

CHAPTER III

IDENTITY IN DIFFERENCE AND EXACT RESEMBLANCE

BRADLEY holds that philosophy is an attempt to find and elucidate a view of reality that will satisfy the intellect. Now the intellect rejects the self-contradictory and accepts the self-consistent. But what is the contradictory? And what is self-consistency? These two questions are answered upon the same principle; that of identity in difference.

Unity (Bradley takes it) is a fact whose actuality is beyond question. A whole could hardly be a blank of empty homogeneity. Devoid of internal distinction, there would be nothing at all within such a whole that it could unite. "A thing cannot without an internal distinction be (or do⁽¹⁾) two different things, and differences cannot belong to the same thing in the same point unless in that point there is diversity. The appearance of such a union may be fact, but is for thought a contradiction. This is the thesis which to me seems to contain the truth about the contrary, and I will now try to recommend this thesis to the reader."⁽¹⁾ Were a whole devoid of internal diversity, it would involve nothing that might be united, and so would fail to be a unity at all. That there may be a union of differences, it is requisite that there may be differences within that unity.

Bradley's thesis is not a statement of the Law of (abstract) Identity, as he is again at some pains to make plain. "Thought most certainly does not demand mere sameness, which to it would be nothing. A bare tautology (Hegel has taught us this, and I wish we could all learn it) is not even so much as a poor truth or a thin truth. It is not a

⁽¹⁾ *Appearance and Reality*, p. 501; footnote; as "This addition is superfluous."

truth in any way, in any sense, or at all. Thought involves analysis and synthesis, and if the Law of Contradiction forbade diversity, it would forbid thinking altogether. And with this too necessary warning I will turn to the other side of the difficulty. Thought cannot do without differences, but on the other hand it cannot make them. And as it cannot make them, so it cannot receive them merely from the outside and ready made. Thought demands to go *proprio motu*, or, what is the same thing, with a ground and reason. Now to pass from A to B, if the ground remains external, is for thought to pass with no ground at all. But if, again, the external fact of A's and B's conjunction is offered as a reason, then that conjunction itself creates the same difficulty. For thought's analysis can respect nothing, nor is there any principle by which at a certain point it should arrest itself or be arrested. Every distinguishable aspect becomes therefore for thought a diverse element to be brought to unity. Hence thought can no more pass without a reason from A or from B to its conjunction, than before it could pass groundlessly from A to B. The transition, being offered as a mere datum, or effected as a mere fact, is not thought's own self-movement. Or in other words, because for thought no ground can be merely external, the passage is groundless. Thus A and B and their conjunction are, like atoms, pushed in from the outside by chance or fate; and what is thought to do with them but either make or accept an arrangement which to it is wanton and without reason—or, having no reason for anything else, attempt against reason to identify them simply?"⁽¹⁾ This lengthy passage contains the gist of Bradley's principle of identity in difference.

Thinking cannot be realized in judgment in the absence of unity. For without unity in judgment there is at best a mere association of ideas. But the inane unity of repetition in tautology is verbiage, not judgment. Therefore judgment can no more dispense with differences than with unity. For without differences there is no more than

⁽¹⁾ *Ibid.*, p. 501.

tautology. Hegel has taught us this, if anything, and Bradley wishes that all of us would learn it.

The form of judgment may not be A is A, but may that form not be A is B? Plainly not, Bradley urges. For clearly B is different from A. Therefore, Bradley argues B is not-A. Thus construed, the formula is equivalent to A is not-A. And abstract contradiction is rejected by the intellect.

It may be objected that this is a pseudo-difficulty that arises out of Bradley's failure to distinguish between the "is" of identity and the "is" of predication. Whenever a man says "A is B" surely no one understands him to mean that A is identical with B. Rather he is understood to mean that B is a predicate of A; that A has B.

In Bradley's view this kind of rejoinder is of no avail. For if A has B then A is such-as-to-have-B. The alleged distinction between the "is" of identity and the "is" of predication is no more than verbal. It enables us to change our symbol for the copula from "is" to "has", not to make "has" mean anything other than the "is" of identity in difference. And so the central question remains: how is it that differences are united in experience?

Bradley realizes that there are those who will reject this question as irrelevant. "This is not so," I shall be told, "and the whole case is otherwise. There are certain ultimate complexes given to us as facts, and these ultimates, as they are given, thought simply takes up as principles and employs them to explain the detail of the world. And with this process thought is quite satisfied. To me such a doctrine is quite erroneous. For these ultimates (a) cannot make the world intelligible, and again, (b) they are not given; and (c) in themselves they are self-contradictory, and not truth but appearance."⁽¹⁾

The alleged ultimates are not intelligible because by hypothesis no one of them bears anything other than itself. Each one of them, in being final and "just there", is self-contained. Therefore each one is isolated in experience and

⁽¹⁾ *Ibid.* pp. 501, 502.

logic from every other one. Any such ultimates, as well as the complexes they would constitute without residuum, stand external to each other. And that flies in the face of the conclusion that all relations are internal.

On his second count, Bradley objects that these alleged ultimates are not given. "The transition from A to B, the inherence of b and c as adjectives in A, the union of discretion and continuity in time and space—'such things are facts', it is said. 'They are given to an intellect which is satisfied to accept and to employ them'. They may be facts, I reply, in some sense of that word, but to say that, as such and in and by themselves, they are given, is erroneous. What is given is a presented whole, a sensuous total in which these characteristics are found; and beyond and beside these characters there is always given something else. And to urge 'but at any rate these characters are there' is surely futile. For certainly they are not, when there, as they are when you by an abstraction have taken them out. Your contention is that certain ultimate conjunctions of elements are given. And I reply that no such *bare* conjunction is or possibly can be given. For the background is present, and the background and the conjunction are, I submit, alike integral aspects of the fact. The background therefore must be taken as a condition of the conjunction's existence, and the intellect must assert the conjunction subject in this way to a condition. The conjunction is hence not bare but dependent, and it is really a connection mediated by something falling outside it."⁽¹⁾ "Facts" that were merely given "in and by themselves" would be without background. They would be self-contained and without relations beyond themselves. We have seen something of the dialectic of quality and relation that constrains Bradley to deny all reality to any such (allegedly) fictitious ultimates.

In this connection he reminds us that any "fact" we may hit upon is not isolated from anything else. Rather it is what it is by virtue of the context of relations which

⁽¹⁾ *Ibid.*, pp. 502, 503.

contribute to constitute it. If we bear Bradley's theory of relations in mind, we can understand the force of the "must" in his statement that the relational context of a fact constitutes the conditions of its existence as that fact. Without its context no fact could be differentiated as is the case. For that context of relations and their qualities, which is, ultimately, the systemic whole that is Appearance, is the categorical relational situation in virtue of which any "fact" is differentiated from everything else.

That is why, on Bradley's third count, any notion of a mere conjunction of ultimate facts is self-contradictory. "And any mere conjunction, I go on to urge, is for thought self-contradictory."⁽¹⁾ For "in a bare conjunction, starting with A thought will externally be driven to B, and seeking to unite these it will find no ground of union. Thought can of itself supply no internal bond by which to hold them together, nor has it any internal diversity by which to maintain them apart. It must therefore seek barely to identify them, though they are different, or somehow to unite both diversities where it has no ground of distinction and union. And this does not mean that the connection is merely unknown and may be affirmed as unknown, and also, supposing it were known, as rational. For, if so, the conjunction would at once not be bare, and it is as bare that is offered and not as conditional. But, if on the other hand it remains bare, then thought to affirm it must unite diversities without any internal distinction, and the attempt to do this is precisely what contradiction means."⁽²⁾—in Bradley's own view.

As long as the differences in question are construed as self-sufficient, self-contained units, they can hardly coexist in a unity. For as respectively different and self-contained, they have no common ground; there is nothing internal to the differences in respect of which they could be at one.

If, instead of trying to take it that experience is a mere complex of self-contained ultimates, we come to see it rather as diverse aspects of a systemic whole of mutually

⁽¹⁾ *Ibid.*, p. 504.

⁽²⁾ *Ibid.*

related qualities, then the entire matter is drastically altered in principle. For then we are able to see that in predicating B of A we do not affirm that A *per se* is B *per se*. For A is not A inherently, ultimately, and independently of all else. And the same consideration applies to B. Rather A is A by virtue of its differentiations from B, as from all else. These differentiations are the relations by which A is related throughout the systemic whole of appearances. *Mutatis mutandis*, the same considerations apply to B.

Thus we may come to see that in the judgment A is B there is and could be no affirmation that A is the same as B. For neither A nor B is such that they could be merely identical with each other. We have seen that the identity of A implies its difference from all else. And that also applies of course to B. By virtue of the differentiations by which A is related throughout within the systemic whole of Appearance, A is an adjective of that whole. So too is B.

Now although it is obvious enough that within the verbal terms of a judgment it is grammatically correct to distinguish a predicate term and a subject term, that distinction is one in point of terms verbal alone. Nothing in judgment proper corresponds to it. For in truth both of the constituents of the judgment proper (as distinguished from the statement of it) are adjectives of a common subject; namely the Whole. That is the identity which is implicated in all differences.

This is to say that the constituents of a judgment are related at once to their proximate subject (a perceived match, for example) and likewise to the Whole itself. For the constituent terms of the judgment, that is a match, are somewhat different from a match. Those terms in judgment, by virtue of their differences from the match, are related to it. These relations constitute the reference of that judgment to the match. And it will not be overlooked that those terms and that match are different from and by that very fact related to all else.

This follows from the conclusion that relations and qualities contribute to constitute each other or are mutually

internal. Every moment of experience is related throughout the whole of Appearance in virtue of the differences of that aspect from every other aspect of the whole. For this reason (among others that need not concern us here), in every judgment the subject term no less than the predicate term is an adjective of the real. The subject and predicate terms S and P are different content. Their differences relate them. And since S and P are different not only from each other but also from every other moment of Appearance, by that very fact S and P are related to every moment of process.

Thus we may come to realize that the judgment S is P asserts at once a diversity of connotation in the adjectives S and P and an identity in their denotation through which the ultimate referent of the judgment about the match is the systemic whole. There is an identity in the differences which constitute the content of that judgment. Ultimately this identity is that Absolute Reality which is the supra relational fulfilment of the development of process in Appearance.

Presumably it is fairly plain that on the theory of identity as relational there may be no exact resemblances. Were there two hues exactly the same in chroma, the identity of one of them would not be determined by its being qualitatively different from all else. The principle that identity is identity by differentiation states the central nerve of the internality of relations in Bradley's *Metaphysic*.

The identity of a quality is determined by the differentiations which, in falling to some extent within, as well as beyond it, contribute to constitute the character of that quality. Conversely, the identity of a relation is determined by the qualities it differentiates to the extent to which it falls within them.

No differentiation in process is a mere disjunction. For the terms of a strict disjunction would be merely other than each other. Thus a strict disjunction could comprise no third thing between the disjuncts. A differentiation is rather the moment of mediation between any two qualities

in the process of contrariety that is the fission of quality and relation. And, conversely, no quality is a mere ultimate that would be inherently self-identical. That would be possible if, but only if, A is A had not been banished from logic by Bradley. Rather, a quality is a moment of immediacy whose character is determined by its relations. That determination is the synthesis in immediacy in and through which the relations involved in it are sublated to some extent; to the extent, indeed, to which those relations fall within that quality.

If we concentrate attention on the relational situation, we see that a differentiation is the third term or moment of mediation between any two qualities, or moments of immediacy. And whenever we concentrate on a qualitative aspect, we find it to be a unitary synthesis of relations in so far as they fall within it. On the one side, the third stage is a differentiation. On the other side, it is a unity.

A necessary (though not sufficient) condition of this conception of quality and relation is the initial repudiation of the Law of Identity. We have seen that Bradley dismisses that Law and, along with its corollaries, banishes it from logic. The way is then clear for the elimination of the contradictory by identifying it with the contrary. Since there will be a third moment in process between any two contraries, the identification of the contradictory with the contrary sets the stage for the Janus play of the dialectic of quality and relation. Bradley's use of that two-edged discourses makes it explicit that identity implies qualitative difference. No two qualities (or relations) may be strictly the same in any respect. For were it the case that any two qualities were indiscernible in any single respect, that respect would be strictly the same or identical in the two qualities. But identity without difference in content or character is "senseless". The repudiation of the Law of Identity and the construing of contradiction as contrariety suffice to rule out of Bradley's conception of experience any exact resemblances. The dialectic of relational identity or

relation and quality makes out some of the consequences of that expulsion. One of these consequences is that identity implies qualitative difference everywhere and always, so that on the dialectic of contraries every experience is unique.