

Blocking Bradley*

Ori Simchen

Abstract

I discuss a novel strategy for blocking Bradleyan regresses that utilizes grounding claims for claims of the form aRb that include themselves within the claimed grounds. Such grounding claims act as regress blockers in the sense that raising the question *why aRb*, given the claimed grounds that include the grounding claim itself, entails either outright inconsistency – if the grounding claim concerns full grounds for aRb – or pragmatic infelicity – if the grounding claim concerns only partial grounds for aRb .

1 Introduction

Bradley's argument for the unreality of relations in Ch.2 of *Appearance and Reality* (1893) is presented in the following famous passage:

'There is a relation C , in which A and B stand; and it appears with both of them.' But here again we have made no progress. The relation C has been admitted different from A and B , and no longer is predicated of them. Something, however, seems to be said of this relation C , and said, again, of A and B . And this something is not to be the ascription of one to the other. If so, it would appear to be another relation, D , in which C , on the one side, and, on the other side, A and B , stand. But such a makeshift leads at once to the infinite process. The new relation D can be predicated in no way of C , or of A and B ; and hence we must have recourse to a fresh relation, E , which comes between D and whatever we had before. But this must lead to another, F ; and so on, indefinitely. (18)

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The outrageous conclusion Bradley draws from these considerations is that relations are not real. They are rather abstractions from what is real. The argument has had an important role in the development of early analytic philosophy, most notably in the work of the early Russell.¹

Bradley's regress has received renewed attention lately following the publication of Della Rocca's *The Parmenidean Ascent* (2020). Della Rocca argues for an extreme monistic view that shuns all distinctions, a position according to which being is entirely undifferentiated (and 'being' is properly understood only in its mass occurrence). Della Rocca's overall argument is largely driven by Bradleyan regressivity, with a special emphasis on grounding. Bradley's regress arises from the attempt to ground a relation relating its relata, aRb , in the existence of the relata a , b , and the relation R itself. In order for R to then relate a to b , it would have to be related to them somehow by a relation R' , which would then require a further relation R'' relating R' to its relata a , b , and R , and so on without end. Della Rocca (2020: Ch.3) considers an application of this general form of argument, making the grounding purport more explicit within an attempt to explain the substantiality of a substance. The thought is that S being a substance is grounded in some relation R^g that S bears to something. But then there is a grounding relation between S and R^g , $R^{g'}$, which is among the grounds for the substantiality of S . But then there is a grounding relation between S and $R^{g'}$, $R^{g''}$, which is also among the grounds for the substantiality of S . And so on. It is the claimed viciousness of this regress that ultimately drives Della Rocca's Bradleyan conclusion that there are no relations at all and hence no distinctions, resulting in a particularly extreme form of monism.

As a retort to an objection that the above regress saddles us with an independently unmotivated ontology of grounding relations R^g , $R^{g'}$, $R^{g''}$, etc., Della Rocca considers an ontologically pared-down version:

Start with the claim that A is related to B and ask: why is it the case that A is related to B? My answer is that

A is related to B in part because the relata exist.

Notice here that I use only the sentential operator "because"; I don't invoke (at least not explicitly) any grounding relations.

Continuing the original argument in this new, more austere register, I go on to say that it is *also* true that

A is related to B in part because it is the case that A is related to B because the relata exist. (2020: 70)

¹For a fascinating study of the idealist background to Russell's early work, see Hylton (1993).

This is meant to launch a regress analogous to the original one, a regress that is ontologically austere but just as viciously regressive, a Bradleyan regress without the original’s ontological baggage. How exactly the two types of regress are related to one another will not occupy us any further here.

I want to make two claims in response to Bradleyan regresses quite generally. The first is that we can appeal to a grounding claim in the grounds of that same grounding claim without explanatory circularity and without launching a vicious regress. The second is that the way we do this can act as a regress blocker in the following sense: Attempting to raise a further explanatory demand regarding the grounded of the proposed grounding claim will imply either inconsistency – if the concern is with full ground – or pragmatic infelicity – if the concern is with partial ground. Blocking Bradleyan regresses gives us a *pro tanto* reason for accepting the blockers as true.

2 Self-citational grounding

Turning to the first claim first, consider the following schema of fully grounding q in p_1, \dots, p_n , and the rest of q ’s grounds X :

$$p_1, \dots, p_n, X < q.$$

Consider next an instantiation of this schema in the following self-citational claim:

$$(SC) \quad p_1, \dots, p_n, (SC) < q.^2$$

What (SC) says, in effect, is that q is fully grounded in p_1, \dots, p_n and whatever is conveyed by (SC) itself (namely that q is fully grounded in p_1, \dots, p_n and whatever is conveyed by (SC) itself). We have a grounding claim that contains itself among the claimed grounds, an explanation containing itself among the explanans.³ Along these lines we can now consider a self-citational Bradleyan claim of full ground, where ‘ $E!(x)$ ’ stands for existence:

$$(\text{Brad}^{full}) \quad E!(a), E!(b), E!(R), (\text{Brad}^{full}) < aRb.$$

(Brad^{full}) says that a being R -related to b is fully grounded in the existence of the relata and the existence of the relation, together with whatever is conveyed by this very grounding claim, (Brad^{full}).

²I assume that the language facilitates the mentioning of (SC) within (SC) itself. See Litland (2015, 2018) for further details on such constructions. (SC) is a schematic full ground version of “grounds’s grounding the grounded grounding the grounded” in Litland’s phrase, but with additional grounds.

³I assume with the unionists that grounding is explanatory.

We can also consider a self-citational instance of the following schema of partially grounding q in p_1, \dots, p_n, X ,

$$p_1, \dots, p_n, X \prec q,$$

which in the Bradleyan case would be the self-citational

$$(\text{Brad}^{part}) \quad E!(a), E!(b), E!(R), (\text{Brad}^{part}) \prec aRb.$$

(Brad^{part}) is a claim of partial ground for a being R -related to b . What (Brad^{part}) says is that aRb is partly grounded in the existence of a and b and R together with whatever is conveyed by this very grounding claim, (Brad^{part}) .⁴

Notice that neither (Brad^{full}) nor (Brad^{part}) exhibits explanatory circularity of any sort. Neither constitutes an explanation of itself. Rather, in each case it is aRb that is being explained in terms of the existence of the relata and the relation and either (Brad^{full}) or (Brad^{part}) . And no infinite regress is being masked here of the kind captured by such typographic conventions as the use of three dots in mathematics to indicate a series going to infinity and the like.

Turning now from the logic of these claims to the underlying metaphysics, we do find ourselves needing to use those dots, not to indicate a series going to infinity but to indicate factual gunkiness.⁵ We shift from the standard operator notation for grounding claims to the standard predicate notation in order to make our focus on the metaphysics of facts explicit.⁶ The need for the three dots here is borne by our lack of an analog for quotation at the level of facts that would allow us to represent a fact that includes itself among its constituents. Using square brackets for ‘the fact that’ and ‘ \leftarrow ’ for the relation of a grounded fact to its factual grounds, the fact that (Brad^{full}) , namely,

$$[[aRb] \leftarrow [E!(a)], [E!(b)], [E!(R)], [[aRb] \leftarrow [E!(a)], [E!(b)], [E!(R)]][\dots]],$$

⁴A recent precedent to such a construction is provided by Litland (2018). Litland considers the sentence

$$(\phi) \quad 0 = 0 \vee 0 = 0 \prec T^\Gamma \phi^\neg,$$

and proves in Fine’s (2012a, 2012b) pure logic of ground the following instance of $(X \prec Y) \prec Y$:

$$(0 = 0 \prec T^\Gamma \phi^\neg) \prec T^\Gamma \phi^\neg.$$

He then uses this result to argue against Fine’s proposed rule of Amalgamation:

$$\Delta_0 \prec \psi, \Delta_1 \prec \psi, \dots / \Delta_0, \Delta_1, \dots \prec \psi.$$

See also Berker (2018: 914-915) for another instance of the above schema, where the grounded is itself a generalized grounding claim. I return briefly to Berker’s discussion at the end of this section.

⁵This use of ‘gunk’ is from Lewis (1991: §1.8).

⁶See deRosset (2023: §2.2.3) for a discussion of these alternatives.

includes itself as a constituent, which includes itself as a constituent, which includes itself as a constituent, and so on without end. As such, it exhibits infinite downward complexity with no fundamental level. It is, in other words, gunky. But that does not percolate up to anything viciously regressive.⁷

Russell (1903: §55, §99) famously reacts to Bradley’s regress by acknowledging its inevitability and claiming that it’s harmless. He distinguishes two kinds of regress, one of “new implied propositions” (99) – aRb implying $R'(a, b, R)$ implying $R''(a, b, R, R')$ implying $R'''(a, b, R, R', R'')$, and so on – and another of the “meaning of the proposition” aRb itself, where the analysis of aRb fails to terminate at an atomic level.⁸ He locates Bradley’s regress with the former benign kind rather than with the latter malignant kind:

“ a exceeds b ” may be held to express solely the relation of a to b , without including any of the implications of further relata. Hence we shall have to conclude that a relational proposition aRb does not include in its *meaning* any relation of a or b to R , and that the endless regress, though undeniable, is logically quite harmless. (1903: 100)

The inclusion of further and further relation terms in the meaning of the proposition aRb is just the idea of never reaching a bottom level inventory of ingredients in the proposition’s analysis. Russell’s general predilection is atomist. The idea of a proposition whose analysis won’t terminate due to endlessly requiring novel atomic constituents $a, b, R, R', R'', R''', \dots$ is anathema to him. This, however, is emphatically not the case with $[\text{Brad}^{full}]$ or $[\text{Brad}^{part}]$, which, while infinitely complex, do not require infinitely many novel constituents. To see this, consider a Russell (1903)-type analysis of $[\text{Brad}^{full}]$, for which we can borrow the double backslash full ground notation for entities rather than facts from Schaffer (2009), and use $|\cdot|$ to indicate entity complexity:

$$||aRb|\backslash\backslash a, b, R, ||aRb|\backslash\backslash a, b, R, ||aRb|\backslash\backslash a, b, R, |\dots|||$$

⁷Gaskin (1995) makes a similar move of denying vicious regressivity associated with Bradley’s regress in connection with the copula as the key to solving the problem of the unity of the proposition. For the original statement of the problem, see Russell (1903: §54). For a recent discussion that draws a connection with Bradleyan regressivity, see Eklund (2019). Gaskin’s intriguing suggestion is that the infinitism associated with the regress is just what the unity of the proposition *is*. Orilia (2007) likewise accepts infinitism about facts as the key to their unity by endorsing an “externalist” – and benign – version of the regress. Externalism in Orilia’s typology is the idea that $[aRb]$ is distinct from $[R'(a, b, R)]$, both of which are distinct from $[R''(a, b, R, R')]$, and so on. My aim here, on the other hand, is to block an “internalist” version of the regress according to which the explanation for the obtaining of $[aRb]$, namely $[\text{Brad}^{full}]$, contains itself iterably to infinity.

⁸For our purposes, Russellian propositions are just possible facts.

Clearly the represented Russellian complex does not require for its full analysis any novel atomic constituents beyond a , b , R . We have here an atomically austere sort of infinite complexity.

Some may feel uneasy about the sort of infinite downward complexity exhibited by the facts conveyed by (Brad^{full}) and (Brad^{part}) . Berker (2018), for example, tentatively considers a particular instance of the schema

$$[Y \leftarrow [Y \leftarrow X]]$$

to be acceptable, where

$$Y = [\exists p \exists q ([p] \leftarrow [q])] \text{ (or 'some fact grounds some fact')}$$

$$X = [[\text{the sky is colored}] \leftarrow [\text{the sky is blue}]],$$

but regards facts whose analysis won't terminate, like those conveyed by (Brad^{full}) and (Brad^{part}) , to be unacceptable:

How can such an endless quicksand of iterated grounding relations, never leading back to an independent grounder for the entire sequence, be the case? (915)

He likens such cases to the truth-teller sentence 'This sentence is true', which could consistently be maintained to be true or not:

[T]here are no independent facts that settle which of these is the case. Just as we should be skeptical that the truth-teller sentence is true, so too should we be skeptical that [such a case] obtains. (916)

As we are about to see in the next section, (Brad^{full}) and (Brad^{part}) play a significant theoretical roll in blocking Bradley's regress. Their success in this task does provide some independent *pro tanto* reason for regarding them as true after all.

This concludes the first half of my response to the Bradleyan regresses.

3 Self-citation as regress blocker

Now for the second half of the response. The grounding claims we've been considering act as regress blockers in a sense to be explained next.

By way of introduction, let us consider self-citatoriality in connection with another famous regress, the regress launched in Lewis Carroll's "What the Tortoise Said to Achilles" (1895). The Carrollian regress is closely related to the Bradleyan one. If we think of the Bradleyan regress as arising from a repeated demand for further

explanatory grounds for a given fact, we may think of the Carrollian regress as arising from a repeated demand for further justificatory grounds for a given conclusion. Consider an argument of the simple MP form:⁹

- (1) $p \rightarrow q$
- (2) p
- (3) q .

The character of the Tortoise in Carroll's story accepts the premises (1),(2), but resists the conclusion (3) by requiring a further premise that states that the conclusion follows from the premises:

- (2.1) (1), (2) \vdash (3).

Then, once faced with the premise-enriched argument

- (1) $p \rightarrow q$
- (2) p
- (2.1) (1), (2) \vdash (3)
- (3) q ,

the Tortoise resists the conclusion (3) by requiring yet a further premise that states that (3) follows from (1),(2),(2.1):

- (2.11) (1), (2), (2.1) \vdash (3).

And so on.

Self-citationality disables the Tortoise's attempted maneuver of accepting premises while failing to accept that the conclusion follows from them. Swapping (2.1) for the self-citational variant

- (2.1*) (1), (2), (2.1*) \vdash (3)

blocks the launching of a regress. For accepting (1),(2),(2.1*), while failing to accept that (3) follows from (1),(2), (2.1*), is accepting (2.1*) – alongside (1) and (2) – while not accepting (2.1*), which is impossible: (3) following from (1),(2),(2.1*) is just what the accepted (2.1*) expresses. Accepting (1),(2),(2.1*) forecloses the possibility of the Tortoise's skeptical resistance to the conclusion while accepting the premises. The threat of a repeated demand for further and further justificatory grounds for drawing the conclusion is thus effectively disarmed.¹⁰

⁹The case considered in Carroll (1995) is a non-schematic syllogistic argument, but the illustration in terms of the MP schema is simpler and standard.

¹⁰For further discussion of this strategy for blocking Carroll's regress, see Simchen (2023).

Against this background, let us go back to Bradley and the full explanation of a being R -related to b , ($\text{Brad}^{\text{full}}$). Can the Bradleyan still raise the question why a is R -related to b – in the full explanation sense of ‘why’ – given the existence of the relata and of the relation, and given that ($\text{Brad}^{\text{full}}$)? Notice that according to ($\text{Brad}^{\text{full}}$), the full grounds for aRb include ($\text{Brad}^{\text{full}}$) itself, which the demand for a further explanation assumes as given. In other words, ($\text{Brad}^{\text{full}}$) is part of the explanans for aRb according to ($\text{Brad}^{\text{full}}$), and the Bradleyan is asking *why* aRb , given the existence of the relata and of the relation, *and given that* ($\text{Brad}^{\text{full}}$). However, to demand further grounds for aRb , given the existence of the relata and of the relation, and given that ($\text{Brad}^{\text{full}}$), is to deny ($\text{Brad}^{\text{full}}$). This is because in claims of full ground, enriching those grounds negates the explanans-impoverished competitor. So while the Bradleyan affirms ($\text{Brad}^{\text{full}}$) as part of the explanans, the Bradleyan also denies ($\text{Brad}^{\text{full}}$). So ($\text{Brad}^{\text{full}}$) is both affirmed and denied, which is inconsistent.¹¹

Might the Bradleyan resist this line of thought by arguing that ($\text{Brad}^{\text{full}}$) is still open to the challenge that it remains unclear *how* it contributes to the explanation of aRb ? As long as it remains a possibility for the Bradleyan to question whether ($\text{Brad}^{\text{full}}$), together with $E!(a)$, $E!(b)$, and $E!(R)$, succeeds as a putative explanation of aRb , as long as a doubt remains as to *how* $E!(a)$, $E!(b)$, $E!(R)$, and ($\text{Brad}^{\text{full}}$) are jointly explanatory for aRb , it remains a viable option not to accept ($\text{Brad}^{\text{full}}$).¹² If what the Bradleyan is requesting here is an account of what it is in virtue of which $E!(a)$, $E!(b)$, $E!(R)$, and ($\text{Brad}^{\text{full}}$) explain aRb , with the aim of launching yet another regress, then this Bradleyan maneuver is unconvincing for the reasons already given. Asking how, or in virtue of what, the explanans explains the explanandum is but another way of asking for further explanatory support for the explanandum. To ask *how* aRb is explained by $E!(a)$, $E!(b)$, $E!(R)$, and ($\text{Brad}^{\text{full}}$) in this sense, is just to ask *why*, given that $E!(a)$, $E!(b)$, $E!(R)$, and ($\text{Brad}^{\text{full}}$), it is also the case that aRb . And this runs into the inconsistency noted above. To see the equivalence of these questions, consider a putative explanation of a drought in terms of greenhouse gas emissions. One might not see how increased greenhouse gas emissions explain a certain drought. A suitable response here is to say that increased greenhouse gas emissions result in higher temperatures, which increase the atmosphere’s

¹¹The Bradleyan might retreat to affirmation and denial as relations not to what is said by our claims directly, but rather to what is said under different modes of presentation (perhaps *as-part-of-an-explanans* and *as-a-full-explanation*). But ($\text{Brad}^{\text{full}}$) doesn’t somehow shed its full explanatory character by its inclusion within its own explanans. The claim presents *both* as part of the explanans *and* as the full explanation, hence the inconsistency noted in the text.

¹²Thanks to an anonymous referee for pressing me on this.

water-holding capacity. But this is exactly the response one would offer to the question “But *why* is there a drought, given the increase in greenhouse gas emissions?”, which suggests that the two questions are explanatorily equivalent. Consider also a parallel maneuver regarding Carroll’s regress. Could the Tortoise respond to the offer of (2.1*) as part of the justification for (3) by saying that it remains unclear *how* (1), (2), and (2.1*) succeed in justifying the inference to (3)? In this context it seems that the question “How do (1), (2), and (2.1*) succeed in justifying the inference to (3)?” is but a variant of the familiar “But *why* does (3) hold, given that (1), (2), and (2.1*) do?”, which is raised at the cost of the inconsistency of accepting (2.1*) while not accepting it. Similarly in the case at hand, “How do $E!(a)$, $E!(b)$, $E!(R)$, and (Brad^{full}) explain that aRb ?” is but a variant of “But *why* is it the case that aRb , given that $E!(a)$, $E!(b)$, $E!(R)$, and (Brad^{full}) ?” which is raised at the cost of the inconsistency noted above. All that being said, perhaps the question how it is that (Brad^{full}) contributes to the explanation of aRb is really a roundabout way of asking what reason we have for thinking that (Brad^{full}) is true. And here, as mentioned at the end of the previous section, the answer boils down to the abductive consideration that (Brad^{full}) allows us to block Bradleyan regressivity.

The point is echoed in a partial grounding setting under certain strictures regarding the pragmatics of explanation. Consider again

$$(\text{Brad}^{part}) \quad E!(a), E!(b), E!(R), (\text{Brad}^{part}) \prec aRb.$$

The partial explanation of aRb is given in terms of the existence of the relata and the relation and (Brad^{part}) itself. Would it be open to the Bradleyan to insist on asking why, given the existence of the relata and the relation and given that (Brad^{part}) , aRb ? Given the partiality of ground being claimed here, (Brad^{part}) is compatible with a richer explanation detailing further grounds for aRb beyond the existence of a , b , R , and (Brad^{part}) itself. But to raise the further explanatory demand upon being offered (Brad^{part}) is to undermine it as a putative explanation. For while raising the demand may not amount to a denial of (Brad^{part}) , as was the case with (Brad^{full}) , the Bradleyan would certainly be treating (Brad^{part}) as an inferior explanation pending improvement. To insist, upon being offered (Brad^{part}) , “Yes, but *why* is it the case that aRb , given the existence of a , b , and R , and given (Brad^{part}) ?” is to demur from the explanation provided by (Brad^{part}) while accepting it alongside the existence of a , b , and R .

To see this, consider a simpler case. A partial explanation of aRb is offered,

$$(\text{exp}_1) \quad E!(a) \prec aRb,$$

which is then countered with a renewed demand for an explanation of aRb , “But *why* is it the case that aRb , given that a exists?”. This explanatory demand already

conveys a demurral from (exp_1) as a putative explanation. The endorsement of (exp_1) would certainly not survive the endorsement of the explanans-enriched

(exp_2) $E!(a), E!(b) \prec aRb$

in response to the renewed explanatory demand. Continuing to maintain (exp_1) while endorsing (exp_2) wouldn't be inconsistent, but it would be pragmatically inappropriate (not unlike the way that maintaining that the Republic is founded upon liberty and equality wouldn't be inconsistent with accepting that it is founded upon liberty, equality, and fraternity, but would nevertheless be pragmatically inappropriate in light of the availability of the more detailed claim).¹³ The reason it would be inappropriate to maintain (exp_1) once (exp_2) is on offer is that the explanatory demand to which (exp_2) provides an answer – “Why is it the case that aRb , given that a exists?” – already conveys dissatisfaction with (exp_1). The key point is that raising a demand for further explanatory support regarding the explanandum of a given explanation is already to demur from it.

Back to our case, following the offer of ($\text{Brad}^{\text{part}}$) as a putative explanation for aRb , which includes accepting the explanans, a demand for further explanatory support for aRb would convey a demurral from ($\text{Brad}^{\text{part}}$). In this case we would be both accepting ($\text{Brad}^{\text{part}}$) and demurring from it. But it is infelicitous to accept ($\text{Brad}^{\text{part}}$) while demurring from it.

This concludes the second half of my response to the Bradleyan regresses.

4 Conclusion

We've been focusing on what ($\text{Brad}^{\text{full}}$) and ($\text{Brad}^{\text{part}}$) express. Each is an explanation of aRb , each appeals to the existence of the relata and the relation in the explanans, and each cites itself among the explanans. ($\text{Brad}^{\text{full}}$) is the more ambitious of the two, being a claim of full ground, and therefore less likely to succeed. After all, to fully ground a being R -related to b in the existence of a , b , and R , together with whatever is conveyed by this very claim of full ground, neglects the diachronic matter of how the relata came to be related in the R -way rather than in some other way R^* , which could then be utilized further in an account of how it is that aRb , specifically, rather than bRa in cases of an asymmetrical R . The existence of the relata and of the relation is a baseline, no doubt, but surely more is required for the full explanation of aRb beyond the existence of the relata and of the relation and the explanation in terms of the existence of the relata and of the relation and this very explanation. But beyond what ($\text{Brad}^{\text{full}}$) and ($\text{Brad}^{\text{part}}$) express, what

¹³The pragmatic principle flouted here is a version of the Gricean maxim of quantity.

they convey is that (Brad^{full}) and (Brad^{part}) do not admit of any further explanatory support. If either one is the case, the explanatory buck stops there.

This may seem especially problematic regarding (Brad^{part}) insofar as it is a claim of partial ground. After all, the partiality invites enrichment of the grounding base, an enrichment which, if I am right, is precluded by the pragmatics of explanation. For while it isn't outright inconsistent to demand further explanatory support for aRb , given the existence of a , b , R , and given (Brad^{part}) , it is nevertheless infelicitous. And this does seem to go against the claimed partiality of the explanation here. Perhaps the right thing to say is that at the semantic level the explanation is partial even if its acceptance pragmatically excludes the further enrichment of its explanans. The pragmatic exclusion doesn't emanate from the kind of grounding at issue but rather from the specific grounds at issue, which include whatever is conveyed by the grounding claim itself.

Both (Brad^{full}) and (Brad^{part}) purport to be self-explanatory. When we say of some claim Y that it is self-explanatory, we don't mean that it literally violates the irreflexivity of explanation by instantiating $Y... < Y$ or $Y... \prec Y$. What we mean, rather, is that Y is evident to the point of not admitting of any further explanatory support. Both (Brad^{full}) and (Brad^{part}) are self-explanatory in this sense if true. Each is a putative explanation of aRb that includes itself among its explanans. If either is true, it doesn't admit of further explanatory support. Whether or not either is true is debatable, but recall the earlier point that we have an independent *pro tanto* reason for taking such claims to be true insofar as they enable the effective disarming of Bradleyan regressivity. The device of including a grounding claim among its own claimed grounds can act as a limiting clause for any purported explanation, closing off the possibility of further enrichment of the explanans.¹⁴

The present point is that we can effectively foreclose the possibility of Bradleyan regressivity. In particular, Bradleyan considerations need not force upon us radical monistic views that shun all distinctions whatsoever. We can consider the claim that aRb as grounded in the existence of a , b , R , and this very claim, the claim that aRb is grounded in the existence of those things and this very claim. It would then be either inconsistent or infelicitous to demand further explanatory support for a being R -related to b beyond what was already given, as we saw. The threat of vicious regressivity is thus effectively disarmed.¹⁵

¹⁴We may think of this as an explanatory analog to the "nothing else" or limiting clause in inductive definitions, often left implicit, as in (iii) below in the definition of *natural number* according to which (i) 0 is such, (ii) if n is such, then so is $S(n)$, and (iii) nothing else is such.

¹⁵The basic idea behind this paper was originally presented in embryonic form in Fatema Amijee's graduate seminar on the Principle of Sufficient Reason at the University of British Columbia in

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