

**The Interplay Between Relations, Substances, and Existence**

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**A Thesis Submitted to  
Saint Mary's University, Halifax, Nova Scotia  
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for  
the Degree of Bachelor of Arts - Honours in Philosophy.**

**April, 2019, Halifax, Nova Scotia**

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**Approved: Scott Edgar  
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**Date: 12/04/19**

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### Abstract

**This thesis explores the ontology of relations and the implications of it. I make the case that relations between multiple substances are impossible. Furthermore, I argue that existence is a predicate, and can therefore be the predicate of a relation. I do this to push the argument that substances cannot exist in relation to each other. The conclusion I make from this is that only one substance can exist, since otherwise a substance could exist in relation to another substance. This conclusion, I point out, is the doctrine of substance monism. Furthermore, I argue that the self exists, because it is given in experience. Because the self is a substance, and I have argued for substance monism, the self is the only substance there is. This conclusion is idealism, and, in conjunction with substance monism, necessitates solipsism.**

12/04/19

## 1. Introduction

In this paper, I investigate the commitments one must make when they uphold the Principle of Sufficient Reason (PSR),<sup>1</sup> which asserts that for every fact, truth, and state of affairs, there is a sufficient reason that explains why it holds. More specifically, I aim to investigate commitments regarding relations. Furthermore, I aim to show why these commitments ultimately lead to an abandonment of substance pluralism<sup>2</sup> and realism.<sup>3</sup> That is, one must abandon the PSR if they are to believe that substance pluralism or realism holds true, or abandon substance pluralism and realism if they believe the PSR to be true. Substance pluralism is the doctrine that there exists more than one substance independent of other things. Realism is the doctrine that objects of perceptions exist independently of the perceptions. That said, throughout this paper, I will be referring to the positions contrary to the above ones: substance monism and idealism.<sup>4</sup> Substance monism is the doctrine that there exists only one substance independent of anything else. Idealism is the doctrine that objects of perception exist only within perceptions. I will argue that if there is only one substance, it must be a mind, specifically the self. The position that the self is the only substance that exists is called solipsism. As such, my earlier statement on the abandonment of substance pluralism and realism may now be rephrased as “one must hold that substance monism, idealism, and solipsism are true if the PSR is true”.

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<sup>1</sup> For more information on the PSR, read Della Rocca, *PSR*; and Spinoza, *The Ethics*. Spinoza was one of the first philosophers to explicitly use a form of the PSR in their philosophy. Della Rocca is a contemporary philosopher who took the initiative to explain what the PSR is, and argue why it is true.

<sup>2</sup> Substance pluralism is omnipresent in both philosophy and common sense thinking. In philosophy, it is often only considered in contrast with substance monism; substance pluralism is a sort of default position. For more on substance monism, see Curd, “Parmenidean Monism”; and Spinoza, *The Ethics*. Curd differentiates between types of monism, and provides an analysis of Parmenides’ monism. Spinoza was a substance monist himself.

<sup>3</sup> For more information on realism, see Hilary Putnam’s “Realism and Reason”.

<sup>4</sup> To better understand what Idealism is, read *Idealism: New Essays in Metaphysics*, edited by Tyrone Goldschmidt and Kenneth L. Pearce

My thesis relies a great deal on regress arguments, as a main argument of mine is a regress argument. As such, I will start, in section 2.1, with analyzing F. H. Bradley's regress argument, which started this style of argument. I will then move on to discussing what drives these arguments in section 2.2: the Predicate-in-Subject Principle (PISP) and the No-Pants Doctrine. Both of these will be explained in their respective sections: 2.2.1 and 2.2.2. I will use the No-Pants Doctrine to argue that relations cannot hold in section 2.2.1.1, except when a mind is one of the relata, which I explain in section 2.2.1.2. I will also argue for the truth of the above principles in sections 2.2.2.1 (The PISP) and 2.2.2.2 (The No-Pants Doctrine), using the PSR, as they must be true for the arguments involving them to hold. Building on the argument against relations, I will provide an exegesis of a regress argument against the existence of a plurality of substances by Michael Della Rocca, which spans section 2.2. This is, then, an argument for substance monism, because substance monism simply is the denial of a plurality of substances.

I will then find myself in a position to defend Della Rocca's aforementioned argument (in section 3), as it requires that existence may be a predicate, and Della Rocca does not himself argue that existence may be a predicate. This is because the argument uses relations of existence to create a regress, and relations are simply two-place predicates. This is a problem because many philosophers believe that existence cannot be a predicate. I will explain why they believe this to be the case, and why I disagree, in section three. I will back this up by analyzing arguments from both positions (that existence is or is not a predicate). Finally, after defending the argument for substance monism, I will explain why my thesis holds true: that is, that if one holds the PSR to be true, one must hold substance monism and idealism to be true (section 4). This is a shift from Della Rocca's argument, as he does not consider idealism in his argument. I

will explain in section 4 that the conjunction of idealism and substance monism, as I have argued for them, collapses into solipsism. There is a way (at least theoretically) to uphold idealism and substance monism, and not solipsism, but this view is not consistent with my argument.

## **2. Regress Arguments**

The nature of my thesis calls for a regress argument that has its roots in arguments of similar reasoning. Specifically, I will be addressing regress arguments made by Francis Herbert Bradley and Michael Della Rocca. Bradley's arguments date much earlier than Della Rocca's and my own, and are responsible, at least in part, for giving rise to arguments like my own. As such, I believe it is important to discuss Bradley's arguments, to understand how regress arguments work in a different context. The underlying reasoning of the argumentation will be analyzed, in order to better appreciate my own regress argument when I formulate it. The context of my regress argument is very much related to Della Rocca's, which is why I will also be addressing his argument. I will provide an exegesis, an analysis, and an argument for its validity by appeal to proof of its premises.

### **2.1 Bradley's Regress Arguments**

In his *Appearance and Reality*, Bradley introduces some regress arguments against the existence of relations. The first appears in chapter 2 of book one, and stems from a concern about substances and their qualities. The problem Bradley illuminates is not a new one (even at his time), but goes as follows: we predicate qualities of their substances. Bradley provides the example of a lump of sugar: it is white, sweet, and hard, among other things. If sugar has these qualities, then what is sugar itself? If we introduce another quality - say, grainy - then we cannot say that this is the substance of sugar, as it is just another quality. Bradley quickly comes to the

conclusion that sugar, and other substances, are just the conjunction of their qualities. For, if there is an underlying substance that has qualities, rather than is the conjunction of qualities, it would be nothing. It could not be, in itself, anything that may be predicated of it, as these predicates would just be qualities of the substance, not the substance itself. For example, the substance of sugar, of which we predicate the qualities sweet, hard, and grainy, cannot in itself be sweet, hard, or grainy. However, a substance cannot merely be the plurality of its qualities, but the conjunction of them.<sup>5</sup> The qualities must be related in some way. This is when we approach the first regress argument.

### 2.1.1 The Three Arguments

Bradley first considers a relation to be an “attribute of the related”.<sup>6</sup> I take this to mean that the relation is grounded in its relata. If this is so, then such a relation either adds nothing to its relata, or simply does not exist. For, if we take each relata separately, and say that the relation is grounded in each separately, we are asserting a falsehood. For clearly, a relation between A and B cannot hold without both A and B, and therefore a relation grounded in each of its relata separately cannot exist. So, the relation must be grounded in both A and B together. But to say this, that the relation is grounded in both A and B together, and not just one of them alone, is just to say that “A and B in such a relation are so related”.<sup>7</sup> That is, A and B must already be in a relation, since the relation is grounded in A and B together, A and B must be together, which is a relation itself. In an attempt to avoid this problem, Bradley considers the relation between its relata to be independent of the relata, viz not grounded in either. However, he creates an argument that denies this possibility: the first regress argument. His argument goes as follows.

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<sup>5</sup> Bradley, *Appearance and Reality*, 19

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 21

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*

Consider A and B, and a relation that holds between them, C. Since C, a relation, must be independent of its relata, it is wholly different from them. As such, C is completely unlike to A and B, and therefore unrelated to them. In order to relate C to A and B, then, we must introduce another relation, D. Yet, D must also be independent of its relata (C, A, and B) and so there must be yet another relation that relates it and its relata, and so on ad infinitum.<sup>8</sup>

One might ask, what does it mean for relata and relations to be wholly different from each other? Why is it that two different things cannot be related? Well, to be wholly different from each other, what can be predicated of C cannot be predicated of A or B. For example, if A is big, then C cannot be big. Furthermore, because A is big, A is extensive, and so C cannot even be extensive. Otherwise, it would not be wholly different from A, because it would be like A in the sense that it occupies space. The point is that if we can find a way to relate two wholly different things, we are making a mistake; the quality we are comparing between two things (e.g. size, color, shape, etc.) cannot even apply to both things if they are to be wholly different. It cannot merely be the case that these qualities have different values for each thing, but that every quality does not apply to both things (I say “thing” to consider both relata and the relations themselves). With this in mind, it makes sense that wholly different things cannot be related. How, for example, can one relate the size of one thing to that of one without size? The key problem in the above argument (i.e the problem it points to, not a problem of its validity) is that if a relation is like (identical to) its relata, then it does not affect the relata in any way. If the relation is unlike its relata, then it cannot relate itself to either one of them, let alone relate the relata to each other.

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

In the next chapter, chapter 3, Bradley provides the next two regress arguments, in retaliation to alternative explanations of relations that he considers. The first argument argues that to be related, two qualities (and relata in general) must be different, for a relation between two of the same thing is no relation at all. A relation between a thing and itself is unintelligible, and not productive to Bradley's dilemma. The context of Bradley's regress arguments is a larger argument that there can be no substance of multiple qualities, as this would require relations (between more than one unique quality). The two relata, therefore, must be different from each other. However, they must both relate to the relation. A relata A cannot relate to its relation C, if a uniquely different relata B relates to C. This is because C cannot be both like A and like B if A and B are different from each other. Bradley proposes that A and B both have two parts. For example, A could be composed of both  $a_1$  and  $c_1$ ; and B could be composed of both  $b_1$  and  $c_1$ . The two like parts,  $c_1$ , relate to C. The  $c_1$  parts allow A and B to relate to C, but the other parts allow A and B to be different from each other. However, if A, for example, is composed of two parts, then those two parts must be related somehow. So, there must be some other relation, D, which relates  $a_1$  and  $c_1$ . However, for  $a_1$  and  $c_1$  to be different, and yet able to relate to D, they too must be composed of parts.<sup>9</sup> You should see where this is going: yet another infinite regress.

Bradley provides one last alternative explanation of relations before putting it down with his third regress argument. With the above explanation in mind, the next one follows rather simply, and is refuted just as easily. Instead of the relata being composed of parts, the relation itself is composed of parts. The relata, A and B, are simples, and entirely different from each other. Imagine an illustration (my idea, not Bradley's), where A is represented by a red puzzle

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 31



piece, B by a blue puzzle piece, and C by a puzzle piece that is blue on one side, and red on the other. The red side connects to A, and the blue side connects to B. Problem solved, right?

Unfortunately, this explanation of relations falls victim to the same problem as the previous. If the relation, C, is composed of two parts, then these two parts must be related in some way, and so we must introduce a new relation which relates these two parts. Let us call this relation D, and the parts  $c_1$  and  $c_2$ . But then D must relate to  $c_1$  and  $c_2$  in some way, and so we must introduce yet another relation, E, and so on ad infinitum.<sup>10</sup>

### **2.1.1.1 The Underlying Problem of Relations**

The fundamental problem that the above two arguments are driven by is that no two wholly different things can be related in any way. This is because for a relation to hold between two objects, the two objects must be related to each other in some way; both objects must be subject to at least one quality in common (e.g they can both be subject to size, mass, color, etc.). If they are wholly different, they cannot be related in any way. Attempting to relate wholly different objects by making the relation similar to both relata divides the relation into two parts - one like the first relata, and the other like the second relata. But then the two parts of the relation must be related with some other relation, and so we face an infinite regress: A thing which is composed of parts merely introduces more things that must be related - the parts. This is where the infinite regress comes from.

### **2.1.2 Responses to The Regress Arguments**

There have been several objections to Bradley's regress arguments, but I do not believe them to be sufficient. The first objections I will discuss is the rejection to how Bradley treats

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 32-33

relations. More specifically, philosophers, including Bertrand Russell,<sup>11</sup> C. D. Broad,<sup>12</sup> Brand Blanshard,<sup>13</sup> and R. Grossmann<sup>14</sup> have all insisted either that relations do not need to relate to their relata, or that they do so in virtue of being relations. According to this view, relations do not have to be like their relata to relate them. However, such relations would not have a sufficient reason explaining why they relate their relata - or how, for that matter. This violates the PSR, and so this objection fails.

For those who do not reject the arguments presented by Bradley, but nonetheless find it troubling, there have been a couple of attempts to account for relations. The first I shall discuss is an appeal to an external relation in the form of an agent, i.e a mind, God, etcetera. To propose the existence of a God to solve the problem of relations would require an argument for the existence of a God (and we cannot simply appeal to its existence for the sake of solving the problem of relations). The existence of a mind, the self, is self-evident, and given. I argue for the grounding of relations, and their relata, in my thesis. How well this solves the problem of relations depends on what one believes the problem to be. If one is committed to the belief that there exist relations between objects which are independent of some mind observing it, then the problem is not solved, as this solution is that it is simply the self which relates objects.

The last response I shall discuss is that of the unifying self-relating relation. The proposal of a self-relating relation seems to me to simply be begging the question. The philosopher who proposes the unifying self-relating relation must explain in virtue of what these unifying self-relating relations relate themselves - or what that even means. One cannot simply say, and

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<sup>11</sup> Russell, "Some Explanations in Reply to Mr. Bradley"

<sup>12</sup> Broad, *Examination of McTaggart's Philosophy*

<sup>13</sup> Blanshard, "Bradley on Relations"

<sup>14</sup> Grossmann, *The Existence of The World*

expect to have won the argument in such a way, that the unifying self-relating relation self-relates by definition, as this does not explain why it is defined in such a way. As such, no explanation is given for the existence of the unifying-self-relating relation, and so we have no justification for its existence. I believe I have sufficiently explained Bradley's regress arguments, and address responses to it.

Now that I have sufficiently addressed Bradley's regress arguments, I believe it is important to move on to a regress argument that is more directly related to my thesis. It was important to first address Bradley's arguments because they are from which more recent regress arguments have originated. Analyzing Bradley's arguments helped to understand the very nature of regress arguments. In the next section, I will be discussing an article by the contemporary philosopher Michael Della Rocca, in which he employs a regress argument on which his thesis depends. I will explain how it relates to my own thesis, how it works, and what it means.

## **2.2 Della Rocca's "Violations of the Principle of Sufficient Reason"**

In his "Violations of The Principle of Sufficient Reason", Michael Della Rocca charges Leibniz with being inconsistent in his philosophy. Leibniz believed in the PSR.<sup>15</sup> An important corollary of the PSR, which we will use often, is that nothing is true or false for no reason, and nothing obtains for no reason; nothing may be arbitrary. The bulk of Della Rocca's article generally consists in proving, or at least arguing, that if the PSR is true, then so is substance monism. That said, Della Rocca phrases this as Leibniz having to choose between abandoning the PSR and adopting substance monism.<sup>16</sup> Furthermore, he does not only charge Leibniz with this dilemma; Della Rocca insists that this decision is one everyone must make, holding that the

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<sup>15</sup> Della Rocca, "Violations of the Principle of Sufficient Reason", 139

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., 140

PSR entails substance monism.<sup>17</sup> First, however, Della Rocca argues only that Leibniz faces this dilemma, relying on his acceptance of two principles: the “no-pants” doctrine, and the Predicate in Subject Principle (PISP). These principles will be defined and explained later. Della Rocca’s strategy for his charge against Leibniz can be described as using the “no-pants” doctrine, in conjunction with the PSR and PISP, to show why substance monism must be true. He then, in an attempt to generalize the argument, argues why the PSR entails the “no-pants” doctrine and The PISP. This makes the argument driven entirely by the PSR: if the PSR entails the “no-pants” doctrine and the PISP, which in turn entail substance monism, then either the PSR is false, or substance monism is true.

### **2.2.1 The No-Pants Doctrine**

According to Della Rocca, Leibniz held utmost belief in the no-pants doctrine. So what exactly is it? The no-pants doctrine claims that nothing may be grounded in, or ontologically dependent on, more than one substance.<sup>18</sup> More particularly, what is important for Della Rocca’s argument, is that no relation may be grounded in more than one substance. A relation being, of course, something that relates two substances. Now, it seems rather unintuitive to suggest that relations cannot depend on more than one substance if they relate more than one substance. However, for now, we will take the no-pants doctrine for granted, and then provide Della Rocca’s argument for it later.

#### **2.2.1.1 Argument Against Relations Using The No-Pants Doctrine**

Our natural inclination is to suggest that for some relation R, which relates two substances, x and y, it must be grounded in x and y. However, the no-pants doctrine denies this

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 144

possibility, so we must cross it out. We may consider, then, the following: R depends solely on one of its relata, x; R depends solely on its other relata, y; R depends on a mind; or R depends on a substance that is not one of its relata nor a mind. It should be worth noting that Della Rocca does not discuss minds as an option, but rather lumps them together with other substances. We reject the first two possibilities, because it would be arbitrary for R to be grounded in one of its relata, but not the other. This would be arbitrary because both of R's relata have equal reason (being R's relata) for being R's ground, and so there is no reason why one ought to be the ground and not the other. This would be a violation of the PSR. We reject the possibility that R is grounded in some substance that is not a mind nor one of its relata, since such a substance would be unrelated to R, and therefore arbitrary. If, for example, R relates x and y, and R is grounded in some object z, there must be some explanation in virtue of which R is grounded in z. Since R relates only x and y, and not z, there must be some relation that holds between x and z and y and z, or at least R and z. This new relation must also have some ground, and if we are to declare it as we declared the ground of R, we would reach an infinite regress or circular argument. The PSR does not allow these possibilities, since both do not provide an ultimate ground for relations.

As for a mind, minds observe relations, and so they must be related to these relations in some way. If we look at the above example, and treat z as a mind, we can make relations between x and z and y and z: z observes x and y. Furthermore, we may make a relation between z and R: z observes x and y in some relation to each other.

### **2.2.1.2 Relations Involving Minds**

However, one can see that minds do not escape the problem of infinite regresses and circular arguments so easily. Minds are, after all, objects. It is intuitive to suggest that minds are exceptional from what we would normally call *z*. As I have said earlier, this is because they observe *x*, *y*, and *R*. This observation is a relation between the mind and what it observes. However, we then must ask, in virtue of what does that relation obtain; why does the mind observe what it does? It is important to use the PSR to verify that our answers to questions are correct. For example, if one can provide a sufficient reason for why triangles must have angles adding up to 180 degrees, then we know that triangles must have angles adding up to 180 degrees. This is how the PSR is being used in this dilemma of relata, relations, and grounds. If we can provide a sufficient reason for why *z* grounds *R*, then we know that *z* grounds *R*. However, the PSR is not the only way we can figure this out. I, for example, know that I perceive an object *x*, because I perceive an object *x*. I am notably appealing to experience. One may then ask, why do I perceive the object *x*? This is a great question, and I believe it has an answer, because the PSR demands it (according to the PSR, there is a sufficient reason for everything that obtains). However, we need not know *why* I perceive *x* to know *that* I perceive *x*. If I perceive some relation *R*, between two objects *x* and *y* (which I often times do) then I know that is the case. Because this is itself a relation, there is a relation between me and *R*, and I know this whether I know why or not. Note that this is not a violation of the PSR. One can know something without understanding why, even if there is a reason why. I know *that* I perceive what I perceive because it is given to me in experience, even if I do not know why it is given to me in experience. Moving on: if we suppose some object *z* relates to *R*, but do not know that it does, we need to explain why it does, which would be yet another relation we do not know about,

causing the infinite regress brought up earlier. Because we know that the observational relation exists, we know that there must be a reason why it obtains, and so anything grounded in such a relation (or the mind of the relation) is ultimately grounded in a sufficient reason. Therefore, grounding R in a mind avoids the problem that grounding it in some z fails to.

The above pattern of thinking is why idealism is relevant to this dilemma. If we assume that objects like x and y are real things independent of the mind(s) that observe them, we have nothing to ground relations between them in. If we are to hold the no-pants doctrine (the argument for which I will provide soon), then the relation between x and y must be grounded in either x alone, y alone, or some other substance alone. As I have shown above, these options are not plausible. If we say that relations are grounded in a mind, then we are in effect saying that relations hold between relata because a mind observes them: they depend on a mind. This is very important for the thesis of idealism, as now we need only to show that the objects of relations are also dependent on minds.

If the above reasoning is not enough to convince one that idealism holds true (which I believe will be the case for many readers) consider the argument against relations in the previous section. If existence is a predicate (which I shall argue for in section 3), then more than one object cannot exist. Because relations cannot exist (at least beyond those involving minds), objects cannot exist in relation to each other; this would be the relation of coexistence. Because more than one object cannot exist, only one object may exist. Because the self is known to exist through experience, it must exist. The self can then be the only thing that can exist, and so only the self (and its experiences) exists. This simply is idealism.

One might believe I have erred in my ontology of relations. I have laid out an argument against relations, and I have then insisted that relations exist between minds and what they observe. However, what the argument against relations really shows is that relations cannot exist between multiple substances. This is because there would be no way of determining what the relation is grounded in: substance A or substance B. When there is only one substance in a relation (in this case, the mind), the relation is clearly grounded in the substance. What the mind relates to (its perceptions, experience, etc.) is itself grounded in the mind, and does not exist independently of it. If we were to say the relation is grounded in the perception of the relation, it would ultimately be grounded in the mind, since the perception is grounded in the mind. Furthermore, as I established earlier, the problem with relations between substances is that for any two substances to be related, there must be a relation between two wholly different things. This was explained with Bradley's regress arguments.

Leibniz himself insisted that relations are grounded in a mind, specifically God's mind.<sup>19</sup> Della Rocca points this out in Leibniz's correspondence with Des Bosses: "orders, or relations which join two monads, are not in one monad or the other, but equally well in both at the same time, that is, really in neither, but in the mind alone". This quote suggests that relations are mind-dependent. Della Rocca also quotes Leibniz as saying, in Mugnai's "Leibniz's Ontology of Relations: A Last Word?", "It appears that relations are not other than truths... they are born by virtue of the divine intellect alone".<sup>20</sup> This second quote suggests that all relations depend specifically on God's mind. Leibniz, according to Della Rocca, wanted to hold both that relations are grounded in God's mind, and yet are real (ontologically independent of minds) as opposed to

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<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., 145



ideal (ontologically dependent on minds).<sup>21</sup> This seems contradictory in nature, since if a relation is grounded in a mind, it is ontologically dependent on it. This problem does not get overlooked by Della Rocca, who points out Leibniz's contrasting of relations and relational states, or "relational accidents". Leibniz uses the example of David's paternity, and Solomon's sonship. David's paternity is a relational state of David, since there is only one subject (David) and one predicate (paternity). The same can be said of Solomon's (subject) sonship (predicate). However, Leibniz goes on to say that the relation common to both David and Solomon (i.e David is Solomon's father, or Solomon is David's son) is merely ideal, and not real.<sup>22</sup> This reflects Leibniz's reluctance to ground relations and states in more than one substance (e.g in both David and Solomon), and the PISP (e.g David's paternity is grounded solely in David's nature).

However, what I believe Della Rocca gets at in his article is that Leibniz relies on the structure of language to make this distinction. In fact, Della Rocca believes it is no different to say that relations are grounded in minds and relational states are grounded in minds.<sup>23</sup> The relational state "David's paternity" is a relational state, and not just a normal state, for a reason: David's paternity depends on, at least in part, something other than David. We would not say that David's paternity - his being a father - is explainable solely with reference to David. Of course, David needs a son to be a father, and this is clear in predicating him with paternity even without reference to another person. It is for this reason, it seems, that Della Rocca believes that the grounding of relations in a mind entails the grounding of relational states in a mind; relational states are just relations. This is a problem, according to Della Rocca for Leibniz because he

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<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., 146

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 147

wants to assert that relational states are real, independent of the observation of relations, yet asserts that relations are grounded in a mind.<sup>24</sup>

### **2.2.2 The Predicate in Subject Principle**

Earlier, I mentioned the PISP. What is it, exactly, and why is it important? According to the PISP, any predicate of a subject is due solely to the subject's nature. That is, if  $x$  is  $F$ , it is because it is in  $x$ 's nature to be  $F$ , and for no other reason.<sup>25</sup> For example, if I am short, it is simply because it is in my nature to be short. The language Della Rocca uses puts predicates in terms of states (e.g  $x$  is in a state of  $F$ ). This is in order to discuss relational states with the PISP in mind. Relational states are simply states which relate the subject to something else (e.g I am in the relational state of being shorter than Scott). We were speaking of a relation,  $R$ , which holds between  $x$  and  $y$ ; however, now we are to say that  $R$  is a relational state of  $x$  that relates it to  $y$ . According to the PISP,  $R$  is to be grounded solely in  $x$ .

#### **2.2.2.1 Argument for The PISP**

If we deny the PISP, for the sake of *Reductio ad Absurdum*, as Della Rocca does,<sup>26</sup> then  $R$  must be grounded in something other than  $x$  (and only one thing, because of the no-pants doctrine). Let us suppose there is a  $y$ , which grounds  $R$ ; this entails an ungrounded relation that holds between  $x$  and  $y$ . There must be a relation between  $x$  and  $y$ , otherwise it would be arbitrary for  $y$  to ground  $R$ , a state of  $x$ . This relation must be ungrounded. If we suppose it is not ungrounded, then we run into the same issue of trying to ground a relation that cannot be grounded in both of its relata, nor one or the other. Because anything that has no ground is arbitrary, and the PSR does not allow for arbitrariness, this relation cannot exist. Because this

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<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., 142

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 148

relation cannot exist, anything that entails it cannot exist either, and so R cannot be grounded in y. More generally, a state may not be grounded in something other than that which it is a state of. This conclusion simply is the PISP.

### 2.2.2.2 Argument for The No-Pants Doctrine

What about the no-pants doctrine - why ought we believe in it? The argument is similar to the one above. After all, the no-pants doctrine is simply a general version of the PISP; the PISP entails that states must be grounded *only* in the *one* substance that is in the state, whereas the no-pants doctrine states that states must be grounded *only* in *one* substance. In short, the no-pants doctrine is the general rule that states must be grounded in any one (and only one) substance, whereas the PISP is the more specific rule that states must be grounded in only the one substance which is in the state. Suppose that some relational state F is grounded in both x and y; F is a relational state of x and of y. Then F obtains because of “the fact that x and y are together, the fact that they *co-exist* with certain natures, i.e the fact that they are related somehow”.<sup>27</sup> Because F is grounded in both x and y, both x and y must exist, or obtain, not just one or the other. This is itself a relation, i.e that both x and y exist, which we shall call R. This may seem odd, but consider this: if x is bigger than y, this is a relation. It is a relation because x’s status, or state, is compared to y’s, and this is the same in the case of them both obtaining: the relation compares x’s existence with y’s.

The problem of relations of existence is rooted in the problem of whether or not existence can be a predicate. If existence can be a predicate, then relations may relate existence, as relations are simply two-place predicates. The problem of existence as a predicate will be

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<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

addressed later in the essay. Now that we have another relation on our hands (the first being F), we must account for it too, and so we fall into another infinite regress. This second relation, R, is another relation between x and y. According to the PSR, R must be grounded as well. We cannot ground R in both x and y, as this would be grounding R in the relation between x and y that both x and y exist. Of course, this simply is R, and so R would be grounded in itself, which is simply saying “it is because it is”. This is arbitrary, and therefore a betrayal of the PSR. Furthermore, the PSR entails that we cannot ground R in just one of its relata. Our only other alternative, if we are not to ground R in a mind, is to ground it in some other relation between x and y, R'. This is the infinite regress I alluded to. This means that R has no ultimate ground, which itself fails to satisfy the PSR. Furthermore, since F is grounded in R, F is also ungrounded. Therefore, we must accept the no-pants doctrine, if we are to accept the PSR and believe that all relations must be grounded.

### **3. The Problem of Existence as a Predicate**

#### **3.1 The Charge Against Existence as a Predicate**

Some people may have qualms with Della Rocca's Bradlean regress argument, even given that Bradley's original argument is valid. Specifically, the claim that x&y, or the coexistence of x and y, is a relation, seems problematic to many. The worry is that relations must be predicates, and that existence is not a predicate. For example, “x is bigger than y” is a relation, because it has a predicate (bigger), but “x and y coexist” is not a relation, because existence is supposedly not a predicate.

The charge that existence is not a predicate arises from the ontological argument alluded to earlier. The argument goes that God is perfect, by definition. Because God is perfect, he is

perfect in every sense. To not exist would be imperfect, and so God must exist. The standard counterargument is simply that existence is not a predicate. This argument has no grounds other than the denial of the conclusion of the ontological argument. If defining something as perfect makes it exist, then everything and anything that can be defined as perfect would exist.

Furthermore, if one can define something as perfect, to define it into existence, then something can be merely defined as existing. This might be thought of as different in nature, because it directly assumes existence. However, defining something as perfect, and asserting that that which is perfect must exist, is doing the same thing with just another step. If part of what it is to be perfect is to exist, then when one defines something as perfect, they are also defining it as existing. Being able to define anything into existence raises major problems. For example, if Fred the god-eating penguin exists by definition, then he must exist. Furthermore, if he eats gods by definition, then there should not be any gods. Yet, there must be gods if they are defined as existing. Clearly, there is some inconsistency with this argument for the existence of a God.

The above argument might be refuted with the charge that defining something as anything other than existing does not make it exist. For example, if I say that goombas are small, brown, mushroom-shaped creatures, they do not necessarily exist, but are necessarily small, brown, and mushroom-shaped. However, if I say that goombas exist, by definition, then they necessarily exist. However, consider this: if I define goombas as both big and small (not varying in size, but all goombas are simultaneously big and small), they could in no way actually be both big and small. If the relativity of 'big' and 'small' bothers one, simply replace them with "one foot tall" and "ten feet tall". It is clear that such creatures make no sense. But, one might ask, what is the contradiction in something being small, brown, mushroom-shaped, and existing?

Well, just like how if nothing that is one foot tall is also ten feet tall, if something is small, brown, and mushroom-shaped, it might be that it does not exist. Of course, there is the *epistemic* possibility that goombas as described do exist - in some corner of the universe - but this does not entail the *metaphysical* possibility of the existence of goombas. For all we know, they simply cannot exist. If it is possible (metaphysically) for something to exist, then there is no reason for it to not exist, and so it must exist, according to the PSR. As such, if something does not exist, it is because it cannot exist, even if we do not know why. So, if we define something as existing, we cannot be sure if existence is even compatible with the rest of the predicates we attribute to it. As such, the ontological argument is not actually an argument, but just a definition that may or may not be a contradictory one. As such, we may treat existence as a predicate without entailing that everything that may be defined as existing must exist, and therefore we may hold that the coexistence of two substances is a relation without worry of this dilemma.

### **3.2 Shaffer's "Existence, Predication, and The Ontological Argument"**

I am certainly not the only one to believe (or at least entertain the idea) that existence is a proper predicate. Otherwise, I would not get very far. In his article "Existence, Predication, and The Ontological Argument", Jerome Shaffer addresses what he believes to be mistreatment of the Ontological Argument (viz, the argument for God's existence by definition). Traditionally, philosophers have discredited the argument, with the most popular and accepted refutation being that existence cannot be a predicate. In the Ontological Argument, God is defined as existing, and so he exists by definition. This is often said to be derivative of a different definition of God, viz God is perfect in every way. It is argued that to exist would be necessary to be perfect, because to not exist would be imperfect. There seems to be a lot wrong with this argument, such

as the objectivity of perfection, and why it entails existence. That is, what exactly is “perfect” is hard to agree upon, and ‘perfect’ is usually used subjectively (e.g the perfect computer may be large enough for a large viewing screen, or small enough to easily carry around). However, the most common counter argument, which Shaffer traces back to Immanuel Kant, is that existence cannot be predicated of a substance.<sup>28</sup> While linguistically, ‘exists’ is a predicate, Kant said that ‘exists’ is not “truly” a predicate, because it changes (or adds to) the original concept one speaks of.<sup>29</sup> That is, Kant recognizes that ‘exists’ is a predicate in the sense that it is a verb that says something about a preceding subject, but not in the metaphysical sense of changing the concept of the subject. For example, if I say “unicorns exist”, the original concept ‘unicorn’ has changed. As such, I have failed to assert that the original concept ‘unicorn’ exists.

However, Shaffer is quick to pick up on the problem with this pattern of argumentation. If the above argument is valid, then no predicate can be a “real” predicate. If I say apples are red, I am altering the concept ‘apple’, and so I do not show that the original concept ‘apple’ is red.<sup>30</sup> If all predicates alter their subjects - which they do - then surely we must define “real” predicates some other way. Shaffer says that this problem arises for Kant because he thinks too narrowly of predication. When we predicate something of a subject, according to Kant, we are either extracting information from the subject (analytic judgement), or adding something to it (synthetic judgement). It is clearly not the case that asserting that something exists is an analytic judgement since there is no concept which can be known to exist by analysis alone. As such, Kant concludes, existence must be a synthetic predicate, if it is a predicate. However, this will not do, since a synthetic predicate only revises its subject. I do not see what is wrong with this,

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<sup>28</sup> Shaffer, “Existence, Predication, and The Ontological Argument”, 308

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., 309

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., 310

but Shaffer does not explain why this is a problem.<sup>31</sup> Nonetheless, he continues by saying that predicating something is not always analytic or synthetic, but sometimes just saying something about the subject. Shaffer seems to fail to understand what synthetic judgements are. He claims that, as an example, “crows are black” merely says something about crows, and not the concept of crows.<sup>32</sup> This is true, but this simply makes the judgement synthetic. Of course, Shaffer could be pointing out that since synthetic predicates add to, or alter their subjects, and Kant believes that such predicates are not “real” predicates, then almost all, if not all, predicates are not “real”, as in the crow example. As such, if Kant were to stick to his original concept of a “real” predicate, he would have to assert that many things we believe to be real predicates are not real predicates. Otherwise, he would have to find another way to argue that existence is not a predicate, or accept that it is one.

Shaffer then moves on from Kant, and discusses another argument against the predication of existence. The argument uses hypotheticals to validate a predicate. If the hypothetical does not make sense, the tested predicate is not a true predicate. For example, “crows are black” is tested with “if there exists a crow, then it is black”. If we say “crows exist”, we end up with “if there exists a crow, it exists”. This is tautologous, but “crows exist” is not tautologous. Similarly, “crows do not exist” is tested with “if there exists a crow, it does not exist”, which is simply contradictory. As such, as this argument goes, existence is not a true predicate.<sup>33</sup> However, as Shaffer points out, this argument is construed in such a way to pick out existence as a non-predicate. Because “there exists” is used in the hypothetical, we run into problems when predicating existence of the subject. If instead, we say “if anything is... then it exists”, as in “if

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<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., 311



anything is a crow, then it exists”, we do not run into this problem. Furthermore, if we are to assume that we ought to keep the hypothetical in the original format, we have problems with other predicates. For example, “if there exists a unicorn, then it is proper subject-matter for a mythologist” does not line up with “unicorns are proper subject-matter for mythologists”. This is because if unicorns existed, they would not be mythological, and therefore not proper subject-matter for a mythologist. Shaffer points out that this is not some extraordinary case, and provides more examples.<sup>34</sup> However, one shall suffice. We cannot conflate subject-predicate statements with hypotheticals, and so we cannot dismiss existence as not a predicate this way.

Shaffer discusses another argument for the conclusion “existence is not a predicate”, which he attributes to David Hume. The argument, and Shaffer’s response to it, are both rather short. According to Hume, everything and anything we conceive of, we must conceive of as existing. According to this line of reasoning, a subject-predicate statement of the form “x exists” is tautologous, and one of the form “x does not exist” is nonsensical.<sup>35</sup> This would be good reason to treat existence, or at least non-existence, as a non-predicate. However, Shaffer first points out that Hume himself was rather indecisive on his thoughts on existence, as he also said that we can conceive of things as not existing. Furthermore, Shaffer charges Hume with conflating the concept of a thing with the thing itself.<sup>36</sup> If, when I conceive of something, I must necessarily conceive of it as existing, it seems to be implied that conceiving of something makes it exist. It is true that if I conceive of something, the conception of it must exist. However, this is not how we normally use the predicate “exists”. For example, most people will readily admit that unicorns do not exist, but also that they have a conception of what a unicorn is. An Indian boy

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<sup>34</sup> Ibid., 312

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., 315

<sup>36</sup> Ibid.,315-316

might say that snow exists, even if he has no conception of what it is, because he has never seen snow. When we say that something exists, we mean to say that it exists independent of our conception of it - independent of our minds.

The rest of Shaffer's article is dedicated to explaining why/how the Ontological Argument still fails to work, despite existence being a valid predicate. I will not analyze Shaffer's argument, as although the Ontological Argument has a controversial conclusion that I disagree with, it is not directly related to my thesis. As such, I have personal reasons to believe, and argue, that the Ontological Argument fails, because I do not believe that the conclusion is true, but to address it here would be to drift off-topic.

### **3.3 The Argument Against Existence as a Predicate from Symbolic Logic**

I will, however, discuss how one can argue existence is not a predicate from the standpoint of the modern system of symbolic logic. While Shaffer himself does not discuss this pattern of argumentation, I believe that it is relevant enough to discuss immediately afterwards. Furthermore, as with the previous arguments discussed, I will explain why the following pattern of reasoning fails. In modern symbolic logic, we have what we call universal quantification, marked by the quantifier ' $\forall(x)$ ', which means "for all  $x$ ". We also have the existential quantifier, marked by ' $\exists(x)$ ', which means "there exists (some)  $x$ ...". We can symbolize predication by using a capital letter to represent the predicate, followed by ' $x$ ' for the subject. For example, " $\exists(x) (Mx)$ " can mean "there exists some  $x$ , such that  $x$  is matter". If we say " $\forall(x) (Mx)$ ", we simply mean "for all  $x$ ,  $x$  is matter", or "everything is matter". We can also use ' $\sim$ ' to negate a predicate. For example, " $\exists(x) (\sim Mx)$ " means "there exists some  $x$ , such that  $x$  is not matter". So far, so good. Now, let us see what happens if we use existence as a predicate

(symbolized by E): “ $\exists(x) (Ex)$ ” means “There exists some x, such that x exists”. Like in the hypothetical argument, we create a tautology, which, while not terrible, is not a good sign. Furthermore, when we predicate non-existence, we get a bigger problem: “ $\exists(x) (\sim Ex)$ ” means “There exists some x, such that x does not exist”. This is a contradiction, again, like in the hypothetical argument. I bring this previous argument up because it has a similar flaw: it seems like existence cannot be treated as a predicate because our symbolic logic is construed in such a way that we cannot always use it as a predicate in the symbolism. Notice that we can use the universal quantifier without having to avoid using existence as a predicate: “ $\forall(x) (Ex)$ ” means for all x, x exists, and “ $\forall(x) (\sim Ex)$ ” means “for all x, x does not exist”. These are perfectly fine assertions. The problem with the existential quantifier is that it assumes that x exists. This is not to say that the existential quantifier is bad, or that we should not use it, but just that it would be silly to use it in conjunction with a predicate of existence. For, when one writes “ $\exists(x)$ ”, one is saying “there exists some x”, which already asserts that x exists; the existential quantifier automatically predicates existence of x, which is why it seems silly to use existence as a predicate in conjunction with it. In short, symbolic logic simply does not treat existence as a predicate. This is not because existence is not a predicate simpliciter, but because this is simply how we choose to symbolize logic.

### 3.3.1 Criticisms of This Argument

Furthermore, while this problem is limited to existence in our symbolic logic, it need not be like that. The existential quantifier just makes it simpler to symbolize logic when it is assumed that existence is predicated of the subject. To provide an example, I must explain ‘ $\supset$ ’, which, when used in the form “ $Aa \supset Bb$ ” means “if a is A, then b is B”. If we write “ $\forall(x)$

$(\exists x \supset Mx)$ ” we are saying “for all x, if x exists, x is matter”. However, despite what intuition might suggest, this does not mean the same thing as “ $\forall (x) [ \exists (x) \supset Mx ]$ ”. In fact, the previous expression is meaningless when following the rules of symbolic logic. This is because the existential quantifier must be followed by a predicate. We read the existential quantifier as “there exists (some) x....”. When followed by a predicate, we read “there exists (some) x such that x is...”. Intuitively, one might try to use the existential quantifier to simply mean “there exists (some) x”, but this does not abide by the rules of symbolic logic. All this means is that we cannot use the existential quantifier to predicate existence of a subject in accordance with the rules of symbolic logic. However, we can express this predication in other ways, such as with the universal quantifier, or with natural language. That symbolic logic cannot predicate existence using the existential quantifier does not mean that existence is not a predicate. As such, this is a problem with the symbolic language, and not a fundamental problem of predication. An appeal to modern symbolic logic fails to show that existence is not a predicate. It can be treated as a predicate in most of symbolic logic, and only cannot be used when it cannot because it is already assumed to be a predicate of the subject in question.

The existential quantifier is not the only non-hypothetical case of making logic more convenient (the hypothetical case being the “person quantifier” above). In modal logic, which expands on propositional and predicate calculus, we use ‘ $\square$ ’ to represent ‘necessarily’, and ‘ $\diamond$ ’ to represent ‘possibly’. For example, “ $\square P \supset \diamond P$ ” means “if P is necessary, then P is possible”. This makes it convenient when dealing with necessity, possibility, and impossibility a lot. However, predicate calculus is sufficient to deal with possibilities. For example, to reproduce the above example, I could use “ $Nx \supset Px$ ”, where ‘N’ means “is necessary” and ‘P’ means “is

possible”. This creates “if x is necessary, then x is possible”. The only difference between this example and the modal example is that in this one, we must define our symbols, whereas the modal examples use standard symbolization. If we go back to the modal example, and define ‘P’ as “it is possible that x”, we get “if it is necessary that it is possible that, then it is possible that it is possible that x”. At best, this seems rather confusing, if not simply nonsensical. As such, we cannot, or at least should not, use the predicates ‘possible’, ‘impossible’, and ‘necessary’ in our propositions when using modal logic. This does not mean that they are not predicates, but that we are already using them when we use modal symbolization, and using the predicates in addition to the symbolization just does not work. The point of this discussion of modal logic is to point out that the existential quantifier is of a similar case. The existential quantifier asserts the existence of the subject, and so following the existential quantifier with predicating existence of the subject is redundant, and predicating the subject of non-existence is contradictory. This would be like saying “ $Px \& Px$ ” or “ $Px \& \sim Px$ ”, which are also redundant and contradictory, respectively. This does not mean that P is not a predicate; we do not even know what P represents here, so how could we assert it is not a predicate?

In summary, what I had aimed to show in the above three paragraphs is that we cannot use existence as a predicate in conjunction with the existential quantifier not because existence is not a predicate, but because we would not be using existence as it should be used, based on the system of logic we are using. We can create a tautology like “there exists x, such that x exists”, and a contradiction like “there exists x, such that x does not exist”, but this in no way means that existence is not a predicate. We can do this with virtually any predicate. For example: “there is a blue x, such that x is blue” and “there is a blue x, such that x is not blue”. The existential

quantifier is not some fundamental phenomenon of logic, but a tool we use to represent it, and so the tautologies and contradictions that may arise from it are no different, fundamentally, from other tautologies and contradictions. As such, one must either abandon this argument, or assert that all predicates (or rather, things which we call predicates) are not actually predicates. The most reasonable decision here is to abandon the argument.

#### **4. Substance Monism and Idealism**

With the above dilemma addressed, and Leibniz's principles argued for, now what? How does accepting the PISP and no-pants doctrine entail substance monism and idealism? Well, according to the no-pants doctrine, a relation  $R$ , between  $x$  and  $y$ , cannot be grounded in both  $x$  and  $y$ . However, if  $R$  relates  $x$  and  $y$ , it is logically (and therefore ontologically) dependent on both  $x$  and  $y$ . For example, if  $R$  is the relation that  $x$  is bigger than  $y$ , then  $R$  depends on  $x$  being some size and  $y$  being a smaller size. As such,  $R$  depends on  $x$  and  $y$ , but the no-pants doctrine tells us this is not possible. This suggests that relations cannot hold between substances, leading us to the PISP. If relations cannot hold between substances, then substances cannot be in relational states. Since relational states are the only states that depend on more than one substance, the states that substances are in must depend on only one substance. The PSR tells us that this substance is that which is in the state. This conclusion is the PISP. Since the states that substances are in depend solely on the substances themselves, they cannot relate to other substances in any way. This includes the relation of co-existence, and so multiple substances cannot exist. This conclusion is substance monism.

Idealism, as argued for in section 2.2.1.2, is true because the mind, or the self, is given in experience; we may not know why it exists, but we know it exists in virtue of being it.

Furthermore, we know our experiences (perceptions, thoughts, etcetera) exist in virtue of experiencing them. However, these are the only things that can exist. If I suppose some other substance exists, it must exist in relation to my existence. Because relations cannot exist, this cannot be the case. This means that only the mind and its experiences exist.

#### **4.1 The Collapse of Substance Monism and Idealism into Solipsism**

I have shown above that Della Rocca's dilemma not only shows that substance monism is true, but also that idealism is true. If we do not accept these beliefs, we are forced to abandon the PSR. Furthermore, while substance monism and idealism do not necessarily entail solipsism, they collapse into it when argued for as I have. As such, my thesis boils down to the claim that solipsism is true, if the PSR is true. I have not provided an argument for the PSR, as it is outside the scope of my thesis, and there are already good arguments for its truth<sup>37</sup>. If one wants to maintain that the self is a substance - that the self is independent of any other substance - then substance monism and idealism collapse into solipsism. This is because there can only be one substance if substance monism is true, and if this one substance is the self, we get solipsism. Since the self is the only substance, everything else (e.g. supposed 'objects') is grounded in the self, which simply is the thesis of solipsism.

Of course, one need not hold that the self is a substance - Spinoza claimed that so-called people are just modes, or expressions, of God, analogous to how an idealist might say a rock is really just a perception belonging to the self. Parmenides of Elea was a substance monist, but he had no room for a self in his ontology. Aside from asserting that only one substance exists, Parmenides believed that time and change do not exist - a belief hardly compatible with the

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<sup>37</sup> See Della Rocca, "PSR", for a good argument of the PSR

concept of a self (at least qua substance). That said, Parmenides' inert ontology, and any sort of God - including Spinoza's - carry their ontological baggage. That is, some extensive argumentation and analysis is necessary to take either of these beliefs as true. Furthermore, such forms of substance monism are incompatible with how I have argued for idealism. I argued for idealism by appeal to the existence of the self as a substance, given in experience. If one insists that the self is not a substance, but rather something dependent on something else that is the one substance, then they will have to argue for idealism some other way. They would have to argue for the existence of this mind without appeal to experience, since only one's own mind can be known to exist through experience.



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