with respect to these orientations relies on a “creedal” acceptance of the “hypothesis of reason”; furthermore, it constructs “the most inclusive description possible of the nature of things.”<sup>30</sup> The speculative orientation being developed in these passages is anti-foundationalist and fallibilist, i.e., sorting out the ordering principles in the speculative orientation embedded in the modern context of an excruciating sensitivity to historicity, experientiality, and self-referentiality.<sup>31</sup> This is no small task, and I am not sure if, at the end of the whole encounter in these *Essays*, we will be able to hold on to some modicum of finality.

Chapters 5, 6, and 7 are profitably read as a unit. There is considerable conceptual, as well as textual, overlap, but they do provide us with key taxonomies and basic markers for any speculative undertaking in philosophy. I use the term *marker* deliberately in this context because Bradley is keen on avoiding conceptual grids and logical bracketing. The struggle is to integrate a dynamism into contemporary speculative philosophy without irreparably burdening it with historicism, relational functionality, or unmanageable algorithmic processes. This is why he likes abduction, ablative activity, the triune event, and the agapeic community.<sup>32</sup> Equally, this is why he is attracted to the “presuppositional or fiducial version of historiology” described in R. G. Collingwood’s work.<sup>33</sup> Each one of these thought-orientations should be further unpacked and developed into a more comprehensive speculative narrative, which appears to be precisely what Bradley was doing before his untimely death, according to his friend and now also deceased colleague Peter

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<sup>25</sup> Bradley, *Essays*, 117.

<sup>26</sup> Bradley, *Essays*, 117.

<sup>27</sup> Bradley, *Essays*, 118.

<sup>28</sup> Bradley, *Essays*, 119.

<sup>29</sup> Bradley, *Essays*, 121.

<sup>30</sup> Bradley, *Essays*, 119.

<sup>31</sup> Bradley, *Essays*, 120.

<sup>32</sup> Bradley, *Essays*, 145.

<sup>33</sup> Bradley, *Essays*, 226.



Harris.<sup>34</sup>

The penultimate chapter on R. G. Collingwood in this collection is the longest and most extensive consideration of the quartet of F. H. Bradley, Whitehead, Peirce, and Collingwood in the pantheon of James Bradley's favorite philosophers and predecessors to his speculative project. The focus is on the metaphysics of absolute presuppositions, which is as it should be in any speculative philosophy. The analysis is primarily on Collingwood's *An Essay on Metaphysics*, first published in 1940. This is viewed by Bradley as the culmination of Collingwood's speculative work. In a section entitled "Faith, Reason, and Metaphysics in Collingwood's Writing,"<sup>35</sup> he lays out the five phases in the development of Collingwood's thought that led to *An Essay on Metaphysics*. The key to the whole undertaking is the "creedal rule thesis."<sup>36</sup> These are rules of faith or trust that historically manifest themselves in absolute presuppositions. Reconciling, at some level, philosophy and its history was Collingwood's chief intellectual goal, see, *An Autobiography* (1939). The conceptual mechanism he used to intertwine philosophy with its history is embedded in the distinction between relative presuppositions, which can be propositions and absolute presuppositions that cannot be propositions. To go on about empirically verifiable propositions à la A. J. Ayer or Karl Popper may excite the fancies of episodic thinkers, but such propositions have no application to, or significance for, metaphysical claims. What, then, do absolute presuppositions actually do if they hover indifferently above neither empirically true nor false statements? Bradley's answer, enmeshed in his discussion of Collingwood's view of the Trinitarian Creed as the fundamental presupposition of science, is to be found in "The Theory of Absolute Presuppositions."<sup>37</sup> Apart from the arcane discussion of "consupponibility,"<sup>38</sup> the whole issue boils down to all of us, in one form or another, subscribing to "first-person performative rules of faith or trust."<sup>39</sup> Consupponibility is simply a way of imagining absolute presuppositions concurrently and not as deductions from one another. The only proviso is that the implications of such imaginings must be compatible with the implications of the others. Philosophically uncovering creedal rules through a historical enquiry into our philosophical and scientific cultures will reveal standards and guides "for thought and practice."<sup>40</sup> Much of Bradley's discussion, and Collingwood's as well, is here a not too disguised Kantianism, with metempirical creedal rules

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<sup>34</sup> Bradley, *Essays*, xvii.

<sup>35</sup> Bradley, *Essays*, 216–221.

<sup>36</sup> Bradley, *Essays*, 221.

<sup>37</sup> Bradley, *Essays*, 205–216.

<sup>38</sup> Bradley, *Essays*, 214–16.

<sup>39</sup> Bradley, *Essays*, 206.

<sup>40</sup> Bradley, *Essays*, 206.

taking on “regulative” powers and serving as delimiters for a critique of relative propositions. They are the ultimate “defence against heresies” that would in the normal course of philosophical discomobulation be the invalid rules of faith of empiricists, dogmatists, sceptics, logical atomists, and perhaps even misologists.

It is now time to turn to Bradley’s previously mentioned *apologia* for speculative philosophy. “Philosophy and Trinity” first appeared in *Symposium: Canadian Journal of Philosophy*<sup>41</sup> in 2012, the same year as his death. As Socrates taught us, any good defense is only to be found in a strident charge across the enemy lines. Who are the enemies of speculative philosophy? Analytic philosophers, empiricists, materialists, religious dogmatists, and other speculative philosophers are the easy targets. Bradley’s favorites are descriptivists, weak theorists of existence, and algorithmic elites. The latter can be particularly dangerous for the body politic. In “Philosophy and Trinity,” the adversaries coalesce around the banderole of “naturalistic philosophy” and its legends of algorithmic functionaries of “meaning” and their weapons of “deflationary” relations. Not to overdo the polemics, but such naturalism can result, in Bradley’s view, in nothing other than a contingent view of history. My PhD thesis under J. N. Findlay is on the historicization of modern thought, so this is a theme that has long been in my DNA. It is the pervasive subtext in Bradley’s speculative philosophy that cries out for considerable exfoliation.

With Lutheran fortitude, Bradley presents us with ten theses. Tantalizingly, he calls them “bizarre,” but I take this as an innocent aside in the sense that any defensible philosophical claim should have an element of wonder in it. There are two hypotheses, presumably absolute presuppositions, or credal rules, that lurk behind the ten theses. The first is the hypothesis of reality, or the assertion of a mind-independent nature outside of us. The second is the hypothesis of the reality of universals, or the indefensibility of nominalism. The first three theses are a critique of naturalistic philosophy and its many sub-themes in modern thought. These three theses are a propylaeum to the formal defense of speculative philosophy.

Bradley’s formal defense of speculative philosophy starts with the principle of reason, which stands at the head of the fourth thesis, and which undergirds the remaining theses. There is no need here to constrict the meaning of reason. It merely exhorts us to search for explanations. He clearly views the hypothesis that “nothing is without a reason” to be at the very core of the speculative mindset.<sup>42</sup> Formulaic or sufficiency arguments do not and cannot exhaust the principle of reason. Bradley is happy to make it an

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<sup>41</sup> Bradley, “Philosophy and Trinity,” in *Symposium: Canadian Journal of Philosophy* 16.1 (2012): 155–177.

<sup>42</sup> Bradley, *Essays*, 250.

“inference to the best possible explanation.”<sup>43</sup> This is a nod to the abductivists and the fallibilists and fits well with the creedal rules of the mode of speculative enquiry. More so, it is an excellent counter to contingency, which in itself cannot be a self-explanatory principle. The latter is also an indispensable part of the speculative toolkit. The fifth thesis is an elaboration of explanatorist theories. It should be read primarily as a clarification. In this sense it is not really a thesis at all. Bradley’s chief enemy here is the explanatorist descriptivism of Schopenhauer, masquerading as speculative philosophy, not unlike Nietzsche’s will to power or Bergson’s *élan vital*.

Bradley’s sixth thesis presents a typology of “principles of actualisation.”<sup>44</sup> It needs be conjoined with the seventh thesis, which is also taxonomic. Western thought is dominated by reflections on triunity, from Plato’s *syntrisi*; to Hegel’s dialectical-speculative metaphysics; to Peirce’s triune ontology of firstness, secondness, and thirdness; to Heidegger; to Collingwood’s Trinity. This is indeed a large canvas. Speculative minds immediately want to know why there is such a prevalence of triadic thinking? Is it one of those creedal rules that is itself creedal? If triadic thinking is unavoidable, then does it really matter whether I believe in it or not? The seventh thesis is Bradley’s attempt to address this issue. He comes up with three historical camps. First, there are the supra-rationalists who declare that the triune tradition is not susceptible to intelligible explanation. The Pseudo-Dionysius and Eriugena are good examples. Second, there are the rationalists who describe the triune disposition on the psychological analogy of mind—as in, for instance, Aquinas, Hegel, or Lonergan. Thirdly, there are the “explicabilists” who say all things are intelligible, but intelligibility need not be identified with mind or rationality. The focus in this camp is on activity; as spontaneous and free albeit relational and teleological.<sup>45</sup> Duns Scotus and Schelling dwell in this realm of abductive movement that is a knowable, but non-conceptual, approach to experience.<sup>46</sup> Theses eight through ten are an elaboration of this third camp as a theory of dynamical and inexhaustible infinity.

Bradley’s theory of self-actualization starts with Peirce’s principle of firstness. It is “a syncategormatic infinite of real or dynamical potentiality that is always greater than any determination whatsoever.”<sup>47</sup> To this friend of speculation, Peirce’s activity is very much the thought-world of modern existentialism, with its wholesale inversion of the classical Greek view of the priority of actuality over potentiality. In this writer’s view a prioritized

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<sup>43</sup> Bradley, *Essays*, 251.

<sup>44</sup> Bradley, *Essays*, 255.

<sup>45</sup> Bradley, *Essays*, 257.

<sup>46</sup> Bradley, *Essays*, 258.

<sup>47</sup> Bradley, *Essays*, 258.

immersion in the potential entails more dangers than its subordination to the actual. A developed theory of “quadruplicity,” as hinted at in Plato, Hegel, and others, is a response to Bradley’s explanatory unity of realism and constructivism that he sees as the hallmark of modern speculative philosophy.<sup>48</sup>

In theses nine and ten the aforesaid unity is developed in terms of “communicative actualisation” and the “agapeic community.” The former involves the give and take of sign and interpretant, while the latter finds expression in the motivations of unconditional concern and self-donation. The speculative tradition—with its luxuriant reflections on freedom, spontaneity, activity, event ontology, and historicity—ultimately and perennially refocuses itself on communicative self-actualization and agapeic love. In a sense Bradley’s defense is a movement back from the triune into a dyadic dynamism where “being as communication is love as unconditional giving or donation, unconditional concern (*agape*).”<sup>49</sup> One might waver on whether this is the better outcome for the West’s overinvolvement with the triadic; nevertheless it must be said that Bradley has certainly forced us to stand back from the triune event and reflect on the virtues of a dyadic or quadratic dynamism.

## Two Postscripts on German Idealism and on the Fallacy of Irreformability

A postscript is necessary with reference to the relation between Bradley and classical German philosophy. If one were to rank the priority of influences on Bradley’s relation to the “big four” of classical German Idealism, it would be Schelling, Kant, Hegel, and Fichte—the last of these being non-existent. It is the late Schelling of the philosophy of revelation, and the Berlin lectures of the 1840s, that holds the most weight for Bradley. Sean J. McGrath has written extensively on this in *The Philosophical Foundations of the Late Schelling: The Turn to the Positive*.<sup>50</sup> Kant’s critique of classical metaphysics is the starting point for Bradley’s project of developing a distinctively contemporary speculative metaphysics. Hegel is undoubtedly there in Bradley’s philosophical outlook and lurks menacingly in the back-staging. Bradley’s interaction with German Idealism is polychromatic, sometimes elusive, and at other times maddeningly simplistic.

First to Schelling. McGrath’s introduction to this volume with its many references to Schelling is the best place to start.<sup>51</sup> I cannot say I am particularly

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<sup>48</sup> Bradley, *Essays*, 259.

<sup>49</sup> Bradley, *Essays*, 261, see also 145–48.

<sup>50</sup> See Sean J. McGrath, *The Philosophical Foundations of the Late Schelling: The Turn to the Positive* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2021).

<sup>51</sup> See especially Bradley, *Essays*, 14–15.



enamoured with the nomenclature of “metaphysical empiricism.”<sup>52</sup> This is an *indicium* of a fallibilist metaphysics that allows for and learns from new experiences. It is ultimately traceable to the critical philosophy according to Schelling. This in turn opens the door to an “explanatory metaphysics” that contemplates a unity of realism and constructivism that Bradley believes lies at the core of modern speculative philosophy. Schellingian metaphysical empiricism is transformed by Bradley into the speculative project and that project has made its peace with the historical consciousness especially in the form of the historicity of Collingwood’s absolute presuppositions. Bradley’s post-idealistic working out of speculative philosophy is through the alembic of the late Schelling’s positivism.

There are numerous indications in these *Essays* that Bradley’s basic philosophical *nisus* is more Kantian than Hegelian. Unconditionals are as much a part of Bradley’s agapeic community as the noumenal presuppositions of Kant’s sourcing of the apex of human reasoning in the regulative power of reason. This is not to say that Bradley thinks speculative philosophy in its current incarnation should concern itself much with transcendental conditions. Though Kant is usually seen as occupying a period in Western thought that is pre-historiographical, when compared to Hegel, the late Schelling, and especially Collingwood, the critical philosophy was crucial for modernity in steering attention toward an ablative, scientifically revisionary approach to experience, albeit one based on a transcendently unifying grid of *a priori* categories. These categories are, however, constitutive and not deductive in the older sense of a rationalistic realism. As constitutive they always leave open the horizon of possible experience. Indeed, a transcendently based modal category of possibility could be said to be Kant’s most basic presupposition, not supposition, and as such and surprisingly the critical philosophy is potentially the most historicistic of German idealisms. One can only surmise how far Bradley would wish to push Kantianism on this point, but it nonetheless shows that in terms of the modern speculative project Kant has more to offer than Hegel, who hammer locks history into philosophy in an altogether overly necessitarian manner.

It is evident that Bradley does not think Hegel’s reconciliation of concept and object as a univocal relation is able to deal with the new and its paradoxes in the way Kant’s approach to experience is able, or even more so, in accordance with the late Schelling’s explanatory, revisable metaphysics.<sup>53</sup> Bradley says things about Hegel that would make any knowledgeable Hegelian squirm, though it would be most unfair to say that he has only a superficial acquaintance with the German Aristotle. Bradley characterizes Hegel variously

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<sup>52</sup> Bradley, *Essays*, 9.

<sup>53</sup> Bradley, *Essays*, 58.

as a necessitarian, a rationalist, or a conceptual determinist. Nahum Brown's *Hegel on Possibility*<sup>54</sup> effectively undermines these conventionalisms. Any respectable Hegelian can make short work of any one-sided appellation or designation. This includes working within the Hegelian system to account for the novel in the face of the pre-determined. One does not get the sense in Bradley's work that he has struggled mightily with Hegel, though there are many detectable Hegelianisms in these *Essays*, especially those that cluster around the idea of self-actualization and its many related subtexts. This is somewhat surprising, for Hegel fits all the criteria for irremovable inclusion in Bradley's speculative philosophy: a strong theory of existence, Christian trinitarianism, a self-explanatory principle, triads and triunities, and the rise of a modern historical consciousness thoroughly entwined with the philosophical consciousness. Are Bradley and Hegel reconcilable? Or should one even bother? Hegel is rarely today taken seriously as a metaphysician. As a speculative philosopher in his own technical sense of the term, Hegel is only thought of as illuminating certain unities at a specified level. A good example would be his consideration of measure in the larger *Logic* as the unity of quality and quantity in such areas as the science of chemistry of his day. As for Fichte's absolute "I," I can find no reference to it these *Essays*.

The second postscript centers on the issue of "the fallacy of irreformability."<sup>55</sup> It must not be assumed, Bradley warns us, that speculative philosophy is irrevocably wedded to this or that theory of the real. This resonates well with moderns but not with more traditional speculative philosophers who cannot let go of bracketing logical structures or "ordinations," as Bradley would say. One can only lament that Bradley never wrote his chapter on speculative theories of ordination.<sup>56</sup> The fallacy of irreformability may not be a fallacy at all because being irreformable is what the speculative often strives to be, especially in its critical capacity of sending just about everybody to reform school. A paradox of the new overlooked by Bradley is surely that the irreformability of reformability, or the converse, is baked into the self-explanatory ultimates of speculative philosophy.

Finally, and in the context of speculative reformability, there is the question of Bradley's contribution to Canadian philosophy and whether it adds anything distinctive to the brand. This may seem a bit out of place given that Bradley is an intellectual cosmopolite and British *émigré*. Like all of us, his education is readily disclosed in his writings. What matters to him may seem parochial to many, a curious emanation from an outpost of the empire in faraway Newfoundland. Furthermore, he did not write anything that can be explicitly construed as characteristically Canadian in political or social

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<sup>54</sup> See Nahum Brown, *Hegel on Possibility* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2020).

<sup>55</sup> Bradley, *Essays*, 172.

<sup>56</sup> See editor's note, Bradley, *Essays*, 172.



philosophy. Nonetheless, if you let these *Essays* sink into your soul, you will see and feel that this philosophy and this country go together quite nicely.

Bradley is British-educated and continentally oriented in a pan-European-based worldview. How does his brand of thinking find its place in the present Canadian mosaic? The best place to begin to answer this question would be to read, or reread, Leslie Armour and Elizabeth Trott's *The Faces of Reason*, a volume that begs for a post-World War II sequel. Canada has long traditions of idealism and neo-idealism. It had its importations during the 1950s to 1970s of analytical and linguistic philosophy, much of which was foreign to many of the country's traditions. Then came certain revivals on the "continental" side that Bradley rightly notes were equally inimical to speculative philosophy. Today there is a broad embrace of many sub-specialties, reflecting the currents of the day, and drawing instrumentally, and indifferently, from the different in-flows of multiple schools and traditions. Few self-identify as speculative philosophers. Making large claims, or drawing extravagant depictions of all things human and divine, does not resonate well in our institutional and professional environments, which is to be expected.

I would, however, suggest that there are some themes that may help Canadian philosophy restore itself to its cosmopolitan roots in a more unified way and thus secure some of its more particular cultural inclinations. Bradleyan speculative philosophy fits well with our anti-dogmatism and general agapeic tolerances. Self-donation is a national virtue. Others see us this way and so we see ourselves. With multiple languages and cultures now finding surer footings in the Canadian mosaic, the idea of communicative self-actualization fits well with the ideals of an agapeic community. Canada's *Charter of Rights and Freedoms* uniquely reconciles individual and collective rights, or at a very minimum provides a civilizing forum for their reconciliation. This is something that is not generally found in other nations and their constitutions. Bradley's work brings together European and American philosophers—in a way that few others have successfully articulated or similarly provided us with transparent guideposts and touchpoints. Canadians have always found themselves dangling precariously between the American and European divide. Now they have a philosopher they can work with who is unburdened by either of these traditions and yet remains a champion for a novel speculative philosophy flourishing in a country where the unconditional concerns of country and citizen for one another know no bounds.