

the incoherencies of the world of agents would be today widely rejected if canvassed at all. The characteristic symptom of this is, so to speak, to read back into morality its shortcomings and, in the different versions of non-cognitivism in ethics, to make these limitations part of the essence of morality itself. These views may even be found combined with a none the less unflagging zeal for the production of 'arguments' upon practical questions, of a kind of higher casuistry, whose impression on the casual reader can only be to convince him of their author's disregard for the 'meta-ethical' non-cognitivism which in their more theoretical moments they espouse. Perhaps such incoherence is due to '... irrelevant appeals to practical results' which are allowed to make themselves heard in philosophical enquiry and of which Bradley complained with such force.

The task of the metaphysician is to inquire into ultimate truth, and he cannot be called on to consider anything else, however important it may be. We have but little notion in England of freedom either in art or in science (*AR*, p. 398-9).

and again:

We may note here that our country, the chosen land of Moral Philosophy, has the reputation abroad of being the chief home of hypocrisy and cant (*AR*, p. 386 n.).

It is in his sense of the partiality and one-sidedness of the moral point of view that Bradley has most to teach us today. Whether it is a partiality and one-sidedness with which we can live as agents without hope of transcendence is a large and unclear question for another occasion.

#### NOTES

1. William Blake, *Jerusalem*, pl. 55.
2. *Utilitarianism: For and Against*, Cambridge, 1973.
3. The difficulty here is that Bradley, for the purposes of a sceptical argument against the self-subsistence of relations and qualities, accepts in *ad hominem* style his opponents' assumption that relations may be separated from their terms. He thus deduces the unintelligibility of the assumption made (*AR*, p. 25 ff.). But he also asserts the unintelligibility of the contrary assumption (*AR*, p. 25). In the passages referred to, the assertions of unintelligibility come so thick and fast that it is not easy to make out the settled view. One may here sympathize with Russell's breaking of the Gordian knot (see especially *AR*, p. 27 n.).
4. In the use of this term I of course beg a question in order to cause attention to it.
5. This view has clear implications for the theory of politics, if such there be. I have developed some of them in 'Bradley as a Conservative Thinker', *The Salisbury Review* No. 5, pp. 38-42 (London, 1983).

## CHAPTER 4

# The Moral Organism\*

Crispin Wright

### I

The general orientation of Bradley's moral philosophy is, as is familiar, broadly Hegelian. Like Hegel, he sees the fundamental dilemma of the moral philosopher as that of steering a course between the Scylla of the 'abstract universality' of Kantian ethics — the futile attempt to elicit substantial moral norms from the idea of a purely rational will<sup>1</sup> — and the Charybdis of 'Modern Utilitarianism' (that is, for Bradley, the views of J. S. Mill).<sup>2</sup> Bradley sees both the problem, and at least the beginnings of its solution, in Hegelian terms: what is wanted is a *synthesis* — a basis for morality which has both the objectivity and the universality to which the Kantian account aspired, and at the same time, like the utilitarian view, sees morality as something essentially subservient to human needs, and the moral life as something in which a man may find happiness and fulfilment. He writes:

What we have left then (to resume it) is this — the end is the realization of the good will which is superior to ourselves; and again the end is self-realization. Bringing these together, we see the end is the realization of ourselves as the will which is above ourselves. And this will (if morality exists) we saw must be 'objective', because not dependent on 'subjective' liking; and 'universal', because not identifiable with any particular, but standing above all actual and possible particulars. Further, though universal, it is not abstract, since it belongs to its essence that it should be realized, and it has no real existence except in and through its particulars. The good will (for morality) is meaningless, if, whatever else it be, it be not the will of living finite beings. It is a concrete universal, because it not only is above but is within and throughout its details, and is so far only as they are. It is the life which can live only in and by them, as they are dead unless within it; it is the whole soul which lives so far as the body lives, which makes the body a living

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body, and which without the body is as unreal an abstraction as the body without it. It is an organism and a moral organism; and it is conscious self-realization, because only by the will of its self-conscious members can the moral organism give itself reality. It is the self-realization of the whole body, because it is one and the same will which lives and acts in the life and action of each. It is the self-realization of each member, because each member can not find the function, which makes him himself, apart from the whole to which he belongs; to be himself he must go beyond himself, to live his life he must live a life which is not *merely* his own, but which, none the less, but on the contrary all the more, is intensely and emphatically his own individuality. Here, and here first, are the contradictions which have beset us solved — here is a universal which can confront our wandering desires with a fixed and stern imperative, but which yet is no unreal form of the mind, but a living soul that penetrates and stands fast in the detail of actual existence. It is real, and real for me. It is in its affirmation that I affirm myself, for I am but as a 'heart-beat in its system'. And I am real in it; for, when I give myself to it, it gives me the fruition of my own personal activity, the accomplished ideal of my life which is happiness. In the realized idea which, superior to me, and yet here and now in and by me, affirms itself in a continuous process, we have found the end, we have found self-realization, duty, and happiness in one — yes, we have found ourselves, when we have found our station and its duties, our function as an organ in the social organism (*ES*, pp. 162-3).

Bradley does not care, in 'My Station and Its Duties', to be too explicit about the social identity — family, immediate community, state, mankind — of the moral or social 'organism'. But two things are completely clear. First, it is no mere metaphor that is intended:

The state is not put together, but it lives; it is not a heap nor a machine; it is no mere extravagance when a poet talks of a nation's soul. It is the objective mind which is subjective and self-conscious in its citizens: it feels and knows itself in the heart of each (*ES*, p. 184).

Further:

The belief in this real moral organism is the one solution of ethical problems (*ES*, p. 187).

That Bradley is in literal earnest is perhaps clearest in his response to the well-known passage in which he gives expression to the opposing point of view.

The family, society, the state, and generally every community of men, consists of individuals, and there is nothing in them real except the individuals. Individuals have made them, and make them, by placing themselves and by standing in certain relations. The individuals are

real by themselves, and it is because of them that the relations are real. They make them, they are real *in* them, not because of them, and they would be just as real *out* of them. The whole is the mere sum of the parts, and the parts are as real away from the whole as they are within the whole . . . Everything is in the organism what it is out, and the universal is a name, the existing fact answering to which is particular persons in such and such relations. To put the matter shortly, the community is the sum of its parts, is made by the addition of parts; and the parts are as real before the addition as after; the relations they stand in do not make them what they are, but are accidental, not essential, to their being; and, as to the whole, if it is not a name for the individuals that compose it, it is a name of nothing actual (*ES*, pp. 163-4).

If the 'moral organism' had been a mere metaphor, Bradley need not have contested the *substance* of this opposing point of view. It would have been enough to contest its moral significance: to make a case that, if one wishes to understand the character of moral concepts and the cogency of moral reasoning, any standpoint which considers a man in abstraction from the social structure in which he is an agent — whether by seeing morality as the servant of pre-social human needs or as the expression of supra-social rational constraints — is certain to fail. It would have been enough to stress that, while society is not *literally* an organic structure of the institutions and, ultimately, individuals who compose it, morality is nevertheless a social phenomenon; and this not just in the sense — which many would not dispute — that it is only by entering into social relations that human beings incur moral obligations, but also in so far as the detail of those obligations cannot be understood simply by adverting to needs which all men or women have in common just because they are human. The detail of our needs, and hence of our rights, cannot be understood without adverting to what society, and our places in society, have made of us.

This is evidently true of such interrelated needs as that for self-expression, for self-esteem, and for respectful treatment: people have such needs only *because* they are social creatures and the specific form which these needs take depends, loosely, on one's specific place in the relevant social (sub-) structure. No doubt there are basic human needs, shared by most other animals; and probably they are best served by living in the sort of communal co-operatives

in which most of us live our lives. But it is an obvious fact — and no less fundamental for that — that it is society itself which creates many of the needs which we feel most keenly; and that the detail of our moral thinking cannot be understood without paying attention to the detail of these needs, our wish to satisfy them in ourselves, and our respect for them in others. If this is an obvious fact, however, it is a fact of which there is no prospect of explanation within the Kantian strait-jacket; and which the strict utilitarian can accommodate only by Procrustean contortions of the notions of pleasure and pain.

Had Bradley's 'moral organism' been a metaphor, it is along these lines that one would have expected him to elaborate his criticisms and positive point of view. But it is evident that he wishes to assert far more; specifically, that in a certain sense people have no *reality* outside society. Bradley is setting himself against the view that social entities like the family, or the state, are — in a more modern, though already archaic-sounding terminology — 'logical constructs' out of the human individuals which participate in them. Admittedly, Bradley's own formulations of the opposition are almost entirely unhelpful; the issue is presented as whether or not the state, say, can be seen as the 'sum of its parts', or as whether it is the state, or the individual in isolation from the state, who is a 'mere abstraction'. So expressed, there is no obvious way of addressing the issue squarely; nor does Bradley attempt any clear account of what it is that is distinctive about organic unities in contrast with those which are, whatever it means to say so, 'sums' of their constituents. But he is explicit (*ES*, pp. 165–6) that he is making a serious metaphysical claim: there are social, organic entities in which men are constituents; in some sense men have no existence outside these entities; and it is impossible to understand the character and function of our moral thinking unless one pays due heed to the fact.

The second evident point is that Bradley succeeds in developing absolutely nothing by way of substantial argument for this point of view. It is difficult to say whether he was under any illusions on this score. He writes:

But we are not going to enter on a metaphysical question to which we are not equal; we meet the metaphysical assertion of the 'individualist'

with a mere denial; and, turning to facts, we will try to show that they lead us in another direction (*ES*, p. 166).

The question is what, having ducked the metaphysical issue, Bradley believes that the 'facts' which he is about to adduce are apt to show. He expresses his intention like this:

We say that, out of theory, no such individual men exist; and we will try to show from fact that, in fact, what we call an individual man is what he is because of and by virtue of community, and that communities are thus not mere names but something real, and can be regarded (if we mean to keep to facts) only as the one in the many (*ES*, p. 166).

This certainly makes it seem as if Bradley believed that he could corroborate the metaphysical point by the adduction of (empirical) fact. And certainly, if there are uncontroversial cases of causal influence exerted by communities on individual men, then at least the autonomy of communities, if not yet their organic character, would have to be granted; for no 'mere abstraction' can be the initiator of change. But, naturally, prior to a resolution of the metaphysical issue, there are no *uncontroversial* cases of causality of that sort. The facts to which Bradley calls attention (*ES*, pp. 168–74) are essentially three. First, our inheritance at birth is an aptitude for socialization:

It is the opinion of those best qualified to speak on the subject, that civilization is to some not inconsiderable extent hereditary; that aptitudes are developed, and are latent in the child at birth; and that it is a very different thing, even apart from education, to be born of civilized and of uncivilized ancestors. These 'civilized tendencies' . . . are part of the essence of the child: he would only partly (if at all) be himself without them; he owes them to his ancestors, and his ancestors owe them to society (*ES*, p. 170).

Second there is the inheritance of the communal language. The child learns:

. . . to speak, and here he appropriates the common heritage of his race, the tongue that he makes his own is his country's language, it is (or it should be) the same that others speak, and it carries into his mind the ideas and sentiments of the race . . . and stamps them in indelibly (*ES*, p. 172).

Third, Bradley emphasizes (*ES*, pp. 172–3), following Hegel, the role of ethical training in forming the character of the individual and in supplying him with the network of goals and standards, which, while giving his life purpose and value, do so only because they are recognized as communal currency.

Now each of the three considerations illustrates a respect in which it would normally be thought quite natural to say that the community exerts an influence on the individual; more than that, we can agree with Bradley that it is not wild hyperbole to say that the community makes the individual what he is. But to grant Bradley's facts would seem to be consistent with holding that a full account of the causal relations involved could ultimately omit reference to the *community* altogether; that the ultimate initiators of the changes which constitute the socialization of an individual are actual and historical human beings. And unless that combination of views is inconsistent, Bradley's facts merely emphasize what I stressed above, that as a metaphor the notion of the moral organism would have a great deal of point.

It is important to realize that there is a good deal at stake in the question whether Bradley's notion should be taken as merely a metaphor or as something more substantial. So long as its legitimate content is exhausted by appropriate stress on the socialized character of men's needs and goals, it can require at most a gloss on the utilitarian point of view. The good for the individual can still be seen as residing purely in the satisfaction of his desires; and the good in general as a maximal satisfaction of the desires of maximally many individuals. It is just that we must recognize that a substantial core of the desires of the individual are desires which are possible to him only because he lives in society, only because he estimates himself and others by communally acknowledged standards, only because social life has nourished in him expectations and ambitions of a quite different order to those associated with his purely physical capacities for pleasure and suffering. So we should have a corrective to the very crude philosophical psychology with which classical formulations of utilitarianism were encumbered; but we should have no corrective to the overriding utilitarian *motif*.

The situation would be quite different, however, if it could be established that there is in reality a social, or moral, organism in which people are organs. For any constituent in an organism is subject to certain modes of appraisal just in virtue of being such a constituent: a kidney, for example, is subject to appraisal according to how well it performs the defining function of a kidney, that of preservation of the

chemical composition of the blood by filtration of certain substances from it. Kidneys are better or worse according to how well they perform this function, — it can even perfectly properly be said of a diseased kidney that it is not functioning as it *ought*. More generally: an organ functioning within an organic structure can, quite unmysteriously, be seen as having an *essence* — its essence will be the function by which it is defined — by reference to which what it is *actually* may be evaluated. That men have such an essence, indeed, that it is in some sense to be *free*, is common to both the leading philosophical schools which have their roots in Hegel's writings: the Marxists and the existentialists. But it is an idea which has found little sympathy among moral philosophers of the Analytic school. If, however, the notion of the social organism can be sustained as a metaphysical thesis, the acceptability of such an idea becomes the merest formality: in explaining the character of the organism, we shall have explained what men essentially are; and thereby elucidated a dimension for appraisal of their character and conduct which has exactly the (kind of) objectivity that is possessed by the manner in which we appraise the functioning of a kidney in a human body. This is exactly what Bradley means when he speaks of the good for the individual as consisting in *self-realization*: that is, realization of the essential nature of the self, the nature which it derives from the role which it plays in the social organism.

Plainly there would be no immediate connection of this good with the utilitarian good, the maximal satisfaction of the individual's desires. What is in prospect here, as far as utilitarianism is concerned, is, at best, an explanation of why it is that evaluation by utilitarian criteria very often gives acceptable-seeming results — whereas from the utilitarian point of view, such an *explanation* is out of the question — and, at worst, the uncovering of a deep basis for moral judgment which cuts across utilitarian criteria and reveals their inadequacy.

It is, then, the metaphysical issue which needs to be tackled if 'My Station and Its Duties' is to be seen as presenting a viable objectivist alternative view of morality to that of classical utilitarianism and its modern descendants. But Bradley, to repeat, does not tackle it; and neither, I venture to suggest, did Hegel.<sup>3</sup>

## II

What is an organism? — what makes for *organic unity*? An evident necessary condition is hierarchical structure: no entity can constitute an organic unity unless it divides into parts, which in turn divide into parts, . . . , etc., in a way that is characteristic of its being an instance of the *kind* — tree, toadstool, human body, for example — which it exemplifies. Thus the human body divides in the first instance into various major systems: the central nervous system, the cardio-vascular system, the digestive system, the lymphatic system, and so on; these in turn are distinctively structured out of various organs; some of these organs have, for their part, their own substructure of constituent organs, and all are constituted by an organized system of cells of appropriate sorts. Prescinding from complications occasioned by the possibility of integrating artificial organs within the body, it is fair to say that for something to be a living human body just *is* for it to be a functioning system of this structure and composition. An analogous claim could plausibly be made for the State, universities, business corporations, and the family. But the parallel is of no great consequence in the present context, since such a structure is also exemplified by many entities whose unity we should not regard as organic; for example, a molecule of sulphuric acid, or a token inscription of 'The Walrus and the Carpenter'. (Of course, what is crucial for our present purpose is that the distinctive structure of these latter types of entity seems to carry with it no basis for *evaluation* of their constituents.)

A second evident necessary condition for organic unity is that the unity should in some way depend upon a certain causal interdependence of the constituents: the proper functioning of the human body, for instance, depends upon the proper functioning of each of its vital organs, and the proper functioning of each of these organs requires that of all the others. But this, too, is only a necessary condition. No such interdependence is manifest among the constituents of a token inscription of 'The Walrus and the Carpenter', but something of the kind *is* presumably true of the atomic constituents of a molecule of sulphuric acid — and of a great many other commonplace physical objects which we should not normally regard as constituting organic unities

(for example, an archway which would collapse if any one of its constituent trapeziform bricks were removed; or a Rubik Cube). Nor do we get a significant strengthening of the condition by specifying that the requisite interdependence is to be *functional*. For that had better mean no more than that the state (in relevant respects) of any one of the constituents is determined as the value of some (complex) function of the states of the other constituents; and that is already the situation in the sorts of example which we are trying to discount.

One wants to reply, however, that this is to interpret 'functional' too narrowly; that what is 'functional' about organic unities is not merely that there is a functional interdependence between states of their constituents but, more, that the constituents each *have* a function, determined by their role in the promotion of some state, or objective, of the whole. With organic unities, explanation of the behaviour of the constituents has to be, at least in part, *teleological*: there are questions about the characteristics and behaviour of the constituents which can only be answered if we pay due heed both to the fact that they are constituents in a larger unity and to the characteristics and behaviour of the other constituents. There is no understanding the structure of a kidney, for instance, unless one knows what it is that kidneys do; and there is no knowing what kidneys do unless one knows a good deal about the chemistry of the blood and the role of the blood supply in maintaining the function of vital organs in the body.

Care is needed with the formulation of this point. It is not merely that, with organic unities, a full understanding of the nature of the constituents will need to take account of the role which they are playing in the whole: that is no more than the condition of functional interdependence which we have already seen to be insufficient. The present thought is rather that, where organic unities are concerned, certain sorts of questions are appropriate about the constituents which are not appropriate elsewhere, and which can be answered only by, among other things, adverting to the role which that constituent plays in the organism as a whole. Roughly: these are questions which call for explanation of characteristics of the constituents not in terms of the

background causal ancestry of those characteristics but in terms of what possession of those characteristics enables the constituents to do. Thus it is perfectly true that a full understanding, in one reasonable sense of the phrase, of the characteristics of a hydrogen atom, which when bonded together with other atoms of hydrogen, oxygen, and sulphur forms a molecule of sulphuric acid, will need to involve knowledge of properties which explain the amenability of such atoms to that particular mode of bonding. But there is no *telos* in the offing: it is no explanation of *why* a hydrogen atom possesses those properties to call attention to the way in which they facilitate its participation in molecules of sulphuric acid. Whereas it is, or is felt to be, an explanation of the cell-structure of the kidney that it enables the kidney to act as a filter. More generally: we conceive a structure as an organic unity only if we suppose not merely that there is a functional interdependence between certain of the characteristics of its constituents but more, that explanations of at least some of those characteristics will be teleological, will proceed by making it clear how it is that possession of those characteristics enables the constituent to carry out its distinctive function in the whole.

To avoid misunderstanding: the foregoing is intended only as a characterization of one aspect of the concept of an organism which we actually use. It is no part of my purpose to take sides on the question whether or not teleological explanations are, in some sense, irreducible; or whether, if they can be reduced to non-teleological ones, it would be proper to draw the conclusion that the notion of organic unity is an empty one. Of course, if that conclusion were correct, Bradley's metaphysical claim would have to be empty as well; but our present goal is merely to assess that claim from a standpoint which accepts that some structures do exhibit an organic unity, and that there is a coherent account to be given of their distinctive features.

Bradley himself appears to have kept this teleological aspect of organic unities in view only episodically. In particular, even if we granted that the above 'facts' which he adduces can be taken straightforwardly as evidence of causal interaction between the community and the individual, they anyway appear — at least if the objective is to reveal the

community as an organic structure — to be of the wrong kind. If the community, or a social substructure within the community, is to be shown to be an organic structure of the people who compose it, it will not do merely to argue that the individual is 'made what he is' by his social environment, that 'the soul within him' is saturated by 'the universal life' (*ES*, p. 172). Rather Bradley needs to call attention to characteristics of individuals whose explanation would have to advert to their functional role in the social organism. It is only if there are such characteristics that it can make sense to conceive at all of organic social structures whose constituents are individual persons.

There is a connection, of course, between the teleological aspect of the notion of an organism and the capacity of Bradley's metaphysical thesis to subserve the intended moral view. Simply: what makes teleological explanations of the characteristics of an organ appropriate is the conception that it has an essential role to play; and it is our understanding of this essential role which supplies, in the manner adumbrated earlier, the standard whereby its actual performance may be evaluated. So it really is vital that Bradley draws the analogy in the relevant respect, i.e. that there be a range of human characteristics the explanation of which is teleological and proceeds in terms of social roles played by the individuals exemplifying them.

Evidently, though, it would not have been difficult for him to do so, if only for the trivial reason that any well-organized social institution is liable to employ people in ways that take account of their special strengths and limitations. There will thus be explanations of the athleticism and co-ordination of footballers, the perfect pitch and manual dexterity of orchestral violinists, and the wisdom of university administrators, of just the sorts that Bradley's thesis requires.

Viewed in the light of these considerations, Bradley's view is apt to strike us as much more reasonable than its detractors over the years have made it seem. There is no question but that it is part of our ordinary moral thinking that if someone takes on a role in a certain organized activity, he thereby incurs certain determinate obligations, the details of which depend upon a conception, perhaps vague, which we have of *ideal* performance of that particular role. The use of evaluative

adjectives as *attributives* in concatenation with role-descriptions — ‘good farmer’, ‘able administrator’, ‘bad doctor’, etc. — is intelligible because and only because of this. If this was the whole content of the moral philosophy of ‘My Station and Its Duties’ then we could give Bradley the point and wonder that he needed over fifty pages to make it. But, of course, the claim is much larger: it is a claim about the fundamental nature of the *truth-conditions* of moral judgments. If someone really supposed — a position from which Bradley in the end recoils — that ‘My Station and Its Duties’ represented a wholly adequate moral theory, his thesis would have to be that the legitimate meaning of moral adjectives is *exhausted* by the kind of attributive function illustrated, and that any contexts in which we appear to judge a man’s conduct in isolation from the social role or roles which he plays must be understood as involving ellipsis of some such attributive use. Where we are concerned with a genuine organism, the only basis — other than aesthetic — for evaluation of the performance of its constituents is in terms of the roles which the organism requires them to play.

To conceive of this kind of evaluation as constitutive of all legitimate moral judgment would seem less rebarbative if, like Bradley, we took it that fulfilment of our ‘essence’ would *eo ipso* make us happy — indeed, only if that is supposed can Bradley see himself as having retained what he views as correct in the utilitarian standpoint. But, however that may be, the salient point is that Bradley will seem merely to have blown up one aspect of our moral thinking out of all proportion, unless the thesis of the organic nature of social structures can be sustained in a more robust sense than any so far indicated. It is not enough merely to observe that there is *some* scope for teleological explanation, in relation to the objectives of the corporations of which they are members, of characteristics and behaviour-patterns which people display.

In fact the propriety of teleological explanations of aspects of its constituents is evidently insufficient to characterize a structure as an organic unity in any case. Just such explanations could be given of the characteristics of many parts of a clock, or motor car, for example; and indeed of the shape of the bricks that make up the arch (supposing that they were

designed for such a job). So what further conditions ought to be imposed? One obvious consideration which we have so far ignored is that organisms are typically *live* in the biological sense: they have, that is to say, a natural cycle of development and decay, certain capacities for self-regeneration and growth, certain capacities of adaptation to change in environmental conditions, and the ability to reproduce their kind. Such a conception of nations, or states, at the level of metaphor is commonplace and is displayed in familiar imagery like that of ‘development’ or ‘decadence’. Should Bradley really be taken to mean, more, that certain social wholes really are living entities, whose study would thus be a province of biology? Sometimes it appears so. He writes, for example:

The universal to be realised is no abstraction, but an organic whole; a system where many spheres are subordinated to one sphere, and particular actions to spheres. This system is real in the detail of its functions, not out of them, and lives in its vital processes, not away from them. The organs are always at work for the whole, the whole is at work in the organs. And I am one of the organs (*ES*, p. 176).

The conception of social wholes as living, regenerative, historical individuals is, of course, more explicit in Hegel; indeed it is the focal point of his entire philosophy of history. Had Bradley, in effect, committed himself to it, or is there some stance, intermediate between the Hegelian view and the admission as appropriate of certain types of teleological explanation, which will nevertheless sustain the moral philosophy of ‘My Station and Its Duties’?

It would be of considerable interest to examine the Hegelian view in its own right (of course, we would expect to find against it), if only because we should be forced to make progress on the question concerning what constitutes a living whole, one cardinal problem of the philosophy of biology. But I shall not try to take on that issue here. For Bradley is clearly making certain demands on the notion of a *person* which we can appraise independently of making progress on that issue, and indeed independently of deciding whether there is any stance available to him of the intermediate sort just mentioned. It is, as noted, characteristic of organisms, and of many mechanisms, that the sortal concepts under which their constituents fall — concepts like kidney, heart,

stomach, root, stalk, gill, spring, cog, transistor, etc. — classify those constituents in accordance with functional role. Our conception of the sort of thing a kidney, or cog-wheel, essentially is, thus carries with it an implicit reference to the type of task it is suitable to perform and the sort of larger entity in which it is apt to perform it. This is not to deny that somebody could learn to classify such objects without knowing anything about their function: the point is merely that such a classificatory ability would not be enough for an understanding of the sortal concepts involved, whatever precise further knowledge we would want to regard as sufficient for understanding.<sup>4</sup>

There is thus a clear sense in which to attempt to conceive of a functional constituent of an organism, or mechanism, in isolation from the role which it plays is to entertain, as Bradley puts it, a mere 'abstraction'. For, to stress this, the functional roles of such entities are *essential* characteristics of them; hence they cannot survive the *loss* of such a role — or, at least, loss of the capacity to play it. I believe that Bradley means to assert something precisely analogous when he claims that individuals are real only in the social organism. At any rate, precisely this analogy is what is wanted if the moral theory of 'My Station and Its Duties' is to aspire to comprehensiveness. But in that case, the following specific, and assessable, demand is being made on the notion of a person: Bradley is demanding that the attempt to conceive of an individual person in abstraction from the social whole, or wholes, into which he is integrated, is, correspondingly, to attempt to abstract away from characteristics essential to his being a *person* at all. If the person outside society is to be a mere 'delusion of theory' (*ES*, p. 174), then the concept of a person must contain the same sort of tacit reference to larger social structures that the concept of a kidney contains to animal bodies. Can such a demand possibly be sustained?

One's instinctive response is that it cannot; that the concept of person is simply that of one *natural kind* of autonomous entity, and that Bradley's demand is quite misplaced. On reflection, however, it emerges that, on the contrary, Bradley has the support of a substantial insight. To explain, persons are essentially *rational*, as Aristotle saw, not in the sense that they are predominantly cool-headed, logical, and resistant to

superstition, but in the sense that at least a large part of their behaviour is susceptible to explanation in terms of systematic theories of their beliefs and desires. Persons are also essentially *self-conscious* in the sense that they possess a conception of themselves as continuants, with a determinate legacy of previous experience, and the prospect of future experience which they can anticipate at least in broad outline. Putting rationality and self-consciousness together, we have that a person, whatever else it is, is a subject aware of its possession of determinate future objectives for itself and of scenarios of how they may be achieved. No creature could satisfy us that it deserved to be viewed in this light unless it was capable, in its behaviour, of manifesting the various relevant conceptions: a grasp of the distinction between itself and other things, knowledge of its own history, an awareness of possible future states which it is within its power to promote and beliefs about the appropriate means for promoting them, the capacity to modify such beliefs in the face of changing circumstances, and a self-consciously entertained framework of desires and goals. If, and only if, a creature presented us with full-blooded behavioural grounds for attributing such concepts and abilities to it, would it then be reasonable to regard ourselves as confronting a person, irrespective of its appearance or constitution; so persons are *not* a natural kind.

Now it is, I think, evident that no behaviour which was not *linguistic* could possibly be rich enough to warrant such a view of an agent. Only linguistic behaviour can manifest a conception of the self; only linguistic behaviour can manifest a conception of various future possibilities. And while it is true that we sometimes apply the belief/desire scheme of explanation to the behaviour of more intelligent non-human animals, there is a significant indeterminacy about the *content* of beliefs attributed to languageless creatures, since — in contrast to the situation which prevails with persons — intersubstitution of coextensive expressions within the formulation of a belief attributed to a dog, say, will not jeopardize the explanatory power of the attribution.<sup>5</sup> Since to be a person is to be able to behave, *ceteris paribus*, in a way distinctive of being a person, and such behaviour must — if the foregoing is cogent — be linguistic, it follows that to be

a person is to be master of an (appropriately rich) language.

We are now close to the Bradleian insight. To clinch it, however, we need to borrow one of the later Wittgenstein's. One way of expressing a leading corollary of his thought about rule-following,<sup>6</sup> is that language is an essentially social activity in the sense that only in a community of speakers are certain conditions met whose satisfaction is necessary for a justified belief that the language exists at all. This thesis, and its celebrated application to the Cartesian conception of language concerning those of a subject's mental states about which he is normally granted a special authority — sensations, intentions, etc. — is not universally accepted by philosophers; and it would take us too far afield to review the grounds for it. Let me merely record both my own belief that they are extremely powerful; and the thought that Bradley would likely as not have had little time for the strong realism to which, I believe, an opponent of Wittgenstein's thesis must commit himself.

Now some interpreters of Wittgenstein have held that the corollary about private language would extend to exclusion of a language used by a Robinson Crusoe to describe the physical surroundings on his island. If that is correct, and language-mastery can thus be exercised only in the context of an actual society of language-users, then, in the light of our above reflections, that someone is a person at all can be manifest only in behaviour which is uniquely possible in the society of other persons. But only in behaviour which manifests his personhood did an agent function distinctively *as* a person: it would appear to follow that in order to function as a person, one must function (in a reciprocally intelligible way) among the members of a social group.

It is important to see, however, that we can forgo this relatively controversial interpretation of Wittgenstein, yet still make out a close analogy between person *vis-à-vis* society and kidney *vis-à-vis* human body.<sup>7</sup> First, define ' $x$  functions as a  $\phi$ ' as:  $x$  behaves in a way in which *necessarily*<sup>8</sup> all and only  $\phi$ s can (unless prevented) behave. Thus for  $x$  to function as a kidney is for  $x$  to filter the blood (in a certain way) and, by our earlier reflections, for  $x$  to function as a person is for  $x$  to deploy a (sufficiently rich) language. Now a kidney can survive excision from its parent body just so long as its capacity

to function as a kidney survives; so too, *mutatis mutandis*, for Crusoe's social 'excision' on his island. What, then, does Wittgenstein, less controversially interpreted, have to say about Crusoe's purported solitary linguistic behaviour? Just that its capacity correctly to be regarded *as* language-use is conceptually dependent upon its capacity to admit of intelligible integration into a community of language-users. So Crusoe can 'function as a person' in solitude; but the claim that he is doing so is answerable to what would happen if he were to be reincorporated within a normal linguistic community. But then the parallel with a kidney is evident. For, in the relevant sense, a kidney too can function as such in isolation: we can pump blood from a blood bank through a disembodied kidney and monitor its performance. Yet the claim that it is functioning as a kidney is conceptually answerable to what would happen if it were to be (appropriately) reincorporated within an otherwise normal, living human body.

The analogy is thus:

- (a) Kidney and person are both sortal concepts.
- (b) Necessarily: to be a kidney/person is to be able (unless prevented) to do certain things which all and only kidneys/persons can do (unless prevented).
- (c) The relevant kinds of activity are standardly performed in the context of integration within a larger whole, but can, abnormally, be performed in isolation.
- (d) The claim that a particular performance in isolation constitutes one of the relevant kinds of activity is conceptually answerable to its capacity to pass tests associated with (re-) integration into an appropriate larger whole.

It hence is arguable that there is indeed a sense in which the notion of person points to the notion of a larger social entity in which persons are constituents; and in which the attempt to conceive of a person in isolation from the capacity to function in such a larger entity is a futile attempt to conceive of him in abstraction from certain essential characteristics. So Bradley is, arguably, right.

## III

If this is an insight, it would nevertheless be a confusion to attempt to rest the theoretical stance of 'My Station and Its Duties' upon it. The explanation is simple. The notion of 'functioning as a person' appealed to in the construction of the analogy has been associated with no *telos* for the relevant whole. The parallel is that for an entity to function as, and indeed *be* a person, or kidney, is, for purely conceptual reasons, possible only if that entity could function in just that way as a successful constituent in an appropriate larger totality. But that is as far as the parallel goes — not far enough for Bradley's purpose. For it remains that to function as a kidney is to play a certain part in promotion of a *telos* of the whole; whereas, although 'functioning as a person' is answerable to integration within a community, it is not, or need not be, a matter of playing a part, after integration, in the achievement of some goal — if only the 'proper functioning' — of the community as a whole. So the sense in which the very notion of a person adverts to a larger totality is not the sense that was wanted.

This is only to point out a lacuna. I do not pretend to *know* that a deeper analysis of the notion of a person could not construct the more thoroughgoing parallel which Bradley needs (and hence overthrow the above suggestion that mastery of a sufficiently rich language is sufficient to constitute personhood). But it is natural to be very sceptical about the prospect. Evidently it would be necessary to be specific about the *telos* of the social organism, in order to verify that the notion of a person does indeed have an appropriate teleological aspect; but all that Bradley has to offer is that the end of the whole is self-realization of its constituent organs — and that is just as circular, though just as correct, as saying that the *telos* of the human body is the proper functioning of its organs.<sup>9</sup>

As noted, Bradley himself is not in the end content with the theory of 'My Station and Its Duties'. At the end of his essay (*ES*, pp. 203-6) he introduces and sustains a number of objections to it, including its inability to account for 'cosmopolitan' aspects of morality and certain sorts of (what Bradley sees as) duties to oneself — in particular, in

so far as one is capable, the production of truth and beauty. He does not make fully explicit, however, what is likely to strike anyone, irrespective of his views on Bradley's 'metaphysical question', as the most serious objection of all: that the theory provides no basis for what is evidently possible, viz. significant evaluation of the morality of the social whole in which one's 'station' is defined. Failing the elucidation of some larger totality in which such wholes are themselves constituent organs,<sup>10</sup> the strict consequence of 'My Station and Its Duties' has to be that moral categories are simply inapplicable to the conduct of such institutions. This is a repulsive consequence; as is the ease with which it comes to those whose political thinking is dominated by the notion of 'social organism' to engage in such conceptions as that of political dissidence as a form of *disease*.

Still, for all that 'My Station and Its Duties' is unacceptable both as morality and as moral theory, it arguably rests upon a conceptual insight; but an insight which Bradley grasped only dimly and which, unless developed in ways I cannot foresee, is inadequate to sustain it.<sup>11</sup>

## NOTES

1. See in particular Hegel, *Philosophy of Right*, Oxford, 1942, tr. Knox para. 135. A good synopsis of Hegel's criticisms is given by chap. IV of W. H. Walsh, *Hegelian Ethics*, Macmillan, 1969. Bradley's objections are concentrated in chap. IV of *Ethical Studies*, Oxford, 2nd edn., 1927.
2. Bradley's dissatisfactions with utilitarianism are various. See *Ethical Studies*, Essay III, 'Pleasure for Pleasure's Sake'. First, the pursuit of pleasure for its own sake, which he sees as the essential motif of the utilitarian standpoint, is simply impractical: 'the world has learnt that, if pleasure is the end, it is an end which must not be made one, and is found there most where it is not sought . . . if you want to be happy in the sense of pleased, you must not think of pleasure, but, taking up some accredited form of living, must make that your end, and in that case, with moderately good fortune, you will be happy' (*ES*, p. 87).

Second, utilitarianism, however careful its formulation, is enormously counterintuitive: 'When moral persons without a theory on the matter are told that the moral end for the individual and the race is the getting a maximum surplusage of pleasurable feeling, and that there is nothing in the whole world which has the smallest moral value except this end and the means to it, there is no gainsaying that they repudiate such a result. They feel that there are things "we should choose even if no pleasure came from them"; and that if we choose these things, being good, for ourselves, then we must choose them also for the race, if we care for the race as we do for ourselves' (*ES*, p. 88).

But Bradley's main theoretical objection is to the hedonism on which

he believes utilitarianism must ultimately rest, viz. that it leaves morality with *no realizable objective*. For Bradley, the moral life is essentially a life in which the self is fully *realized*; and whatever the correct account of this notion of realization, it must, on pain of the pointlessness of moral conduct, supply a practical, feasible objective. But the pursuit of pleasure, for Bradley, even the maximum pleasure for the maximum number of people, is the pursuit of a state which, in the nature of the case, is transitory: 'And pleasure (as pain) we find to be nothing but a name which stands for a series of this, that, and the other feelings, which are not except in the moment or moments that they are felt, which have as a series neither limitation of number, beginning nor end, nor in themselves any reference at all, any of them, beyond themselves. To realize, as such, the self which feels pleasure and pain, means to realize this infinite perishing series. And it is clear at once that this is not what is required for a practical end' (*ES*, p. 95). In short, as Bradley sees it, utilitarianism renders the moral task *incompletable*. The objection is apt to seem odd to anyone accustomed to think of the moral life as one in which practical decisions are habitually informed by the application of moral principles rather than as one in which a certain *task* is achieved — a task in something akin to the sense in which we think of someone's life's work as a task, and judge, for example, that W. H. Auden and Bertrand Russell completed their respective tasks while Dylan Thomas and F. P. Ramsey did not. But it is, of course, this very conception of morality that Bradley wishes to challenge.

3. In view of the arcane character of Hegel's *Logic*, such a claim must, of course, be tentative!
4. People identified the kidneys, for example, long before their function was understood (perhaps as we now identify the vermiform appendix); but it is characteristic of this type of concept that once the function is understood, it comes to dominate other, original bases of classification. We can make perfect sense of the possibility of people who had a quite different *type* of kidney to ours: kidneys which looked different, worked on a different mechanical principle, and were situated, say, adjacent to the heart.
5. Another way of putting the point would be that any attribution of belief to a dog may equivalently be recast so as to give wide scope with respect to the belief-operator, and hence extensional intersubstitutivity, to any of the constituent expressions in the that-clause. Hence a description of a dog's belief has neither characteristic — indifference to existence or non-substitutivity — which Brentano regarded as the essential features of *intentionality*, the hallmark, as he supposed, of the mental.
6. See in particular *Philosophical Investigations*, Oxford, 1953, paras. 185–242; and *Remarks on the Foundations of Mathematics*, Oxford, 1978 (especially I, paras. 113–18, and VI, paras. 15–49). Recent commentary on this aspect of Wittgenstein's thought includes S. Kripke, 'Wittgenstein on Rules and Private Language', in *Perspectives on the Philosophy of Wittgenstein*, ed. I. Block, 1981, and my own *Wittgenstein on the Foundations of Mathematics*, London, 1980.
7. The 'relatively controversial interpretation' (see, for example, Rush Rhees, 'Can there be a Private Language?', *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*, supp. vol. 28, 1954) is in any case — unlike the milder interpretation which I am about to suggest — at odds with Bradley's apparent willingness to admit the possibility of the unsocialized *acquisition* of language. See, for example, *Essays on Truth and Reality*, Oxford, 1944, chap. XII, p. 357.
8. i.e. it is to be non-contingently true that all and only  $\phi$ s can behave in the relevant fashion.

9. If the *telos* of the human body is healthy life, say, it is true that its healthy life consists in the proper functioning of its organs. But it must be possible to explain what 'healthy' life is *independently* of identifying the vital organs and their proper functions if there is to be any basis for regarding the body with its organs as an organic unity at all; for, failing such explanation, how could *teleological* questions about the organs be properly motivated?
10. As Hegel attempted to do.
11. Robert Nozick has recently given extensive space to a theory of value based on organic unity in his *Philosophical Explanations*, Oxford, 1981. Perhaps it is worth remarking that his starting-point is quite different to that of Bradley. For Bradley, integration within an organic whole is the basis of evaluation: value is in proportion to effective discharge of role. For Nozick, it is, crudely, organization itself that is of value; the value of an entity is generated by its own degree and manner of organization rather than its role as an organ in something else. (It will be interesting to see whether Nozick's ideas achieve a more popular reception than Bradley's, and whether they have the effect of revitalizing interest in the latter.)