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# *The Taming of Philosophy*

Michael Della Rocca

*Philosophers' uncritical talk of philosophy as relying, for better or worse, on "intuitions" often manifests the misconception that our evidence in philosophy consists of psychological facts about ourselves rather than facts about the philosophical topic itself.*

TIMOTHY WILLIAMSON<sup>1</sup>

*I am not to be moved here by the charge of an insult offered to Common Sense. For not only in speculation, but in life, we must all be ready to affront that which somewhere, perhaps, in the name of Common Sense may claim our respect.... Common Sense taken ... at its worst, is in its essence a one-sidedness, which we must not be afraid to mark as stupid or even, perhaps, to denounce as immoral.*

F. H. BRADLEY<sup>2</sup>

*Don't mistake the fact that you don't like my view for an argument against it.*

MICHAEL DELLA ROCCA EPIGRAPH TO THIS CHAPTER.

## *1. Introduction*

RECENTLY—OVER THE LAST 100 years or so—something that might be called the method of intuition (hereafter the MI) has been widespread and even dominant in philosophy.<sup>3</sup> I will characterize this method more fully soon,

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1. In Hendricks and Symons (2005), 222.

2. Bradley (1935), 640.

3. It is, perhaps, a manifestation of the length of philosophy's history and of the significance of this history to philosophy itself that the "recent" past can cover a period of more than a century.

but for a first pass, we might say that the MI is the method whereby intuitive responses (often to particular more-or-less well-described cases or examples) are central to one's philosophical theorizing: the—or an—aim of this theorizing is to arrive at an overarching theory that somehow “accommodates” these intuitive responses as well as possible. The so-called intuitions may originate in so-called common sense or be expressed in so-called ordinary language or be the result of, perhaps, a more refined, philosophical reflection or seeing, but, on any of these construals of intuitions, the—or a—goal of philosophy is often to accommodate these intuitions, to formulate a theory that somehow “respects” them and does not “ride roughshod” over them. This is the method in one way or another, and, to some extent or another, of many of my (and, I venture to say, your) favorite philosophers: e.g., Lewis, Sider, Kripke, Kamm, Nagel, Chisholm, Thomson, Fine, Moore, Putnam, van Inwagen, Schaffer, Rawls, and many, many others.

This kind of reliance on intuition has not always been as prominent in philosophy as it has been recently. Although there were, of course, prior to the twentieth century, philosophers who were more or less subservient in their philosophy to intuition and, in some cases, to common sense, and although, as I acknowledge, one can find elements of the MI in just about any historical philosopher, nonetheless, with the twentieth century and with the rise of analytical philosophy—and for reasons that we will begin to explore later—intuition came to dominate philosophy to, perhaps, a greater extent than previously. Before the twentieth century it is much easier to find philosophers—such as, in reverse chronological order, Bradley, Nietzsche, Hume, Leibniz, and (did I say?) Spinoza—who seem to be able to do philosophy without continually looking over their shoulders to check that their delicate intuitions continue to thrive in the hothouse of philosophical reflection. These philosophers and many other historical figures do not assume that their own philosophical views have to accommodate intuitions—which are, after all, facts about our psychology, our ways of thinking of the world—but instead tend to focus more directly than do more dedicated practitioners of the MI on the generally non-psychological subjects with which they are engaged. None of these philosophers, perhaps, turns his back entirely on the MI, and in recent philosophy one can find philosophers less concerned than some others with intuitions, but the general differences between recent and not-so-recent philosophy are striking.

These sweeping claims lead to the two questions that will guide me throughout this chapter: “Is it good?” and “Why now?” More subtly: in what respects is the MI to be applauded and in what respects is it to be criticized?

And why has the MI become so popular recently? I should say at the outset that I will be very critical of the MI, and perhaps as important as the challenge I make to the MI is the fact that my answers to the two guiding questions are, surprisingly, closely intertwined. The historical story I tell near the end of the chapter will help us to understand what is wrong with the MI and will clear the way for our appreciation of an alternative to the MI. Here the assiduously neglected F. H. Bradley will be pivotal to our discussion, for not only does he straddle the nineteenth and twentieth centuries and not only is he a particularly clear example of one who rejects the MI, but it is also this example that—in a negative fashion—provided much of the impetus for the ascendancy of the MI.

The story that I will tell and the assessment that I will offer are, I'm sure, skewed in important ways (I can already hear the complaints!), but this slant also provides, I believe, a provocative and needed challenge not only to certain ways of doing philosophy but also perhaps to philosophy itself.

## *2. Characterizing the Method of Intuition and Its Alternatives*

Let us begin more modestly than we will end by offering a fuller characterization of the MI and of its varieties. A focal point of the MI consists of certain attitudes—intuitions—toward cases or phenomena. These intuitions concern whether such-and-such is a case of knowledge, causation, intentional action, free action, good or bad or right or wrong action, etc. Think Gettier cases, Frankfurt-style cases, trolley problems, etc. Discussions of such cases or intuitions about them have been for many years and continue to be a staple—or the staple—of the diet of many philosophers.

Often these intuitions are regarded as ordinary beliefs or as expressions of common sense (whatever that is) or as evident in the workings of ordinary language (whatever that is). This is true, e.g., of Moore, Lewis, Sider, etc., who, as we will see, make it at least part of their mission to account for ordinary beliefs. Some philosophers (e.g., Bealer) do not regard intuitions as beliefs but rather as an epistemically privileged kind of seeing or insight. The difference between the ordinary and what might be called the more refined MI is, for the most part, not relevant to my chapter. As we'll see, the criticisms I make of the MI apply in one form or another to both the ordinary and the refined MI.

For practitioners of what I am calling the MI, such intuitions often play a crucial role in constructing an overarching theory that “accommodates” such

intuitions. As we'll see, the goal of such practitioners of the MI is to put intuitive responses to cases in touch with often extra-intuitive principles by means of which we can codify, generalize upon, and perhaps explain these intuitive responses.

Some philosophers, of course, eschew—on philosophical grounds—any such use of general principles. Although such philosophers reject philosophical theorizing of the generalizing sort, they nonetheless and obviously accord our intuitions a central role in whatever philosophical accounts they offer in a given domain. A prime example of such theorists are the so-called moral particularists.<sup>4</sup> But we can also at least conceive of similarly particularist approaches in other areas such as metaphysics or epistemology.<sup>5</sup> Because particularist and non-particularist purveyors of the MI each give intuitions (though in different ways) a central role in their theorizing, they will each be subject to the kinds of critiques I make against the MI.

Finally, the MI need not be focused just on intuitions about cases. One may also appeal directly to intuitions about general principles, i.e., principles that would apply to or explain a range of cases. But intuitions about cases are usually thought to be stronger than, and thus to enjoy primacy over, intuitions about general principles.<sup>6</sup> Whether or not this is the case, I will continue to focus on intuitions about cases. This is because such intuitions are more often discussed and because the criticisms I make concerning the version of the MI that focuses on intuitions about cases will apply to the more general version of the MI that concerns intuitions about principles as well as about cases.

The criticisms of the MI that I will offer thus all turn on the interplay between intuitions about cases, on the one hand, and principles (often, though not always, extra-intuitive principles) that are to “accommodate” such cases, on the other. Let's ask then: what kinds of interaction between principles and intuitions about cases are possible? There are three basic possibilities:

1. The first version of the MI, alluded to already, relies on intuitions about cases and dispenses entirely with principles that might govern these cases. Moral particularism would fall into this category. Intuitions about different cases are allowed to stand and are not seen as in need of buttressing by general principles that might explain how the cases about which we have intuitions are related.

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4. See Dancy (in the *Stanford Encyclopedia*) and the essays in Hooker and Little (2000).

5. Anscombe espouses a view that might be called “causal particularism.” See Anscombe (1971).

6. See McMahan (2000); Bealer (1992), 104; Bealer (1998), 205; Kagan, (2001), 46, 60.

(2) The second version of the MI is more generous than the first when it comes to principles: this version of the MI allows that there are general principles and so there can be, e.g., an overarching moral theory, but on this view, the principles are completely subservient to intuitions about cases. No principle can dictate that an intuition be revised or given up; instead the principles are completely grounded in the intuitions and any principle that conflicts with any intuition must therefore be given up. I doubt that any philosopher holds this excessively rigid view about the interplay between intuitions and principles. Indeed, it's not clear that such a view would be coherent: principles that are, as on this view, completely grounded in intuitions and have no power over intuitions might not qualify as *principles* that *govern* particular cases.

(3) The first two versions of the MI are, in different ways, inflexible when it comes to the interplay between intuitions and principles. It's in part because of its hallowed flexibility that the third version of the MI is so popular and is, perhaps, the predominant method at work in philosophy.<sup>7</sup> On this view, although intuitions are in *a* driver's seat and are owed *some* deference, they are not in the only driver's seat. Thus they are subject to revision and reconstrual when they conflict with well-supported principles. There is, for the method of reflective equilibrium (hereafter MRE) thus a reasonable and, one might say, fair distribution of weight between intuitions and principles: each has some, but not total, power over the other. Intuitions about cases can lead us to reject certain principles or certain proposed principles that conflict with those intuitions *and* principles can, in certain cases lead us to reject intuitions that cannot be accommodated by the principles. The intuitions are especially likely to be given up or at least modified in a case in which there is a plausible explanation of the fact that we were initially inclined to endorse the intuition.

The MRE was, perhaps, first made explicit—though not given its name—by Nelson Goodman in his discussion of the justification of deductive and inductive reasoning:

[R]ules and particular inferences alike are justified by being brought into agreement with each other. *A rule is amended if it yields an inference we are unwilling to accept; an inference is rejected if it violates a rule we are unwilling to amend.* The process of justification is the delicate one of making mutual adjustments between rules and accepted inferences.<sup>8</sup>

7. DePaul (1998), 294.

8. Goodman (1983), 64; emphasis in the original.

Around the same time, John Rawls described the method in his 1951 paper, “Outline of a Decision Procedure for Ethics,” and he later gave the method its name and elaborated it in *A Theory of Justice*.<sup>9</sup> Rawls speaks mostly not of intuitions but of our “considered judgments” “against which conjectured principles can be checked”<sup>10</sup> in a “process of mutual adjustment.”<sup>11</sup>

To see the reach of the MRE, I’ll point out just two examples of philosophers far removed from moral and political philosophy who nonetheless espouse this method. Thus, take David Lewis whose work has been preeminent in metaphysics and other areas. Lewis says, “a reasonable goal for a philosopher is to bring them [our intuitions] into equilibrium. . . . If we lose our moorings in common sense . . . the trouble is that we settle for a very inadequate equilibrium.”<sup>12</sup> Notice that Lewis, a philosopher who espouses such radical views as modal realism, counterpart theory, and perdurantism, nonetheless sees his positions as based securely in intuitions and ordinary beliefs, and he sees as his goal the establishment of a stable equilibrium. Lewis doesn’t mention Rawls here, but it’s clear that he means to call the Rawlsian approach to mind.

Ted Sider—another metaphysician—articulates a methodology very much in the same vein and emphasizes the accommodation of ordinary beliefs: “One . . . develops a theory preserving as many of these ordinary beliefs as possible, while remaining consistent with science.”<sup>13</sup> I’ll return to these passages from Lewis and Sider.

I suspect that many versions of experimental philosophy fall within the general MRE camp. Experimental philosophy typically investigates and critiques our intuitions understood as ordinary beliefs (to see which intuitions are worth keeping) and seeks, upon that basis, to come up with principles.<sup>14</sup> Such accommodation of intuitions—at least of some kind—is also the goal of the MI.

George Bealer’s view is not a version of MRE for Bealer, unlike Lewis, Sider, Rawls, and others, does not begin with ordinary beliefs but rather with

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9. Cf. Rawls (1971). In light of the equitable distribution of weight between intuitions and principles, it is not a coincidence that this inherently fair method should be most prominently developed by the thinker who introduced the notion of justice as fairness.

10. Rawls (1951), 51.

11. *Ibid.*, 20n.

12. Lewis (1983), x.

13. Sider (2001), xv–xvi.

14. See Alexander, Mallon, and Weinberg (2010).

a quasi-perceptual state of seeing. Nonetheless, because Bealer recognizes that even intuitions in his sense are fallible, intuitions may need to be rejected in order to accommodate principles or other intuitions.<sup>15</sup> In this respect, i.e., because of the mutual accommodation between intuitions and principles in his system, even Bealer's methodology resembles a version of MRE.

The versions of the MI just discussed exhaust the ways in which one may give deference (of some kind) to intuitions (of some kind) with regard to principles (of some kind). There are, of course, other ways for intuitions and principles to interact, but because these other ways put principles, as it were, in sole occupation of the driver's seat and leave no room for intuitions to determine our philosophical theories, these other ways do not count as versions of the MI. I would like to describe these other kinds of interactions briefly in part because their implausibility makes some version of the MI seem almost inevitable and in part because we may nonetheless in the end have no choice but to see whether we can avail ourselves of some version of these methods that are opposed to the MI.

(4) The first alternative to the MI is, in effect, the flip side of (2): instead of appealing to intuitions that completely determine principles (as in (2)), according to (4) principles completely determine intuitions. That is, according to (4), if an intuition about a case conflicts with a principle we accept, the intuition must be given up. This view may not be incoherent in the way that (2) is, for there is nothing in principle wrong with principles totally governing intuitions about cases, but this view seems as inflexible as (2) and, more important, it seems highly implausible for reasons I will get to in a moment.

(5) Finally, there's the view according to which principles totally dictate our philosophical theories and intuitions play no role. The intuitions play no role, not because, as in (4), the intuitions must cave in, as it were, to the principles we accept, but because even if there are intuitions, we should just ignore them in the formulation of our philosophical theories.

Does anyone endorse either (4) or (5)? I venture to say that there is not one straightforward example of a philosopher—present or past—who does so, and, as I indicated, this is especially the case among contemporary philosophers who in one way or another tend to adopt the MI. Partly for purposes of illustration and partly also because these philosophers will play a brief but important role at the end of the chapter, let me say a few words about three historical figures: Spinoza, Leibniz, and Hume. Each of these three (and there are, of

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15. The fallibility of intuitions is discussed in Bealer (1992), 102, 104; Bealer (2002), 202.

course, others) seems to have little concern for accommodating common sense and seems relatively uninterested in focusing on intuitions as such. Instead, each of these philosophers is most directly concerned not with our intuitions but rather with uncovering reality itself. Intuitions as such are more or less not a focus for these philosophers. Rather, these philosophers (and others) tend to train their gaze on reality itself and their means of doing so consist of certain principles in terms of which they structure their philosophical systems.

Thus Spinoza builds his system around the Principle of Sufficient Reason (hereafter the PSR), the principle according to which each thing that exists has an explanation or is intelligible.<sup>16</sup> Spinoza follows this principle where it leads, regardless of whether he winds up at a place far from common sense, and with nary a glance at our intuitions as providing evidence for the theory constructed.<sup>17</sup>

To say that Spinoza doesn't invoke intuition as evidence for his philosophical positions is not to deny that Spinoza has rich things to say about intuitions. Indeed, for Spinoza, intuitive knowledge—i.e., knowledge of the so-called third kind—is, in some sense, the highest form of knowledge and is infallible, unlike intuitions as they are typically regarded in contemporary philosophy. My point here, though, is that Spinoza does not have as his focus the construction of a system that accommodates such intuitions; rather, what Spinoza seems more interested in accommodating is reality itself, not our intuitive thoughts about reality.

Unlike Spinoza who structures his system around one great principle (the PSR), Leibniz structures his system around two: the PSR and the Principle of Non-Contradiction (*Monadology* §§31–32). Of course, Spinoza relies on the Principle of Non-Contradiction too, but he, unlike Leibniz, does not see the PNC as independent of the PSR.<sup>18</sup> Employing these principles (and derivative principles such as the Principle of Continuity and the Predicate-in-Subject Principle), Leibniz arrives at shocking conclusions far from common sense. Leibniz is more concerned than Spinoza is to preserve at least some ordinary beliefs and to show how his system enables us to preserve much of what we ordinarily want to say about the world. Still, Leibniz is little concerned with making intuitions, as such, focal points in his philosophy.

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16. See Spinoza (1994), especially Part 1, Proposition 11, Second demonstration: "For each thing there must be assigned a cause, or reason, both for its existence and for its nonexistence."

17. I have developed such a PSR-oriented conception of Spinoza's system in Della Rocca (2008).

18. See Della Rocca (2008), 276–77.



Hume is another example of a philosopher who structures his system with little attention to intuitions. Tracking down Hume's motivations and guiding principles is always a fraught matter; nonetheless, I think it is clear that, on the strength of such principles as the separability principle (according to which distinct things are separable) and the copy principle (according to which all of our ideas or thoughts derive in some fashion from experience), Hume is able to build a vast philosophical edifice that—explicitly and radically—is little concerned with common sense, except by way of pointing out that his system departs from common sense on a number of matters and by way of explaining that common sense exerts a powerful hold over our beliefs despite the force of Hume's philosophical arguments. Not even more refined intuitions are Hume's focus in his philosophical theorizing. Rather, Hume concentrates on the structure of the world and on the status of our beliefs about the world without specifically trying much to accommodate our intuitions.

Because of their distance from common sense and because they do not feel the need to consult their intuitions constantly, such philosophers may seem to reject the MI. However, even in these cases, the power of the MI is strong. Although Spinoza and company may not regularly consult their intuitions, still, such checking-in may play a crucial role in their systems, for on what basis do they start with their fundamental principles, unless they are, at some point, consulting their intuitions about these principles or about the cases governed by these principles? Further, the mere fact that each of these philosophers structures his system around principles that do not completely overlap with, and may even be incompatible with, the principles to which other philosophers give pride of place suggests that there may be some other basis besides simply reality itself on which these philosophers are relying. And here we might see an opening for the importance of intuition even in Spinoza, Leibniz, and Hume.<sup>19</sup>

Indeed, in this light, one may come to suspect that some version of the MI is inevitable. Without the ballast apparently provided by intuitions, what legitimate basis could one have for starting with whatever starting points one starts with? Philosophy that gives sole weight to principles as opposed to intuitions seems to be philosophy without moorings, philosophy in danger of listing dangerously from side to side, a philosophy plagued by what Lewis calls

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19. Similarly, contemporary philosophers who are hostile to the MI may not coherently carry out their philosophy in an intuition-free way. I am thinking here, e.g., of Williamson who raises some important challenges to the MI. However, his positive endeavor to pursue philosophy without adverting to intuitions is unsuccessful. I hope to explore the reasons for this assessment elsewhere.

“an unstable equilibrium.” For this reason, the MI, in one form or another, may come to seem inevitable, and, while Spinoza, Leibniz, and Hume may have, to some extent, freed themselves from overt appeal to intuition, nonetheless, they too must, it seems, at some level be beholden to intuitions.

This apparent inevitability of the MI only serves to make it all the more troubling that there are, as I will now explain, deep objections to the MI. By considering these objections, we will be led to a vision of how it may be possible, after all, at least to approximate a way of doing philosophy that is free of the MI.

I will thus now elicit three related difficulties with the MI, each of which is an instance of what I call the taming of philosophy, i.e., of philosophy’s arbitrary limitation of its engagement with reality. These difficulties will enable me to answer the first guiding question—Is the MI good?—in the negative, and they will also lay the groundwork for the historical considerations I will invoke to answer the second guiding question—Why did the MI become so popular?

### *3. Is It Good? Taming and Conservatism*

A standard objection to the MI in general and to the MRE in particular—though as we will see, an objection that is, in some respects, unfair—is that such a method is too conservative: it doesn’t allow for the radical changes in beliefs that are sometimes required by the aspect of reality that one is investigating. The charge is that proponents of this method privilege certain starting points that are not worthy of such privileging. And the worry is that with such unjustified starting points, the whole edifice that one erects is rendered arbitrary.

This criticism is more obviously appropriate when directed against a version of the MI that privileges ordinary, commonsense beliefs. Ordinary beliefs are just ordinary, after all. Why should they get any special treatment and constrain where we wind up in our philosophical investigations? Reality may demand radical revision in our beliefs, and if we are beholden to common sense, then it may be unjustifiably difficult to make the required changes.

Such conservative—and, I think, ultimately, arbitrary—fealty to common sense is widespread in philosophy, particularly over the last 100 years, though also among certain historical figures. Thus let me just mention Berkeley and Moore as explicit proponents of commonsense philosophy who are, I believe, vulnerable to this charge of arbitrary conservatism. But let me also highlight

two widely admired contemporary philosophers who, surprisingly perhaps, are subject to the same criticism. Thus consider one of Sider's methodological musings, part of which was quoted earlier:

One approaches metaphysical inquiry with a number of beliefs. Many of these will not trace back to empirical beliefs, at least not in any direct way. These beliefs may be particular, as for example the belief that I was once a young boy, or they may be more general and theoretical, for example the belief that identity is transitive. One then develops a theory preserving as many of these ordinary beliefs as possible, while remaining consistent with science.<sup>20</sup>

This is an extremely conservative methodology: one may depart from ordinary beliefs, but one must not go too far; one must always return to common sense as much as possible.

Lewis gives expression to a very similar methodology. On Lewis's view (as well as Sider's apparently) one may "give up" an intuition or ordinary belief, but in order to do so one must first show how such giving up enables one to hold onto many other ordinary beliefs and to do so within a stable system of beliefs. Lewis's methodology, like Sider's, is obviously and deeply conservative. Even the most apparently exotic views, according to this methodology shared by Lewis and Sider and many others, must in the end return home and be grounded in common sense.

An explicitly and similarly conservative view (focusing on the nature of perception in particular) is embraced by James Pryor:

[W]e start with what it seems intuitively natural to say about perception, and we retain that natural view until we find objections that require us to abandon it. This is just sensible philosophical conservatism.<sup>21</sup>

To point out this conservatism is not yet to criticize Lewis et al., but the criticism is not far behind, for the worry is that this privileging of ordinary beliefs is arbitrary and unjustified. Yes, it may feel good to return home to the comfort of familiar beliefs, but not all homes are worth returning to. Many of our ordinary beliefs are the products of less than reputable sources, e.g., in the case of moral opinions such as judgments that, as Peter Singer puts it,

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20. Sider (2001), xv–xvi.

21. Pryor (2000), 538.

“derive from discarded religious systems, from warped views of sex and bodily functions, or from customs necessary for the survival of the group in social and economic conditions that now lie in the distant past.”<sup>22</sup> Without a good reason for requiring a return to commonsense beliefs, a philosophy generated by this methodology seems inevitably arbitrary.

The arbitrariness is not removed by pointing out, as Lewis does, that a philosophy not anchored in common sense is unstable. This may be so, but that doesn't mean that the comforts of stability and common sense are reliably connected to the truth. It's not clear what the bearing of stability is on our grasping of reality.

The charge of unjustified conservatism has often been leveled at Rawls's MRE. Indeed, the charge by Singer recently quoted is directed against Rawls. But here the criticism is not as clearly on target, and that is because Rawls is not as beholden to common sense as philosophers such as Sider and Lewis are. Rawls can go some distance toward rebutting the charge of conservatism (and thus of arbitrariness) by pointing out, first, that the opinions about cases which he accords weight in the process of achieving reflective equilibrium are not just any judgments but our “considered judgments.” Further, and especially after the original edition of *A Theory of Justice*, Rawls stresses that the kind of reflective equilibrium he has in mind is the “wide” variety according to which in one's deliberations one brings to bear not just considered judgments about cases but also background facts concerning persons and morality. Such further theoretical background may provide more room for criticism and revision of ordinary beliefs and of considered judgments.<sup>23</sup>

Bealer, also a proponent of the MI, like Rawls does not give pride of place to common sense or ordinary beliefs.<sup>24</sup> Indeed, as we saw, Bealer's focus is not on beliefs at all, but on what he sees as the kind of just seeing that is constitutive of intuitions. Because—in these different ways—they do not dwell on common sense, both Bealer and Rawls may be able to rebut (at least initially) the charge of undue conservatism or undue reliance on existing beliefs.

Nonetheless, even if they rely on intuitions of some kind which may—in different ways—be remote from common sense, both Bealer and Rawls may still face a charge of undue privileging of certain states or graspings over others. For we can ask: why should intuitions in Bealer's sense or considered

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22. Singer (1974), 516.

23. See Rawls (1974–75), 7–8.

24. Bealer (1992) 103–4; (1998), 211.

judgments in Rawls's sense be our starting points or focal points?<sup>25</sup> It may be that reality requires a sharper, more radical departure from even our refined intuitions or considered judgments which are, as Bealer and presumably Rawls admit, fallible. There is no reason to think antecedently that we are more likely to arrive at the truth by attuning our theories to fallible intuitions—of whatever kind—than by adopting some other, extra-intuitive starting point.<sup>26</sup> Thus the method of refined intuition or of considered judgments in wide reflective equilibrium, just like the MI generally, may be too conservative in blocking or hampering the kind of departure from our beliefs that may be required in order to reach the truth. Thus this method may—just like the MI generally—arbitrarily treat certain starting points or focal points as good.

This closing off of certain radical options, this arbitrary limitation of one's philosophical perspective that is characteristic of the MI is what I call the taming of philosophy. The taming of philosophy in general is the ungrounded limitation of philosophy's engagement with reality, a limitation that narrows one's perspective on the world, may preclude the possibility of overturning our existing convictions, and may unjustifiably shut us off from exotic, unusual views. We will see shortly two other manifestations of this taming that the MI ushers on stage.

Of course, as I noted in the previous section, without appealing to intuitions there may be no reason for starting at whatever point one starts at in philosophical inquiry. Thus damned if you do (appeal to intuitions), damned if you don't. Or, more specifically, arbitrary if you do appeal to intuitions, arbitrary if you don't. This may be so, but even if it is, then this would merely go to support the skeptical claim that whether or not one relies on intuitions, one has no principled or justified starting point. But then as I am fond of saying in my skeptical way: so much the worse for us. The fact (if it is a fact) that any other starting point besides intuition is equally arbitrary doesn't mitigate the fact that starting with one's intuitions (of one kind or another) is itself arbitrary. Yes, it would be nice for us to have non-arbitrary starting points, but if we don't we don't, and no amount of wishing or of pinning one's hopes on intuitions or considered judgments will make it so.

So the first criticism of the MI and the first part of my answer to the question, "Is it Good?" is to point out that the MI inevitably generates a system of claims that is arbitrary and, in some respects, conservative. This is the first respect in which the MI leads to the taming of philosophy.

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25. Cf. Hare (1973), 147.

26. Cf. Cummins (1998), 124.

#### 4. *Is It Good? Taming and the Antiquarianism of the Present*

The first charge of taming was that this focus on our intuitions—refined or not—engenders an arbitrary conservatism in our psychological economy. The second charge of taming dwells not so much on the conservatism of the MI but on the fact that the MI centers on our intuitions, bits of our psychology. The charge is that this focus makes the MI inherently unsuited for providing an account of reality.

When one adopts the MI, one's focus is not directly on reality or the world itself; rather, one's focus is directly on our intuitions about the world, i.e., on bits of our psychology instead of on bits of extra-mental reality, and perhaps one so focuses with the ultimate goal of getting at reality through our intuitions. Thus, with the MI, philosophy becomes in the first instance more a recording of opinions or apparent insights into reality than an account of reality itself.

Timothy Williamson describes this kind of approach well:

[Many contemporary analytic philosophers] think that, in philosophy, ultimately our evidence consists only of intuitions. . . . [T]hey take that to mean not that our evidence consists of the mainly non-psychological putative facts which are the contents of those intuitions, but that it consists of the psychological facts to the effect that we have intuitions with those contents, true or false.<sup>27</sup>

One worry about this approach is that the emphasis on our intuitions seems to be misplaced: with the MI or the MRE, we are being asked to “check” our theories against our intuitions.<sup>28</sup> But instead of focusing on our intuitions about the world, we should be focusing on the world itself—after all, that is what we in our philosophical theories are primarily trying to understand. This errant emphasis renders philosophical accounts that purport to be of reality unnecessarily and illegitimately subjectivist. Williamson makes a similar point in inveighing against MRE:

[P]hilosophy is often presented as systematizing and stabilizing our beliefs, bringing them into reflective equilibrium: the picture is that in

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27. Williamson (2007), 235; see also the passage from Williamson quoted as an epigraph to this chapter.

28. See Hare (1973), 145.

doing philosophy what we have to go on is what our beliefs currently are, as though our epistemic access were only to those belief states and not to the states of the world that they are about. This picture is wrong; we frequently have better epistemic access to our immediate physical environment than to our own psychology.<sup>29</sup>

It's as if Rawls and other proponents of the MI are guilty of placing not so much a veil of ignorance but rather *a veil of intuitions* between us and reality. By dwelling more directly on our intuitions about the world than on the world, a philosophy guided by the MI becomes oddly detached from the philosophical subject matters with which it seeks to concern itself. Philosophy under the MI is philosophy without its moorings in reality. Earlier I said that it *may be* the case that philosophy that is not in the spirit of the MI is also philosophy without moorings, philosophy without an adequate basis for its starting points. Now we see, however, that whether or not such approaches other than the MI lack moorings, philosophy in the spirit of the MI is not well-grounded.

The problem for the MI here is another instance of the taming of philosophy. By drawing back our focus onto us and psychology, the MI detaches us from the world and so, once again, limits philosophy's engagement with reality. And, crucially as before, this limitation seems to be arbitrary and unjustified: what basis is there for thinking that certain of our intuitions should be a guide to the world? Here again, philosophy fails to be sufficiently open to the world.

And in this there is a bit of irony. In becoming in many cases more directly focused on our thoughts, than on the world, philosophy under the MI comes to resemble nothing so much as what is often derided as mere doxography, the recording of belief systems without being primarily concerned with the truth of the beliefs in those systems. Similarly, Hare likens the MRE to anthropological theories:

[T]he only "moral" theories that can be checked against people's actual moral judgments are anthropological theories about what, in general, people *think* one ought to do, not moral theories about what one ought to do.<sup>30</sup>

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29. Williamson (2007), 5

30. Hare (1973), 148.

For his part, Rawls seems (oddly) unperturbed by this kind of charge: “It [the procedure of reflective equilibrium] is, if you wish, a kind of psychology.”<sup>31</sup> Of course, proponents of the MI will claim that they are concerned with reality, but their explicit focus on our intuitions as well as the lack of any good reason to see such intuitions as tied to the truth tends to undermine this claim.<sup>32</sup> I call—somewhat paradoxically—the doxography that is constitutive of the MI, its focus on what we happen to think, the MI’s antiquarianism of the present.

This is where the irony comes in. Often, the MI is presented as a refreshingly direct way to do philosophy, unimpeded by such non-philosophical “distractions” as trying to understand a past philosopher on his or her own terms. Employing the MI to achieve philosophical results is seen as decidedly philosophical in a way that, often, engagement with historical figures in philosophy is not. But now—in light of this second charge of taming—it turns out that in following the MI one is less engaged with reality than one might have thought. Further, and crucially, one is less engaged with reality than one is when one grapples with and struggles to understand on its own terms the thought of a philosopher who is him or herself more directly engaged with reality instead of merely with his or her own (or anyone else’s) opinions or intuitions about reality. Thus in engaging with, say, Spinoza, Leibniz, and Hume—precisely because these philosophers tend not to dwell on intuitions but on reality itself—one is more likely to be doing philosophy directly than one is when one explores the contours of one’s (or Kripke’s or Lewis’s or Nagel’s) intuitions about this or that matter. Engaging with certain historical figures in philosophy can thus be a way of doing philosophy in a less tamed fashion than is engaging with the latest journal articles that are trapped behind the veil of intuitions. In other words, in some cases, the study of the history of philosophy is a way of doing philosophy that is more philosophical than are certain current, relatively ahistorical approaches to philosophy, approaches guided more completely by the MI. In this way, relatively ahistorical approaches to philosophy are often relatively a-philosophical.

Of course, avoiding this turn inward and focusing directly on the world without relying on appeals to intuitions as evidence may not be as easy as Williamson and other opponents of the MI sometimes make it out to be. It may be, then, that—as I’ve skeptically said—we have no principled starting points either in our intuitions or somewhere else. But then—as I’ve also skeptically said—so much the worse for us.

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31. Rawls (1974–75), 9.

32. See Williamson (2007), 211



### 5. *Is It Good? Taming, Quine, and Revision*

The third and final challenge to the MI that I will raise is another charge of taming, and it may be the most far-reaching charge yet. I will introduce this problem for the MI by focusing on the MRE in particular (or views, such as Bealer's, that resemble the MRE in important respects). Afterward, I will briefly extend this problem to the other, less common versions of the MI.

Begin with the point that the MRE is a method of bringing intuitions or considered judgments and principles into a process of, to use Goodman's phrase, "mutual adjustment." No particular intuition and no particular principle is treated as sacrosanct. Principles are not by themselves in a position to override intuitions, nor are intuitions by themselves able to overturn a principle that conflicts with those intuitions. Rather, there is an interplay at work, a "familiar give and take," as Sider puts it.<sup>33</sup> And we must adjust principles and intuitions so as to come up with the most coherent overall system, a system that does the best job of accommodating intuitions and also offers the most illuminating explanatory principles. But precisely because of what may seem to be its greatest virtue—its judicious balancing of intuitions and principles—the MRE faces another significant challenge. The flexible interplay between principles and intuitions means that when there is some kind of conflict between them, no one way of resolving the conflict is dictated. In the face of a conflict between an intuition and a principle, one can hold on to the intuition *come what may*, as long as one is willing to make requisite changes in the principles that one accepts and perhaps to modify, as well, certain other intuitions. Alternatively, in the face of this conflict, one can hold onto the principle *come what may* and revise or reconstrue or simply reject the offending intuition and make whatever other adjustments are required in the intuitions and principles one accepts. The general point is that because of the apparently welcome flexibility of the MRE, there is—in the case of a conflict between intuitions and principles—significant latitude: no one outcome is dictated either by the principles or by the intuitions or by the two together. This means that, for any line that one draws between intuitions and principles or between the claims that are kept and those that are rejected or modified, there are other such lines that one could equally well draw within a coherent systems of principles and intuitions.

Given this multiplicity of incompatible ways of drawing the line, whatever line we draw is going to be arbitrary and unprincipled because there

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33. Sider (2001), xvi.

is no adequate basis for drawing that line as opposed to another. Drawing whichever line we draw is, in that respect, inexplicable. Or—to put the point another way—the line, the *relation*, between the principles and intuitions that we accept and those that we do not accept is ungrounded and inexplicable. And this inexplicability derives from something essential to the MRE: its flexible give-and-take between intuitions and principles.

This commitment on the part of the MRE to inexplicable distinctions of a certain kind is yet another instance of the taming of philosophy. In requiring that we arbitrarily choose one way of drawing the line between intuitions and principles as opposed to some other way, the MRE shuts us off from these other ways of gaining access to the world. The method thus necessitates an arbitrary and ungrounded limitation on philosophical perspectives on the world. Such a limitation is constitutive of the phenomenon of the taming of philosophy as I have characterized it.

One way to make the significance of this charge of taming felt is to articulate the strong analogy between this criticism of the MRE and Quine's best argument against the analytic/synthetic distinction in "Two Dogmas of Empiricism," an enormously influential paper widely regarded as one of the highlights of analytical philosophy over the last century. The argument I have in mind is Quine's argument—in sections 5 and 6 of that paper—against the analytic/synthetic distinction based on the nature of confirmation.<sup>34</sup>

Here is a skeletal version of this Quinean argument. Assume that there is a distinction between analytic statements that are true solely by virtue of their meaning and are not dependent for their truth on extra-conceptual facts about the world, facts that we have access to (if at all) only by virtue of experience. This is a distinction between statements we must hold onto (as long as we are to be said to understand the statement) and statements that are subject to revision or rejection in light of facts about the world that are independent of the concepts contained in the statement itself. Quine says that any such distinction is arbitrary and illegitimate for, he says, no statement is immune to revision, no statement is one that we must hold onto come what may. Any statement is such that it may be revised as long as one is willing to make the requisite changes in the system of other statements one accepts. Similarly, any statement

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34. I regard his earlier arguments in that paper against the distinction as far less conclusive. There he seems merely to point out that the notion of analyticity is bound up with other equally fundamental notions such as synonymy. Quine seems to conclude that this shows that all such notions are suspect. But it's not clear why the interconnection among these notions doesn't show, instead, that they are all virtuous. See Williamson (2007), 50. The argument from confirmation, however, is not problematic in this way.

is one we may hold onto come what may as long as we are willing to make requisite changes elsewhere in our web of belief. As Quine puts the point,

[I]t becomes folly to seek a boundary between synthetic statements, which hold contingently on experience, and analytic statements, which hold come what may. Any statement can be held true come what may, if we make drastic enough adjustments elsewhere in the system.<sup>35</sup>

The worry here is over the very intelligibility of the purported distinction. As Quine says, “we at present lack any tenable general suggestion, either rough and practical or remotely theoretic, as to what it is to be an analytic sentence.”<sup>36</sup> This basic style of argumentation has influenced similar proponents of holism, such as Davidson and many others.

Quine even ties this kind of argument to—and I kid you not—the PSR. Let me set up the crucial passage I am about to quote. In critiquing Carnap’s notion of logical truth, Quine argues that there is no basis for the distinction between the postulates and theorems of set theory, and, more generally, no basis for the distinction between those claims of set theory that are constitutive of the meaning of a particular term within set theory and those that are not. The point here is clearly of the same form as the claim Quine makes (later in the very same paper) that there is no basis for the distinction between analytic and synthetic statements.

When Quine describes this flexible interplay between theorems and postulates in set theory, he says first:

In exposition we may select some of these truths [of set theory] as so-called postulates and deduce others from them, but this is subjective discrimination, variable at will, expository and not set-theoretic. We do not change our meaning of ‘ $\varepsilon$ ’ between the page where we show that one particular truth is deducible by elementary logic from another and the page where we show the converse.

And now here comes the passage that brings tears of joy to my rationalist eyes:

Given this democratic outlook, finally, the law of sufficient reason leads us to look upon S [the species of sentences which is so fundamental that

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35. Quine (1980), 43.

36. Quine (1976a), 129; see also Quine (1976b), 105.

one cannot dissent from them without betraying deviation in usage or meaning of 'ε'] as including *all* the sentences which contain only 'ε' and the elementary logical particles. It then follows that anyone in agreement on elementary logic and in irresolvable disagreement on set theory is in deviation with respect to the usage or meaning of 'ε'.<sup>37</sup>

Here Quine is saying that no principled line can be drawn between claims of set theory that constitute part of the meaning of a given term (and are, as it were, analytic) and those that do not. This is so because all statements in set theory are on the same footing, because there is no sufficient reason for differentiating their statuses. In the same way, all statements in general are on the same footing vis-à-vis analyticity because there is no sufficient reason for differentiating their statuses. For Quine, the analytic/synthetic distinction (like the postulate/theorem distinction in set theory) is to be rejected because it violates the Law (or Principle) of Sufficient Reason.

So much for Quine's reason for rejecting the analytic/synthetic distinction. Let's return to the MRE where, I believe, a similar line of argument applies. Just as any analytic/synthetic distinction is arbitrary and inexplicable and thus should, for Quine, be rejected, so too, in the interplay between intuitions and principles, any distinction between claims we keep and those we reject is arbitrary and inexplicable and, for that reason, should be rejected. Since the MRE requires drawing such an arbitrary distinction, this method should be rejected too. That is, we should stop trying to accommodate intuitions and principles in the flexible manner embraced by the MRE.<sup>38</sup>

So this criticism of the MRE, this third instance of taming, gets additional force from its similarity to Quine's best argument against the analytic/synthetic distinction. But, perhaps, you don't like Quine's argument against the analytic/synthetic distinction (even though it is, as I said, regarded as one of the high points of analytical philosophy). OK then, allow me to state my point about the MRE directly, without the help of Quine. The MRE requires arbitrary distinctions and inexplicable relations between claims we accept and those we reject. Such inexplicable relations are not to be tolerated because these inexplicable relations constitute a failure of the MRE to engage

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37. Quine (1976a), 114.

38. This is not to say that Quine rejects the MRE. He may think that in holistically adjusting our theory in the way MRE requires we are avoiding the pitfalls of the analytic/synthetic distinction. But because such holistic adjustment is arbitrary in precisely the same way that the analytic/synthetic distinction is arbitrary and because Quine rejects the analytic/synthetic distinction on this basis, he should not endorse the MRE either.

non-arbitrarily with reality, and thus they constitute an illegitimate narrowing of philosophy's perspective on the world, another instance of the taming of philosophy. It is the very flexibility of the MRE—the very point that earns this method its august status—that leads to this objection to that method.

Of course, as before, rejecting the MRE (or something like it) and proceeding in a non-arbitrary fashion may not be realistic. And, again as before, perhaps damned if you do and damned if you don't. And again as before and again skeptically, perhaps so much the worse for us.

Briefly, we can also see that the other versions of the MI invite a similar charge of taming, even though these other versions do not depend on the kind of interplay between principles and intuitions that characterizes the MRE. On versions (1) and (2) of the MI, intuitions are, as we noted, in the driver's seat and either control principles entirely or exist without any principles at all. However, even on such a view, intuitions may come into conflict (after all, as all players in the contemporary discussion seem to agree, intuitions are fallible), and if they do come into conflict, then something has to give: the conflict needs to be resolved somehow. But given the holistic nature of psychological states and events, there is more than one way to resolve the conflict. Which resolution we adopt will ultimately be ungrounded, arbitrary, and invite charges of taming in just the way that the revisions adopted in the spirit of MRE were ungrounded, arbitrary, and invited charges of taming.

Stepping back from the three charges of taming, we can see that they all turn on the unpleasant fact that each version of the MI relies on arbitrary and inexplicable *relations*. Thus, the first charge of taming is that proponents of the MI have no non-arbitrary and principled starting points or focal points and so they can draw no principled distinction between claims that they accept as starting points or focal points and those that they do not. (This kind of taming is bound up with, as I explained, an objectionable conservatism on the part of the MI.) Thus the *relation* between claims that are accepted and claims that are not is arbitrary and inexplicable.

The second charge of taming is the more specific charge that proponents of the MI treat as evidence for whatever conclusion they reach the fact that we have such-and-such intuitions or certain special attitudes toward particular cases or principles. This focus on us and on our psychology is, I claim, arbitrary because no principled reason is given for thinking that our responses are the ones that should have primacy when it comes to reaching the truth. Because of this unprincipled focus on us, we can see the proponents of the MI as committed yet again to ungrounded and inexplicable relations: for the proponents of the MI, there is no principled reason to treat intuitive claims as

particularly worthy of respect and so again there is an arbitrary line between the claims the proponent of the MI treats as epistemically valuable and those that he or she does not. The *relation* between the two classes of claims is arbitrary and inexplicable.

Similarly with the third charge of taming, we pointed out that there are unintelligible relations at play because the *relation* between the claims one revises and the claims one does not is arbitrary and inexplicable, for the proponent of the MI.

Because of the centrality of the notion of inexplicable relations in the key objections to the MI, it seems that its commitment to unintelligible relations is the basic criticism of the MI. And this commitment is the chief reason for my negative answer to the first guiding question I raised at the beginning of this chapter concerning the MI: is it good?

### 6. *Why Now?*

This insight into the crucial role that arbitrary, inexplicable relations play in the MI leads to an insight into the other guiding question, “Why now?” I noted earlier that the MI gained or regained prominence about 100 years ago with the rise of so-called analytical philosophy, and so one question I raised was this: why did the MI become so prominent with the rise of analytical philosophy and why does it continue to be prominent? A full answer to this question must contain many strands that I cannot hope to explore here. But let me isolate one particularly revealing strand that invokes some of the themes of intelligibility that I have already relied on in my (negative) answer to the question, “Is it good?”

The story I am about to tell begins on a familiar note: analytical philosophy, as we have come to know it, came into prominence with Russell’s and Moore’s revolt against the idealism of Bradley and others, an idealism that was, at the turn of the twentieth century, the dominant philosophical movement, at least in the English-speaking world. Now (as an irreverent supporter of Bradley might ask), why were Russell and Moore revolting? To see why, we need to look more closely at the idealism Russell and Moore sought to—and eventually did—knock off philosophy’s pedestal. As Russell and Moore saw, a certain doctrine about relations lay at the heart of Bradley’s idealism, and it was their rejection of this doctrine that lay at the heart of their new approach to philosophy. Thus Bradley, Russell, and Moore all shared the insight that (as Russell put it), “The question of relations is one of the most important that arise in philosophy, as most other issues turn on it: monism and

pluralism, ... idealism and realism in some of their forms, perhaps the very existence of philosophy as a subject distinct from science and possessing a method of its own."<sup>39</sup> Fundamentally, the doctrine Bradley advanced and the others challenged was that relations are not real: relations between things—including relations of distinction—are, in some sense, merely apparent.<sup>40</sup> And so for Bradley, multiplicity is merely apparent and there is at most one thing in the world. Bradley's denial of the reality of relations thus quickly leads to a form of monism. For our purposes, we need not characterize the precise form this monism takes;<sup>41</sup> all we need to note is that Russell and Moore were opposed to monism.

In denying the reality of relations, Bradley and other idealists were denying, in particular, that there is any relation of distinction between things and thoughts about those things. This lack of a distinction between thoughts and objects of thought is characteristic of one form of idealism, and so Bradley's denial of relations also led to a kind of idealism. Russell and Moore thus were exercised both about Bradley's idealism as well as about his monism, but as Russell notes, "I think Moore was most concerned with the rejection of idealism, while I was most interested in the rejection of monism."<sup>42</sup>

Russell and Moore sometimes mischaracterized Bradley's thesis as the claim that all relations are internal and as merely a denial of external relations, i.e., of relations that are independent of the natures of the relata. Bradley does often focus on external relations in his critique of relations, but that critique is as much a challenge to the notion of relationality as such: both internal and external relations come under attack. I will continue to speak of Bradley's attack in these more general terms.<sup>43</sup>

Why does Bradley reject the reality of relations? Bradley's famous (notorious) regress argument is responsible. The most straightforward way to present the argument is as an expression of the demand that relations be grounded, i.e., they must be explained by some thing or things. Bradley's argument, then, turns on the claim that there is no legitimate way for relations to be

39. Russell (1956a), 333.

40. See especially Bradley (1968), chapters 2 and 3, Bradley (1935), and Candlish (2007), chapter 6.

41. For some relevant distinctions, see Schaffer (2010).

42. Russell (1956b), 54.

43. Candlish (2007) is very good at distinguishing the more general and less general forms of Bradley's critique and at showing that Bradley intends the more sweeping attack, despite some potentially misleading things Bradley says.

grounded or explained. Why not? Consider a relation, *R* between relata *a* and *b*. Given the demand for grounding that Bradley accepts, this relation must be grounded in some thing or things. But in what things? *R* cannot be grounded in *a* alone (to the exclusion of *b*) because that would be arbitrary: *b* is equally eligible to be a ground for *R*. Similarly, *R* cannot be grounded in *b* alone. So what, then, is *R* grounded in? It's natural to say that *R* is grounded in *a* and *b* not separately, but in *a* and *b* together, i.e., in the fact that *a* and *b* co-exist, i.e., in the fact that *a* and *b* are related somehow. But this is to ground *R* in another relation, which simply raises the question of the ground of a relation again, and we are off on Bradley's regress.

Here's another way to see Bradley's point: *R*, the relation between *a* and *b*, must be grounded and it seems that it must be grounded in part in *a*. But grounding is itself a relation, so in order for *a* to be related to *b*, there must be a grounding relation between *a* and *R*. Call this further relation, *R'*. But *R'*—a relation between *a* and *R*—must itself be grounded. So there must be another relation *R''* that grounds the relation between *a* and *R'*, but *R''* must be grounded, etc. And so again we have a regress.<sup>44</sup>

Bradley's notorious (famous) argument has been challenged and, less frequently, defended, but I cannot enter into a full-blown defense here. The point I want to stress is that Bradley's argument proceeds from the demand that relations be explicable and that they be grounded—and Bradley explicitly sees his argument this way. Here is Bradley focusing on external relations in particular:

[I]f the terms from their inner nature do not enter into the relation, then, so far as they are concerned, they seem related for no reason at all, and, so far as they are concerned, the relation seems arbitrarily made.<sup>45</sup>

Also, throughout chapters 2 and 3 of Book I of *Appearance and Reality*, Bradley is concerned with, as he puts it, the intelligibility of relations and with giving a "rational account" of them.<sup>46</sup> And he expresses this concern both about external relations *and* about internal relations.<sup>47</sup> In insisting that relations be

44. I have presented the Bradleyan regress in these ways and defended this argument from some objections in Della Rocca (2012).

45. Bradley (1968), 514; see also 517.

46. *Ibid.*, 19.

47. *Ibid.*, 24, 26–27.



explicable and should be rejected because they are not explicable, Bradley articulates a claim that is a general version of Quine's more specific rejection of relations of distinction between analytic and synthetic statements. Indeed, it's worth noting that Bradley—more than fifty years before Quine's paper—argues against the analytic/synthetic distinction for reasons that are continuous with his reasons for the rejection of relations.<sup>48</sup>

Others also regard Bradley's argument as proceeding via something like the PSR.<sup>49</sup> But, most important for our purposes, *Russell* and *Moore* also see Bradley's argument this way. Russell is more explicit on this point. Citing some of the same passages that I just quoted, Russell points out<sup>50</sup> that Bradley's regress argument depends on the rejection of brute or inexplicable relations and on the PSR (or, as Russell calls it just as Quine does, "the Law of Sufficient Reason"). Seeing Bradley's use of the principle as the source of Bradley's monism and idealism, Russell attacks this source. He flatly rejects the PSR and embraces inexplicable relations. Russell says (correctly, I believe) that Bradley's view on relations

seems to rest upon some law of sufficient reason, some desire to show that every truth is "necessary." I am inclined to think that a large part of my disagreement with Mr. Bradley turns on a disagreement as to the notion of "necessity." I do not myself admit necessity and possibility as fundamental notions: it appears to me that fundamentally truths are merely true in fact, and that the search for a "sufficient reason" is mistaken.<sup>51</sup>

Given the fundamentality of Russell's rejection of the non-reality of relations to his critique of Bradleyan monism and idealism, and thus given its fundamentality to his role in the formation of analytical philosophy, it is no exaggeration to say that Russell's rejection of the PSR made possible his role as one of the founders of analytical philosophy.

The same is true of Moore's role as a generator of analytical philosophy. Moore too sees Bradley's denial of the reality of relations as fundamental to Bradley's system, and he goes after Bradley at precisely that point. Moore obviously has no problem with ungrounded or inexplicable relations. In his early,

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48. See Bradley (1922), 185.

49. See, e.g., Campbell (1931), 25; Hylton (1990), 56; Candler (2007), 46–48; van Inwagen (2009), 44–45.

50. In Russell (1956b), 58, and Russell (1910a), 164–65.

51. Russell (1910b), 374.

landmark essay, “The Nature of Judgement” (1899), an essay that, as Russell acknowledges was a major influence on Russell, Moore makes his acceptance of ungrounded relations clear in the context of his treatment of the relations between a thinker and concepts or possible objects of thought. Moore points out, in effect, that this relation is an external relation: “It is indifferent to their [concepts’] nature whether anybody thinks them or not.”<sup>52</sup>

The general claim that there may be external relations, relations not grounded in the natures of the relata (or in anything else) emerges more clearly in Moore’s 1919 paper “External and Internal Relations.” That relations hold is, Moore says, often a mere matter of fact:

It seems quite obvious that in the case of many relational properties which things have, the fact that they have them is *a mere matter of fact*.<sup>53</sup>

In these passages, Moore’s commitment to the rejection of the PSR is apparent and so is his commitment to ungrounded or inexplicable relations. And these commitments form the basis of Moore’s attack on Bradleyanism and form the basis of Moore’s contribution to the rise of analytical philosophy.

Fair enough, you might say, but so what? What does all this stuff about Russell’s and Moore’s fundamental commitment to the inexplicability of at least some relations and to the falsity of the PSR have to do with the prominence of the MI in philosophy as we know it today?

First, note that Moore is, in a way, the patron saint of the MI. The intuitions that Moore shows deference to are, above all, intuitions in the form of the dictates of so-called common sense. Thus Moore says in another landmark essay, “A Defence of Common Sense” (1925): “the ‘Common Sense view of the world’ is, in certain fundamental features, *wholly* true.”<sup>54</sup> For Moore, intuitions of common sense must be accommodated: “to speak with contempt of those ‘Common Sense beliefs’ which I have mentioned is quite certainly the height of absurdity.”<sup>55</sup> Moore thus espouses a version of the MI in which intuitions (about cases in particular) are accorded primacy, and principles that go against commonsense beliefs have no legitimate role to play.<sup>56</sup>

52. Moore (1993c), 4.

53. Moore (1993b), 88, emphasis in original; see also 99.

54. Moore (1993a), 118.

55. *Ibid.*, 119.

56. See also Moore’s equally influential essay, “Proof of an External World.”

Russell also is a fan of the commonsense version of the MI, though his endorsement is a more nuanced one that gives deference to science as well. Although Russell supports his rejection of monism “on empirical grounds” informed by science,<sup>57</sup> we also find Russell explicitly rejecting the PSR and monism in part on the basis of something like common sense. Thus, he rejects the PSR by appealing to ways of defining necessity that “account for its common uses,”<sup>58</sup> and in a classic statement of the MI, he says, “Pluralism is the view of science and common sense and is *therefore* to be accepted if the arguments against it are not conclusive.”<sup>59</sup>

So Moore and Russell adhere to the MI and, in different ways, defer to common sense.

By contrast, Bradley is no fan of common sense and is much more willing than either Moore or Russell to go against our intuitions. Thus, we find Bradley acknowledging that the acceptance of external relations is a deliverance of common sense:

At first sight obviously such external relations seem possible and even existing. They seem given to us ... in change of spatial position and gain also in comparison. That you do not alter what you compare or rearrange in space seems to Common Sense quite obvious, and that on the other side there are as obvious difficulties does not occur to Common Sense at all.<sup>60</sup>

In rejecting external relations, as he does, Bradley is thus explicitly going against common sense. In a striking expression of non-deference to common sense, one that I have quoted more fully as an epigraph to this chapter, Bradley says, “I am not to be moved here by the charge of an insult offered to Common Sense.”<sup>61</sup> Although inveighing against common sense in these ways doesn’t by itself mean that Bradley rejects the MI in general, he certainly comes closer to doing so than do either Russell or Moore.

OK then, Russell and Moore embrace a version of the MI, and Bradley seems more or less hostile to the MI. But, again, so what? What bearing does

57. Russell (1910a), 338–39.

58. Russell (1910b), 374.

59. Russell (1927), 264, my emphasis; see also Russell (1956c), 178.

60. Bradley (1968), 514.

61. Bradley (1935), 640.

this interesting difference have on the other interesting difference, lately noted, between Bradley, on the one hand, and Russell and Moore, on the other, viz., the difference whereby Russell and Moore accept inexplicable relations and Bradley does not? To answer this question, recall that, as I have argued, inexplicable relations are fundamental to the MI (in any version). Further, as I have also argued, the key objections to the MI stem from this very commitment to inexplicable relations. In this light, we can see that once Russell and Moore—in their youthful, headlong effort to avoid Bradleyan idealism and monism—rushed to embrace inexplicable relations, the way was paved for them to adopt some version of the MI. Not only was the commitment to inexplicable relations necessary for adopting the MI, but it was also practically sufficient in this context for adopting the MI. Given that Bradley's metaphysical views were, as we have just seen, bound up with his methodology which was in tension with the MI, it follows that in attending to Bradley's metaphysics it was only natural for Russell and Moore to address themselves to methodological matters. In particular, once Russell and Moore focused on the interaction between principles and intuitions, once inexplicable relations were allowed on the table, and once the major objections to the MI were thus off the table, there was, if I may put it this way, no reason for Russell and Moore *not* to adopt the MI, and so they did. In this context, in which, among other things, they succumbed to the allure of inexplicable relations, the MI was indeed almost inevitable.

And not only was it almost inevitable, it became so thoroughly ingrained among philosophers who followed in the footsteps of Russell and Moore that the problems with the MI did not even show up on the radar screen of most philosophers in the soon-to-be-dominant analytic tradition. Thus, as we saw, certain contemporary philosophers such as Pryor channel Moore and praise philosophical conservatism without any apparent pangs of conscience. Indeed, we find more and more philosophers—right up until the present—pursuing philosophy behind what I have called the veil of intuition. For these philosophers who feel the now almost instinctive aversion to Bradleyan monism—an aversion that is more or less part of the collective unconscious (or collective conscious) of analytical philosophers—some version of the MI is completely natural and any apparent alternative is well-nigh unthinkable.

In this light, it is not surprising that many contemporary philosophers who reject something like Bradleyan monism are explicitly fans of the MI.<sup>62</sup>

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62. For example, Lewis—a proponent of the MI—is an atomist who rejects any form of monism. Schaffer—also a proponent of the MI—endorses a form of monism but rejects the much more radical form to be found in Bradley. See Schaffer (2010).

In this light also, we can begin to see that philosophers such as Quine who promote (perhaps unknowingly) Bradley-esque arguments concerning relations are, like Bradley himself, to be seen as less in line with the MI than are most contemporary philosophers. Because of this Bradleyan connection, such philosophers may stand outside the analytic tradition in an important respect. Thus Quine's Bradley-esque argument in "Two Dogmas"—in addition to being seen as a high point of analytical philosophy—may also be, in fact, the beginning of the end of analytical philosophy, for it has influentially embodied a kind of argumentation that runs counter to the presuppositions on which analytical philosophy was founded and which have, for better or worse, largely dominated philosophy ever since.

To be clear: my claim is not that Quine in "Two Dogmas" and philosophers such as Davidson who argue in this vein were directly influenced by Bradley. At the time of "Two Dogmas," practically no one—except perhaps Richard Wollheim—was reading Bradley. Nor am I saying that Quine and others explicitly rejected the MI. Rather, my claim is that the similarity between Quine's argument and Bradley's reveals Quine (and others) to be out of step both with the MI and with the originating force of analytical philosophy.

So we have at least a partial answer to the second guiding question: why now? Why has the MI been so popular over the last 100 years or so? The answer—or an answer—is that the rejection of Bradleyan monism required the acceptance of inexplicable relations that paved the way for the adoption of the MI. And, as we saw, we also have an answer to the first guiding question: is it good? Is the MI a good method for philosophical inquiry? The answer I offered is that this method is highly problematic because, in several ways, the pursuit of the MI embroils its practitioners in inexplicable relations, relations of a kind that Quinean arguments have taught us to be wary of and, more generally, inexplicable relations that seem to make the pursuit of philosophy more arbitrary than we might have expected or would have desired.

One might also think that seeing the problems with the MI and seeing the far-from-inevitable philosophical presuppositions that, once adopted, give rise to the MI may make embracing an alternative to the MI all the more feasible. But, unfortunately, that doesn't seem to be the case, for, as we saw, the alternatives to the MI seem unworkable because these alternatives do not rely on intuitions and it may seem that doing philosophy without the guidance of intuitions is every bit as arbitrary as starting with intuitions. As I've said, perhaps it's damned if you do (start with intuitions), damned if you don't. More specifically: arbitrary if you do, arbitrary if you don't. And, as I've also said, perhaps so much the worse for us.

If there is no principled way to proceed, then we face the real possibility and prospect that philosophical inquiry itself cannot be coherently pursued. I think that this, perhaps grim, skeptical possibility is one that we philosophers must, if we are to be honest, take seriously. The very possibility of philosophical inquiry is thus, I believe, something that should always be in question for philosophers.

### 7. *Two Lifelines*

But, against this stark backdrop, there are some flickers of hope, two lifelines, that emerge from the criticisms and historical account of the MI that I have presented.

The story I have told about the origins of analytical philosophy indicates that the acceptance of inexplicable relations by Russell and Moore created a context in which the MI could thrive. We also saw that it is the MI's commitment to inexplicable relations that is the culprit behind the taming of philosophy that the MI brings on. So a possible way to try to avoid the MI and these difficulties is to strike at their root, i.e., to reject the embrace of inexplicable relations and to challenge the rejection of the PSR.<sup>63</sup> A philosophy guided more completely by a concern with intelligibility and the PSR is thus a philosophy more removed from the inexplicability that leads to the MI and to the taming of philosophy. Again, we may never reach a point at which each move in our philosophy—including its starting points—is dictated solely by a concern to maximize explicability and to avoid arbitrariness, but we can, perhaps, approximate this ideal to greater and greater degrees. The motto here is, to the extent that a philosophy is guided by the PSR and by the goals of maximizing intelligibility and explicability and avoiding arbitrariness, it is a philosophy untamed. So being guided by intelligibility is the first lifeline.

But how can such a philosophy be carried out? This brings me to the second lifeline. To help us figure out what such an intelligibility-focused philosophy might look like, to figure out how far we can go in untaming philosophy, one suggestion is to look to certain philosophers at work before the veil of intuitions descended on philosophy, philosophers who, in some cases—though in imperfect fashion—placed a concern with explicability and intelligibility at the heart of their philosophical systems. In philosophy's past—more so, perhaps, than today—we may find thinkers who are willing to be guided by a concern with intelligibility and who may be our guides in untaming philosophy.

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63. I have defended the PSR in Della Rocca (2010).

In this light, it is no surprise that some of the philosophers who are furthest from the MI have also been philosophers most concerned with intelligibility and the PSR. Thus, as we saw, Spinoza and Leibniz who (in different degrees) are far removed from the MI also—and not coincidentally, I would say—structure their systems around the PSR and explicability. Hume, too, as we saw, is far from the MI and, while he explicitly rejects and argues against the PSR,<sup>64</sup> his system is also shot through with a concern with intelligibility, and he grapples throughout with the strength of the PSR whose implications he understands better than most other philosophers.<sup>65</sup> It is to philosophers such as these—philosophers most engaged with the power of intelligibility, explicability, and the PSR—to whom we should turn for guidance in seeking to undo the taming of philosophy. Thus a return to certain areas of the history of philosophy is my second lifeline.<sup>66</sup> By engaging with these figures from philosophy's past, we may be, as I argued, pursuing philosophy more directly than we do when we practice the method of intuition and are caught up in what I called the antiquarianism of the present. There are other weighty reasons to engage with the history of philosophy, but this one—correcting the distortion of philosophy brought on by the rise of analytical philosophy—is perhaps one of the most timely.

So my suggestions are two: let intelligibility be your guide and engage with historical figures who—writing before the veil of intuitions tamed so much of philosophy—also let intelligibility be their guide. Can these suggestions lead to successful philosophical inquiry? I don't know. But they are, perhaps, our best hope for attaining a philosophy that is, as far as possible, untamed.

### *Acknowledgments*

This chapter was presented at a workshop on methodology in the study of the history of philosophy at Concordia University in Montréal in October 2011. For generous and helpful comments, I would like to thank Eric Schliesser, Mogens Lærke, Justin Smith, Sungil Han, Leslie Wolf, Rebecca Newberger Goldstein, Barbara Sattler, George Bealer, Allison Glasscock, Laurie Paul, Paul Franks, Omri Boehm, Joshua Knobe, Carol Rovane, Julia Borcharding, my colleagues at a Yale faculty lunch presentation, and the loyal critics in my memorable seminar at Yale in the spring of 2012.

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64. See, especially, Hume (2000), I.3.3.

65. For this reading of Hume, see Della Rocca (forthcoming).

66. I call this lifeline: "phone-a-friend."