Bradley's Regress from a Radical Pragmatist Point of View

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Abstract: I shall argue that Bradley's Regress arises because of the assumption that our world entails entities (properties, relations and the like) that are supposed to be had, hold or exists independently of what is practically possible to do. For, on this view, it seems that a statement of the kind "a is F" or a statement of the kind "a_i are R" must be understood in the sense of "a exemplifies (instantiates, has, bears) F" and in the sense of "a_i exemplify R" respectively and, therefore, as involving a relation, the exemplification relation, that is supposed to hold between a and F and a_i and R. In my opinion, our world entails not properties and relations but doings. Our world is basically a world of actual and potential doings (and of correlates of doings). I therefore suggest to understand statements of the kind "a is F" in the sense of "It is practically possible for a subject to perform the doing F on a" and statements of the kind "a_i are R" in the sense of "It is practically possible for a subject to perform the doing R on a_i". Thus, the statement that the apple on the table is red says that it is practically possible for a subject to perform the doing of seeing red on the apple on the table or, in short, that it is practically possible to see the apple on the table red. On this view, Bradley's Regress does not arise because a doing and the corresponding entities are connected not in virtue of an exemplification relation but in virtue of that doing itself as well as in virtue of the relevant subject. This is because a doing is essentially an entity that is performable by a subject on one or several entities and because some doings are accidentally performed by particular subjects on one or several particular entities.

1. Our world as a world of doings

Radical pragmatism is the view that our world is basically a world of potential and actual doings (and of correlates of doings) but not a world of properties, relations, states of affairs, facts or other things that are supposed to be had, hold, obtain and exist independently of what is practically possible to do. This view provides simple solutions for several metaphysical problems. As I wish to show in my talk, if we substitute doings for properties (and relations)

then we may solve Bradley's regress in a straightforward way because there is an interpretation of the copula which does not rely on the assumption of an exemplification relation.

I shall start by defining doings. This will require an interpretation of the practical possibility of performing a doing and of the practical possibility of trying to perform a doing. On grounds of the given definition of doings, I shall afterwards introduce the notion of criteria and specify both the criterion for criteria and the criterion of identity for criteria. I maintain that doings are criteria because they enable us to pick out some entity or entities out of the relevant domain and I argue that they enable us to do that because it is practically possible to try to perform a doing on all entities of the relevant domain but practically impossible to actually perform a doing on other entities than on those on which it is performable. These preliminary expositions will then allow me to address the universality of criteria as well as to give an interpretation of the copula, and this will then allow me to explain why, from the radical pragmatist point of view, there is a simple solution for Bradley's regress. The idea is that a doing and one or several entities on which that doing is performed at a time or on which that doing is at least performable are connected not in virtue of a relation holding between them but in virtue of that doing itself as well as in virtue of the subject capable of performing that doing on those entities.

2. Doings

By defining doings I do not wish to clarify the ordinary language meaning of such expressions as "doing" or "to do". I merely wish to define those entities that are performable. But since it is convenient to have a short expression for these entities, I suggest to call them doings. Some doings are performable only on single entities at a time, while others are performable on pairs of entities, and yet others on triples of entities and so forth. In order to keep my definition general, I shall therefore consider not entities but sequences of entities and I shall thereby assume that in the case of a doing that is performable only on single entities at a time only the first element of a sequence is relevant while in the case of a doing that is performable only on two entities at a time only the first two elements are relevant and so forth.

Let me then define *doings* as those entities that are performable on at least one sequence of entities, by at least one subject, at at least one place, time and possible world. According to this definition, doings are both entities such that it is practically possible to perform them and entities such that it is practically possible to *try* to perform them on at least one sequence of entities. This is because the practical possibility of performing a doing implies the practical possibility of trying to perform that doing. Whenever there is at least one sequence of entities such that it is practically possible to perform a doing on that sequence then there is also at

least one sequence of entities such that it is practically possible to try to perform that doing on that sequence.

This definition of doings is not yet satisfactory of course. It does not say what the practical possibility of trying to perform a doing nor what the practical possibility of performing a doing consists in. In what follows, I shall therefore present my notions of these possibilities and I shall, in order to do that, analyze the sentence

(1) The doing Φ is performable for the subject s on the sequence f of entities

What do we mean when we say, for example, that it is practically possible for Peter to bite into the apple, i.e. to perform the doing 'biting an object' on the apple? I think we mean that if Peter wants to perform that doing on the apple then he can perform that doing on the apple. We mean, in short, that Peter can bite into the apple if he wants to do so.

It might therefore be thought that (1) should be paraphrased by the conditional

(2) If s wants to perform Φ on f then s can perform Φ on f

But how shall we understand the expression "s can perform Φ on f" entailed in (2)? A first suggestion might be to understand it in the sense of "It is possible for s to perform Φ on f" and, accordingly, to replace (2) by

(3) If s wants to perform Φ on f then it is possible for s to perform Φ on f

There are however at least two quite obvious reasons why (3) cannot be an adequate paraphrases of (1). First, given that it is practically possible to perform Φ on f, wanting to perform Φ on f does not imply the practical possibility of performing Φ on f. Peter's wanting to bite into the apple does not imply the practical possibility of Peter's biting into the apple. Rather, if it is practically possible for Peter to bite into the apple then Peter's wanting to bite into the apple implies Peter's biting into the apple. Second, how shall we understand the expression "it is possible for s to perform Φ on f" entailed in (3)? On pain of running in circles, we cannot understand that expression in the sense of "It is practically possible for s to perform Φ on f". Nor can we understand it in the sense of "There is at least one possible world such that in that world s performs Φ on f". Wanting to perform a doing does not imply the existence of some possible world either. Rather, it seems that if a doing is performable and if the subject in question is able to try to perform that doing then wanting to perform that doing implies the performance of that doing. Wanting implies doing – provided that the doing is performable and that the subject is able to perform that doing. In view of this connection between wanting and doing, I suggest to paraphrase (1) not by (2) but by the conditional

(4) If s wants to perform Φ on f then s performs Φ on f

This paraphrase bears however a problem that is similar to the problem mentioned by Rudolf Carnap with regard to the interpretation of disposition ascriptions. Given that the "if-then"-relation entailed in (4) is to be understood in the sense of material implication, it follows that Φ is performable on f if s does not want to perform Φ on f. For material implication is such that a conditional is true if its antecedence is false. Yet it is clear that not wanting to perform a doing does not imply the practical possibility of performing that doing. There are, as far as I can see, only two ways of avoiding that problem. We must either understand the "if-then"-relation in (4) in some other sense than material implication or we must revise the interpretation of (1) such that the problem does not appear. I opt for the second possibility. In my opinion, (4) is not an adequate interpretation of (1) because it assumes that the performance of a doing is always deliberate, whereas we often perform doings whether we want to perform them or not.

I therefore prefer to paraphrase (1) by

(5) Either s wants to perform Φ on f and then s performs Φ on f or (in the exclusive sense) s does not want to perform Φ on f and either s performs Φ on f or (in the exclusive sense) s does not perform Φ on f

In the case of (5), the above problem does not appear because (5) is true if and only if s wants to perform Φ on f and s performs Φ on f.

Now, it seems clear that, unless it is practically possible for a particular subject to try to perform a doing, it does not make sense to speak of the practical possibility of performing that doing with regard to that subject. If (for whatever reason) it is practically impossible for Peter at least to try to bite into the apple then it would be simply non-sense to say that it is practically possible for Peter to bite into the apple. Accordingly, I suggest to understand the *practical possibility of performing a doing* as follows:

(6) For all doings Φ, for all sequences f of entities, for all subjects s: if it is practically possible for s to try to perform Φ on f, then it is practically possible for s to perform Φ on f if and only if either s wants to perform Φ on f and then s performs Φ on f or (in the exclusive sense) s does not want to perform Φ on f and either s performs Φ on f or (in the exclusive sense) s does not perform Φ on f

Let us next look at the notion of the practical possibility of trying to perform a doing. An important difference between trying to perform a doing and performing a doing is that the former is always deliberate whereas the latter is deliberate or not. I take it that we cannot try to perform a doing without wanting to try to perform it. But this means that it does not make

sense to speak of the practical possibility of trying to perform a doing unless the subject in question wants to try to perform that doing. I therefore suggest to understand the *practical possibility of trying to perform a doing* as follows:

(7) For all doings Φ, for all sequences f of entities, for all subjects s: if s wants to try to perform Φ on f, then it is practically possible for s to try to perform Φ on f if and only if it is true that if s wants to try to perform Φ on f then s tries to perform Φ on f

These interpretations do not take into account that it is only practically possible to try to perform or to perform a doing at a time, place and possible world. This simplification has however no importance for what follows.

It is clear that my notions of the practical possibility of trying to perform a doing and of the practical possibility of performing a doing – and, consequently, the given definition of doings as well – depend crucially on the notions of wanting and performing. Yet I take these notions to be basic and familiar. I assume that every conscious human being knows what it means to want to perform a doing and what it means to perform a doing because wanting and doing is part of being alive and conscious. Moreover, since I assumed that a doing may be performed deliberately or not, I consider non-deliberate sensations to be just as much doings as deliberate actions. Thus, perceptions such as seeing red or emotions such feeling happy are just as much doings as deliberately raising one's arm or as writing a letter and posting it.

3. Criteria

At least some doings are such that there are more entities on which it is practically possible to try to perform those doings than entities on which it is practically possible to perform them. Seeing red, for example, is such that it is practically possible to try to perform that doing on any object, be it a red one or not, but practically impossible to perform it on objects that are not red, because only red objects are such that they can be seen red. Seeing red allows us therefore to distinguish all red objects from all other objects. This is a trivial point. For how else should we distinguish red objects from all other objects if not by means of seeing red? Despite its triviality it is however an important point because it implies that some doings enable us to pick out all entities of a kind or all entities standing in a relation to each other. Seeing red enables us to pick out all red objects while measuring an object to be one meter apart from another object enables us to pick out all pairs of objects such that one is one meter apart from the other. Let me call doings that enable us to pick out all entities of a kind or all entities standing in a relation to each other *criteria*.

I assume that all doings are criteria. Each doing enables us to pick out from the corresponding domain all entities of the relevant kind or all entities standing in the relevant

relation to each other. Accordingly, I shall hereafter use the expressions "criterion" and "doing" as synonyms. Furthermore, instead of the expression "it is practically possible to try to perform the criterion Φ on f" I shall also use the expression "Φ is applicable to f". And instead of the expression "it is practically possible to perform the criterion Φ on f" I shall also use the expression "f fulfills Φ". Note that, although for convenience I shall speak of *the applicability* and of *the fulfillment* of criteria, there are no such things as the applicability and the fulfillment of criteria. The expression "Φ is applicable to f" is not a denoting expression but merely an abbreviation for the sentence "It is practically possible to try to perform the criterion Φ on f" which in turn is merely an abbreviation for "If the subject s wants to try to perform Φ on f then s tries to perform Φ on f". Likewise, the expression "f fulfills Φ" is merely an abbreviation for "It is practically possible to perform the criterion Φ on f" which in turn is an abbreviation for (5).

There is one doing, the *criterion for criteria*, which enables us to distinguish all criteria from all other entities. For this doing is such that it is practically possible to try to perform it on any entity but practically impossible to perform it on other entities than criteria. Since by defining doings I have identified the criterion for criteria already, I may now express that identification formally as follows – thereby using "K" for "criterion", "x>f" for "x is applicable to f" and "xf" for "f fulfills x":

$(\text{Def}_K)\quad (x)(Kx \leftrightarrow (\exists f)(x>f) \wedge (\exists f)(xf))$

The variable "x" in (Def_K) is supposed to range over all entities and the variable "f" over all sequences of entities. Note that, since fulfillment implies applicability, the identification of the criterion for criteria may also be expressed by means of "$(x)(Kx \leftrightarrow (\exists f)(xf))$". And note furthermore that (Def_K) does not exclude the self-application nor therefore the self-fulfillment of criteria but that this does not generate a paradox, as I explain in detail elsewhere.[1] The reason is, in short, that there are no negative criteria nor, therefore, such a thing as the criterion for all non-self-fulfilling criteria.

Another doing, the *criterion of identity for criteria*, enables us to distinguish all single criteria from all single and all pairs of entities. This doing is such that it is practically possible to try to perform it on any single entity and on any pair of entities but practically impossible to perform it on other entities than single criteria. The identification of the criterion of identity for doings is, at the same time, the individuation of criteria. It may be express formally as follows – with "$x =_K y$" for "x is the same criterion as y":

$(\text{Ind}_K)\quad (x)(y)(x =_K y \leftrightarrow (\exists f)(x>f) \wedge (\exists f)(y>f) \wedge (\exists f)(xf) \wedge (\exists f)(yf) \wedge (z)(x>f \leftrightarrow y>f) \wedge (z)(xf \leftrightarrow yf))$

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[1] In "The Criterion-Theoretic Paradoxes", yet unpublished.

In (Ind_K), the variables "x" and "y" are supposed to range over all entities and the variable "f" over all sequences of entities. According to (Ind_K), an entity x is the same criterion as an entity y if and only if x is a criterion, y is a criterion and x is applicable to and fulfilled by the same sequences of entities as y is. In other words, the identity of a criterion depends on both on all entities (or pairs or triples and so forth of entities) fulfilling the criterion as well as on all entities (or pairs of triples and so forth of entities) to which the criterion is applicable to. Let me call the totality of the former *extension* and the totality of the latter *range of applicability*.[2]

Criteria as defined above fulfill the purpose usually attributed to entities called 'natures', 'essences', 'forms', 'properties' and the like. The nature of apples, for example, is considered to be the thing that makes an apple an apple and that allows us to say which objects are apples and which not. It is supposed to allow us to distinguish between apples and all other objects. But this is precisely what the criterion for apples does. It enables us to pick out all apples from all objects. Moreover, by distinguishing apples from objects the criterion for apples 'makes' apples to be apples in the sense that this criterion is the doing that is performable on all and only on objects that are apples.

4. The universality of criteria

Ever since Plato philosophers were mystified by the universality of 'forms', 'natures' or 'properties'. How can one and the same property be universal in the sense of being shared by spatially and/or temporally separated entities? Or, to put it the other way around, how can different exemplifications be exemplifications of one and the same property? It seems that the exemplification of red on the apple on the table and the exemplification of red on the candle in the room must be exemplifications of one and the same property because otherwise it is not clear as to what those objects have in common. But it seems also clear that they cannot exemplify one and the same property because this would mean that that property is separated and therefore distinct from itself.

At first it might seem that a similar problem concerns criteria as well. How can one and the same criterion be performed by different subjects and at different places, times and worlds? Or, to put it the other way around, how can different performances be performances of one and the same criterion? It seems that the performance of the criterion for red objects on the apple on the table and the performance of that criterion on the candle in the room must be performances of one and the same criterion because otherwise it is not clear as to what these performances have in common. Yet it also seems clear that they cannot be performances of

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[2] I give a more detailed account of the corresponding view on individuation and on criteria of identity in "Identifying Criteria of Identity", forthcoming in *Metaphysica*. See also my *Metaphysische Untersuchungen – Erster Teil*, chapters V and VII. Frankfurt: ontos verlag, 2007.

one and the same criterion because this would mean that the criterion for red objects is separated and therefore distinct from itself.

In the case of criteria, however, this problem has a simple solution. For, according to (Ind_K), the identity of a criterion does not depend on the entities on which that criterion is actually performed but only on the entities on which it is practically possible to try to perform the criterion as well as on the entities on which it is practically possible to perform the criterion. In other words, the identity of a criterion depends exclusively on its range of applicability and on its extension. Thus, while it is essential for the criterion for apples to be applicable to all objects and to be fulfilled by all and only by objects that are apples, it is not essential whether that criterion is applied to the candle in the room or whether that criterion is actually performed on the apple on the table. But this means that to speak of different performances of one and the same criterion really means to speak of one and the same criterion performed on different occasions. Likewise, to speak of 'the performance of a criterion' is merely a way of speaking. Yet if we choose to speak that way then we may say that the performance of a criterion must not be conceived as a further entity but as the very criterion itself accidentally performed on one or several particular entities, by a particular subject and at a particular time, place and possible world. If we choose to speak of 'the performance of a criterion' then we may say that a criterion is identical with its performances.

The theory of criteria allows us therefore to identify and to explain the relation between a criterion conceived as 'universal' and its many 'instances'. That relation is no other than identity. A criterion is 'universal' insofar as it is applicable and performable by different subjects and applicable to and performable on one or several entities that exist at different places, times and possible worlds. And a criterion is 'instantiated' whenever it is actually performed by a particular subject on one or several particular entities, at a particular place, time and possible world.[3]

5. *The four-dimensionality of criteria*

As becomes clear now, a crucial difference between properties or relations and criteria is that, whereas the former are merely had by entities or holding between entities, the latter are applicable to and performable on one or several entities at a time. Moreover, some criteria are sometimes actually applied and some actually performed. In other words, whereas properties and relations are *one-dimensional* in the sense of being related only to one notion, the notion of having a property and the notion of standing in a relation to each other respectively, criteria are *four-dimensional* in the sense of being related to four notions – applicability, fulfillment, application and actual performance.

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[3] I developed the theory of criteria in more detail in op.cit., especially chapter IV. There are also further articles concerning the theory of criteria that are written in English but still unpublished. Please contact me if you are interested in these articles (aleksandar.kellenberg@gmx.net).

Due to this four-dimensionality of criteria, the theory of criteria offers not only a simple solution to the problem of universality but also simple solutions to many other notorious problems of property/relation theory – provided, of course, that we substitute criteria for properties and relations. In particular, the theory of criteria allows us

- to give a unified account of properties and relations because criteria are criteria whether they are applicable to more than one entity at a time or not;
- to formulate a theory of dispositions according to which dispositionality is nothing else than the potentiality of being performed and according to which there is therefore no need to distinguish between categorical and dispositional properties but merely between the practical possibility of performing a criterion (i.e. fulfillment) and the actual performance of a criterion;
- to explain certain peculiar features of dyadic relations and to explain why identity seems to be both a relation and a property;
- to deal with problems concerning qualia; or
- to defend an extensional individuation of properties (and relations), namely the individuation of criteria mentioned above, against examples such as the one concerning equilateral and equiangular triangles.

In the remaining part of my talk, I shall however not discuss these issues but rather explain why radical pragmatism provides also a simple solution for Bradley's regress.

6. An interpretation of the copula and Bradley's regress

It seems plausible to interpret the statement that the apple on the table is red as saying that there is an object, the apple on the table, and a property, the property redness (or, if you like, the property of being red), and that there is a relation holding between that object and that property. And it seems plausible to interpret the statement that the apple on the table and the pear on the table are one meter apart from each other as saying that there are two objects, the apple and the pear, and a relation, the relation one meter apart from each other (or the relation of being one meter a part of each other), and that there is a relation holding between those objects and that relation. These interpretations seem plausible because an object and a property or several objects and a relation must be related somehow in order to constitute what is expressed by statements of the kind "a is (an) F" and "a_i are R" and because it seems clear that they must be related by means of some relation. Yet, plausible as it may be, these interpretations raise several questions and involves rather serious problems. One question concerns the relation of having a property and the relation of being related by a relation, the *exemplification relation*, that is supposed to hold between entities and properties or between entities and relations. Which one is that relation? It seems we are still awaiting a satisfying answer.

The exemplification relation involves moreover the following problem, known as *Bradley's regress*. It seems clear to me that if there is an exemplification relation then that relation must be an entity, whatever else it is. For I take it that to be (to have being) means nothing else than to be an entity. Yet, given that the exemplification relation is an entity, it follows that there must be two further relations, one relating the exemplification relation with the property or relation in question and one relating the exemplification relation with the entity that is supposed to have that property or the entities that are supposed to stand in the relevant relation. These further relations are however entities as well and must, therefore, be related by yet some further entities, and so on without end.

The theory of criteria suggests a different interpretation of statements of the kind "a is (an) F" and "a_i are R". It suggest to understand the sentences "a is (an) F" in the sense of "It is practically possible to perform the criterion F on the entity a" or, for short, in the sense of "a fulfills F", and the sentence "a_i are R" in the sense of "It is practically possible to perform the criterion R on the entities a_i" or in the sense of "The entities a_i fulfill R".) According to this interpretation, the sentence "The apple is red" for example expresses that it is practically possible to perform the criterion for red objects on the apple. And the sentence "The apple and the pear are one meter apart from each other" expresses that it is practically possible to perform the criterion for objects that are one meter apart from each other on the apple and the pear.

The theory of criteria allows us moreover to distinguish between the statement that a is (an) F and the statement that a is matter-of-factly (an) F. The former may be understood in the sense of "It is practically possible to perform the criterion F on a"; the latter in the sense of "The criterion F is actually performed on a". Likewise for the statement that the a_i are R and the statement that the a_i are matter-of-factly R.

On this interpretation of statements of the form "a is (an) F" and "a is matter-of-factly (an) F", "a_i are R" and "a_i are matter-of-factly R", there is no such thing as an exemplification relation. For on this interpretation the expression "a is (an) F" is merely an abbreviation for "It is practically possible to perform Φ on a" and the expression "a is matter-of-factly (an) F" merely and abbreviation for "Φ is actually performed on a", and likewise for "a_i are R" and "a_i are matter-of-factly R". But if there is no exemplification relation then the question as to which one that relation is becomes pointless while Bradley's regress loses its starting point.

The fact that there is no exemplification relation does however not imply that entities and criteria fulfilling those entities are unrelated. Usually the entities fulfilling a criterion are different from that criterion itself and it is clear that different entities must by related somehow if they are supposed to have anything to do with each other and, in particular, if they are supposed to constitute what statements express. What then connects entities with criteria? Which is that 'metaphysical glue', that 'mysterious nexus'?

Well, according to the view sketched above, it is the criterion itself which by being performed by the relevant subject on the entity or entities in question or which by being

performable on those entities connects those entities with that criterion. More precisely, a criterion and one or several entities are connected in virtue of that criterion itself as well as in virtue of the relevant subject and the subject's capacity of performing that criterion. For, due to the given definition of criteria, criteria are essentially entities that are performable by a subject on one or several entities at a time, and due to the universality of criteria a criterion may be accidentally performed by a particular subject on one or several particular entities. Hence, the 'metaphysical glue' and the 'mysterious nexus' between a criterion and one or several entities turns out to be us who are capable of performing doings as well as those doings themselves. Yet notice whether it is practically possible to perform a doing depends of course not on us nor on that doing but on the world. Whether the apple on the table is red and whether it is one meter apart from the pear on the table depends on the way the world is.

So, from a radical pragmatist point of view, Bradley's regress arises because of the idea that our world consists of properties and relations and that properties are had and relations hold independently of what is practically possible to do with the entities having that property or standing in that relation to each other. But if, on the other hand, we accept that our world is basically a world of doings and if we define doings as suggested above then Bradley's regress does not arise.