

SUBJECT, OBJECT AND THE NATURE OF
REALITY: METAPHYSICS IN DOROTHY
RICHARDSON'S *DEADLOCK*

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'From the first I hated, and whenever possible evaded, orderly instruction in regard to the world around me', Dorothy Richardson observed, in a sketch published posthumously in the *London Magazine* in 1959.¹ Even in early childhood, she noted, she had held 'a deep-rooted suspicion of "facts" and ordered knowledge':

Not that I lacked the child's faculty of wonder. In a sense, I had it to excess. For what astonished, and still astonishes, me more than anything else was the existence, anywhere, of anything at all. But since things there were, I preferred to become one with them, in the child's way of direct apprehension which no subsequent 'knowledge' can either rival or destroy, rather than to stand back and be told, in relation to any of the objects of my self-losing adoration, this and that.²

This early scepticism regarding conventional explanations of the wonder of existence was consolidated by Richardson's schooling at a progressive ladies' college in Putney. Influenced by John Ruskin's advocacy of an education of holistic moral and aesthetic value, the teaching, she recalled, 'fostered our sense of fair play, encouraged us to take broad views, hear all sides and think for ourselves'. When she rebelled at having to attend classes in geography, which seemed to her 'unrelated to anything else on earth', she was allowed to join a sixth form class on logic and psychology. The brash confidence of the latter in its 'amazing claims' ultimately provoked her mistrust, but 'joyously chant[ing] the mnemonic lines representing the syllogisms' was by contrast a revelation. The study of formal logic, Richardson declared, and 'the growth of power to detect faulty reasoning', brought about a sense of freedom and confidence in her own thought that was 'akin to the emotion later

¹ Dorothy Richardson, 'Data for a Spanish Publisher', in Dorothy Richardson, *Journey to Paradise* (London: Virago, 1989), p.132.

² *Ibid.*

accompanying my acquisition of a latch-key'.³ A few years later, living in Bloomsbury and working as a dental nurse, she set herself to the task of 'making contact [...] through the medium of books and lectures, with the worlds of Science and Philosophy', soon finding herself frustrated by '[t]he clear rather dictatorial voice' of the former, 'still far from confessing its inability to plumb, unaided, the nature of reality', yet quickly absorbed by the latter, the ideas of the philosophers seeming 'more deeply exciting than the novelists'.⁴

In Richardson's multi-volume novel *Pilgrimage*, the autobiographical protagonist Miriam Henderson similarly remembers the eagerness of her young logic teacher, Miss Donne, 'her skimpy skirt powdered with chalk, explaining a syllogism from the blackboard' and then 'turning quietly to them, her face all aglow, her chalky hands gently pressed together, "Do you ... see? ... Does anyone ... see?"' (I 79). Miriam's education, like that of Richardson herself, is terminated prematurely as a result of her father's bankruptcy, but she continues to be fascinated by philosophical argument and metaphysical ideas, 'the strange nameless thread in the books that were not novels' that she reads in the brief hours of leisure from her job as a dental nurse in London. In this paper I examine Richardson's particularly overt engagement with philosophical theories and ideas in *Deadlock*, the sixth volume of *Pilgrimage*. Metaphysical questions about the nature of being and of reality pervade *Pilgrimage* as a whole, in itself a revolutionary experiment in the representation of Miriam's single consciousness and her perception of and relation to existence and the world around her. It is in *Deadlock*, however, that Richardson first shows philosophical ideas and inquiry taking persistent and organised shape in Miriam's maturing thought, as she recalls her early excitement at reading Stanley Jevons' *Elementary Lessons in Logic* at school, discusses the ideas of Herbert Spencer, Ralph Waldo Emerson, Benedict de Spinoza and Friedrich Nietzsche with her fellow lodger Michael Shatov, attends a course of introductory lectures by the British Idealist philosopher John Ellis McTaggart, and muses upon the nature of existence, knowledge and

³ Ibid, p.136.

⁴ Ibid, p.138.

perception.

Deadlock is set at a turning point in British philosophy, the *annus mirabilis*, as Leonard Woolf would subsequently describe it, of 1903, in which the publication of G. E. Moore's 'The Refutation of Idealism' and Bertrand Russell's *Principles of Mathematics* announced the reaction of an emerging 'New Realism', against the absolute Idealism hitherto dominant in late nineteenth-century philosophy.⁵ For many Victorian intellectuals, scientific rationalism and a loss of religious faith did not extinguish a desire for belief in a spiritual reality. The ascendancy of Idealism in England in the late nineteenth century responded to a turn against the seeming aridity of a scientific empiricism; asserting a quasi-mystical creed to shore up the Victorian crisis in the Anglican Church, a revisionary morality that would counter the principle of self-interest as the foundation of utilitarian ethics, and a recognition of consciousness and agency in a seemingly deterministic evolutionary universe. Idealism stood in opposition to, and indeed deadlock with, that other axiom of nineteenth-century thought, materialism. Key principles of metaphysical Idealism, such as belief in an ultimate reality lying beyond that of material appearance, the intuitive capacity of the subjective mind, and the monistic concept of an ideal union of all things in an absolute truth, offered a welcome revival of the possibility of spiritual faith

⁵ In his *Notes on Pilgrimage*, George Thomson surmises, based on substantial textual and calendar evidence, that the events in *Deadlock* take place between October 1900 and July or August 1901. Yet when Miriam attends the first McTaggart lecture, her neighbour in the audience recommends that she read Richard Haldane's *The Pathway to Reality*, not published until 1904 (III 163). In all other respects, however, Thomson's dating seems accurate. In corroboration, I would add that, as discussed later in this essay, Richardson bases the lectures on those delivered at the Passmore Settlement by the London School of Ethics and Social Philosophy, which was dissolved in 1900. The dating of *Deadlock* is significant, the discrepancy caused by the reference to Haldane's book offering an instance of the slippage between the events of Richardson's own life and those of her retrospective representation of that life – not always faithfully autobiographical – in the figure of Miriam Henderson. Here, for example, Miriam's otherwise constantly present-time stream of consciousness is overlapped by Richardson's own subsequent reading as it extended beyond the time-frame covered in *Deadlock*. See George Thomson, *Notes on Pilgrimage: Dorothy Richardson Annotated* (Greensboro, NC.: ELT Press, 1999).

following both a scientific positivism that seemed to reduce existence to physical or chemical systems, and the gloomy implications of Darwinian evolutionism.

Although Moore and Russell are not directly referenced in *Pilgrimage*, their critique of the Idealist tradition was central to the crisis in philosophy at the beginning of the twentieth century, as Richardson, certainly by the time she was writing *Deadlock*, would have been well aware. Part of the strength of the Idealist position lay in the difficulty of disproving metaphysical systems. Moore's and Russell's attacks, however, concentrated upon the epistemological, rather than ontological, claims of traditional Idealist doctrine; specifically Berkeley's proposition *esse est percipi* ('to be is to be perceived'), or that what we understand as an object is inseparable from our sentient experience of it through sensation or thought. In his 1903 essay, Moore set out to refute Idealism by invalidating this claim. 'Even if I prove my point, I shall have proved nothing about the Universe in general', he declares at the outset, noting that '[u]pon the important question whether Reality is or is not spiritual my argument will not have the remotest bearing'.⁶ Yet from the New Realist perspective, neither should nor need he do so. For a start, the question of the spiritual nature of Reality, interesting as it might be, was not, in Moore's and Russell's eyes, a legitimate object of philosophical study. Moreover, all that was required to refute the Idealist position, Moore maintained, was simply to demonstrate that the theory 'to be is to be perceived' - which he notes is at least a necessary, even if not sufficient, condition for the Idealist argument - doesn't hold up to logical analysis. To summarise briefly, Moore's argument is that in the proposition *esse est percipi*, which itself presupposes a distinction between the thing that exists (*esse*) and experience (*percipi*), Idealism collapses what it understands by the object and the sensation of the object. For 'to deny that yellow can ever *be* apart from the sensation of yellow', Moore reasons, 'is merely to deny that yellow can ever be other than it is; since yellow and the sensation of yellow are absolutely identical, to assert that yellow is necessarily an object of experience is to assert that yellow is necessarily yellow

⁶ G. E. Moore, 'The Refutation of Idealism', *Mind*, New Series, 12: 48 (Oct., 1903), 433-453, p.435.

- a purely identical proposition, and therefore proved by the law of contradiction alone'.⁷ What is more, he continues, 'the proposition also implies that experience is, after all, something distinct from yellow - else there would be no reason for insisting that yellow is a sensation'. The result is that the proposition is self-contradictory; 'that the argument thus both affirms and denies that yellow and sensation of yellow are distinct', Moore concludes, 'is what sufficiently refutes it'.⁸

Despite the cataclysmic power that has been attributed to Moore's 'refutation', British Idealism largely retained its philosophical dominance within the first two decades of the twentieth century - at least outside the newly solid walls of Cambridge. Russell, indeed, was still assuming the tone of something of a manifesto for the New Realist and analytic approach in his lecture 'On Scientific Method in Philosophy' in 1914. Describing the history of philosophical investigation as having developed from two impulses, 'often antagonistic, and leading to very divergent systems', the first derived from ethics or religion, and the second from science, he argues that the former has been 'on the whole a hindrance to the progress of philosophy, and ought now to be consciously thrust aside by those who wish to discover philosophical truth'.⁹ Ethical or religious motivations, he observes, are too prejudiced and too personal to guarantee infallibility. It is a common but mistaken assumption, Russell states, that the purpose of philosophy should be 'to tell us something about the nature of the universe as a whole, and to give grounds for either optimism or pessimism'.¹⁰ Instead he advocates a scientific philosophy from which such metaphysical themes as 'the notion of the universe and the notion of good and evil are extruded'.¹¹ Even the scientific impulse, he warns however, could impede philosophical truth if it inspired attempts to elaborate systematic explanations of the universe inferred from the latest scientific fact. The 'scientific'

⁷ Ibid, p.442.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Bertrand Russell, 'On Scientific Method in Philosophy', in *The Collected Papers of Bertrand Russell* (London: Routledge, 1986), 57-73, p.57.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Ibid, p.64.

philosopher who draws upon the specific findings of science and infers *a priori* laws from them, he cautions, citing Herbert Spencer and his elevation of the natural principles of evolution and the indestructibility of matter as the foundation of a universal philosophy, 'is tempted to give an air of absoluteness and necessity to empirical generalizations, of which only the approximate truth in the regions hitherto investigated can be guaranteed by the unaided methods of science'.¹² Scientific philosophy, he asserts, should draw not upon the *results* of scientific inquiry but upon its *methods*. It should eschew religious or ethical impetus for dispassionate and impersonal analysis, grand metaphysical system-making for mathematical logic, and questions of existence for questions of knowledge. The result is that the very nature of that field, of what constitutes philosophical concerns, will necessarily shift. The new philosophy would aim 'only at understanding the world and not directly at any other improvement of human life'.¹³ 'The adoption of scientific method,' Russell explains, 'compels us to abandon the hope of solving many of the more ambitious and humanly interesting problems of traditional philosophy'.¹⁴

It was amidst this period of transition in both the matter and method of British philosophical inquiry that an aesthetic New Realism was similarly being forged. Where the modern philosophy of Moore and Russell was turning against the Idealist metaphysics that had dominated nineteenth century philosophical thought, however, modern literature was less quick to do so. As Michael Bell suggests, commenting on the persistence of Bradleyan themes and tropes in the poetry of T. S. Eliot, 'the important thinking of the age was where it attempted to meet, rather than ignore, the earlier tradition'.¹⁵ This thinking, however, remains surprisingly underexamined in literary studies, with little critical attention paid to the lines of engagement between modernist aesthetics and the paradigm shift in Anglo-American philosophy at the turn of the

¹² Ibid, p.61.

¹³ Ibid, p.64.

¹⁴ Ibid, p.73.

¹⁵ Michael Bell, 'The Metaphysics of Modernism', Michael Levenson, *The Cambridge Companion to Modernism* (1999), 9-32, p.19.

century.¹⁶ The direction of philosophical method as championed by Moore and Russell, influenced by scientific models of thought and formulated in mathematical and logical terms, has perhaps seemed divorced from aesthetic concerns. Yet, in fact, the convergence of the worlds of British philosophy and the arts was pronounced. This, of course, was largely mediated through the social platform linking Cambridge and Bloomsbury, resulting, as Ann Banfield has meticulously and convincingly detailed, in a period of intense mutual interest and intellectual fertility. Male Bloomsbury was almost entirely Cambridge-educated, with Roger Fry, E. M. Forster, John Maynard Keynes, Desmond McCarthy, Lytton Strachey and Leonard Woolf all members of the Cambridge Apostles, the secret student society to which the philosophers G. E. Moore, Bertrand Russell, Alfred North Whitehead and Goldsworthy Lowes Dickinson also belonged. With the shift from college rooms to London drawing rooms, the mood and values of Cambridge extended to the ideology of Bloomsbury modernism. Literature might mildly mock the form and terminology of philosophical debate, but it was similarly preoccupied with articulating and probing the Idealist/New Realist deadlock over the relationship of, as Andrew Ramsay puts in Virginia Woolf's *To the Lighthouse*, 'subject and object and the nature of reality'. 'Think of a kitchen table [...] when you're not there', he says to the artist Lily Briscoe, explaining his father's studies in philosophy.¹⁷ The opening of E. M. Forster's *The Longest Journey* (1907) dramatises the same debate, as a group of Cambridge students argue about whether objects 'exist only when there is some one to look at them? Or have they a real existence of their own?'.¹⁸ Yet for Andrew Ramsay, and Forster's Stewart Ansell

¹⁶ For the few exceptions, see S. P. Rosenbaum, *English Literature and British Philosophy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1971); Jessica R. Feldman, *Victorian Modernism: Pragmatism and the Varieties of Aesthetic Experience* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002); Jean-Michel Rabaté, 'Philosophy', in David Bradshaw and Kevin J. H. Dettmar (eds.), *A Companion to Modernist Literature and Culture* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2006), 9-18; and Ann Banfield, *The Phantom Table: Woolf, Fry, Russell and the Epistemology of Modernism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007).

¹⁷ Virginia Woolf, *To the Lighthouse* (1927; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), p.33.

¹⁸ E. M. Forster, *The Longest Journey* (1907; London: Penguin 2006), p.1.

and Rickie Elliott, the problem is an epistemological one, about the nature and scope of our knowledge of objects or the external world.

Richardson's representation of Miriam's subjective consciousness and perception of the world around her in *Pilgrimage* indicates a similar, if less ironic, awareness of the question of the nature of reality being articulated by Bloomsbury and within contemporary philosophical discourse. Where Richardson differs from Woolf and Forster, is that in *Pilgrimage* the problem of the relation of subject and object, or the nature of reality, is presented as a primarily ontological rather than epistemological project. For Miriam Henderson, the Tansley Street boarding-house where she lives, and objects within it such as her table and window, seem to possess *identity*. Musing on the walls of her room in chapter three of *Deadlock*, she not only assumes that they persist when she is not there to look at them, but indeed they seem to her to possess their own mysterious life, observing her and journeying with her through her London life: in the early years as 'the thrilled companions of her freedom', then scornful and mocking of her everyday life, 'waiting indifferent, serene with the years they knew before she came, for those that would follow her meaningless impermanence' (III 86), and at this point 'transparent' (87), their challenge forced into abeyance by her growing companionship with new fellow-lodger Michael Shatov.

Richardson's aim when conceiving *Pilgrimage*, she declared in her retrospective preface to the novel in 1938, was to fashion a form of narrative that would represent 'contemplated reality having for the first time [...] its own say' (I 10). What she *means* by 'contemplated reality' in this context, and the journey towards it that she represents Miriam undertaking, is the broader theme of this essay. The first two sections set out to establish the philosophical influences and allusions that Richardson draws upon for the material of *Deadlock*. Given the nature of Richardson's narrative, which is based entirely within Miriam's interior monologue, these may seem oblique on an initial reading, but it is nevertheless possible to trace out in some detail Miriam's knowledge of specific systems and explanations of reality. I

concentrate particularly on those with which she has most extended engagement; Spencer's social Darwinism, Emerson's transcendentalist individualism, and McTaggart's mystical Idealism. While recreating in Miriam her own early fascination with metaphysical enquiry in the early 1900s, however, Richardson, writing two decades later, would have been retrospectively aware of the empiricist stance of the emerging 'analytic tradition', and its assault on the tenets of Idealist thought, as well as familiar with the appeal being mounted by figures such as Haldane and fellow-novelist May Sinclair, whose *A Defence of Idealism* had appeared in 1917, shortly before her collective review of the first three books of *Pilgrimage* in *The Egoist* in April of the following year.¹⁹ The historical fold in Richardson's perspective results in *Deadlock* in the drawing together of these different moments; the representation of Miriam's exploration of the nature of self and reality through her exploration of Idealist philosophies in the early 1900s, with the narration of that process in the 1920s, a moment when such metaphysical speculation had been supplanted as the focus of contemporary debate by the New Realism's emphasis on logical analysis and claim to scientific method. In the third section I consider some of the implications of this overlapping of philosophical paradigms, and propose that Miriam's concerted effort to engage with philosophical thought in *Deadlock* might be seen to set the groundwork for Richardson's philosophical and formal project in the writing of *Pilgrimage* as a whole.

'Emerson; and the comet'

Deadlock takes place several years after the close of the previous *Pilgrimage* volume, *Interim* (1919). Miriam is still working for Mr Hancock's dental surgery, and living at the Tansley Street boarding-house that has been her home since her excited arrival in London in the fourth volume, *The Tunnel* (also 1919), but during the intervening period her initial youthful enthusiasm at the personal and economic freedom of her independent life has faded into a

¹⁹ May Sinclair, *A Defence of Idealism* (London: Macmillan & Co., 1917). Sinclair's follow-up, *The New Idealism*, was published by Macmillan in 1922.

lonely contemplation of the tedium and fatigue of her daily existence. With the arrival of a new boarder, however, the Russian student émigré Michael Shatov, her *Bildungsroman* moves into a new phase of intellectual stimulation and intimacy. The evening before the novel opens, she has been introduced to Shatov by her landlady, who has promised that Miriam would offer him English tuition. Despite her nervousness she accedes, aware of Mrs Bailey's fear of losing a wealthy client, and is surprised at the ease of their ensuing conversation. At her mention of the French metaphysician and philosopher of science Ernest Renan, Shatov announces eagerly that he has 'always from the first been interested in philosophy' (III 18), prompting a sudden moment of connection between the two that Miriam remembers with a glow of exhilaration. His scholarly knowledge thrills her with the prospect of fellowship in 'wide thought-inviting illumination' (III 27), but also threatens to reveal what she anxiously regards as her own relative ignorance of the philosophical ideas she has taken such private pleasure in reading. She is no longer in the privileged position of the student, free to study, and yet, she reflects, 'if, without knowing it, one had been for so long interested in a subject, surely it gave a sort of right?' (III 18). Encouraged by the warmth of his enthusiasm, and the relative confidence of her own authority in acting as his English tutor, she determines, '[n]o matter what failure lay ahead, [...] to find out all he knew about philosophy' (III 18).

Miriam thus arrives home on the first page of *Deadlock* in a flurry of excited thoughts, which combine her reflections on the previous evening with her anticipation at the possibility of witnessing a comet due to appear in the night sky. As a celestial phenomenon that is measurable by mathematical science, and yet continues to inspire cosmological awe, the comet sets the ground for the metaphysical inquiry in this volume. Richardson herself had reviewed H. G. Wells' novel *In the Days of the Comet* in 1906, writing that after a career focused on the external aspects of life, this new novel seemed to capture something more fundamental, 'that sense of a vast something behind the delicate fabric of what is articulated – a portentous silent reality', that she thought promised 'an emotional deepening, a growth of insight and

sympathy' on Wells' part.²⁰ 'For all my earthly concentration of mind,' the unnamed narrator of the novel declares as he observes the approaching, ever-growing comet, 'I could but stare at it for a moment with a vague anticipation that, after all, in some way so strange and glorious an object must have significance, could not possibly be a matter of absolute indifference to the scheme and values of my life'.²¹ Miriam similarly attributes a degree of agency or at least cognition to the 'intelligent sky'. Opening her window to look at the stars, she feels a sense of connection with the many other people also watching for the comet, briefly drawn together in this moment, 'not as separate disturbing personalities, but as sky watchers' (III 16), and she challenges what she describes as the 'dreary-weary' sentiment that the stars merely emphasise man's irrelevance within the large-scale pattern of an evolutionary universe:

If the stars are sublime, why should the earth be therefore petty? It is part of a sublime system. If the earth is to be called petty, then the stars must be called petty too. They may not even be inhabited. Perhaps they mean the movement of the vast system going on for ever, while men die. The indestructibility of matter. But if matter is indestructible, it is not what the people who use the phrase mean by matter. If matter is not conscious, man is more than matter. If a small, no matter how small, conscious thing is called petty in comparison with big, no matter how big, unconscious things, everything is made a question of size, which is absurd. But all these people think that consciousness dies.... (III 16)

Miriam alludes directly in this passage to Herbert Spencer's *First Principles* (1862), which she subsequently tells Shatov her father thought 'the greatest book that was ever written' (III 111). Split into two parts, the first outlines Spencer's concept of the 'Unknowable', and his argument that ultimate reality, while it may exist, is essentially inconceivable, while the second argues for a

²⁰ Dorothy Richardson, 'From "In the Crank's Library": *In the Days of the Comet*', in Bonnie Kime Scott, *The Gender of Modernism* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990), 399-400, p.400.

²¹ H. G. Wells, *In the Days of the Comet* (1906; Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2001), p.59.

theory of universal laws to be deduced from the mutual findings of the empirical sciences, and expounds Spencer's systematic explanation of the universe based on Lamarckian evolutionary principles. The indestructibility of matter is the focus of chapter four in part two, where Spencer notes that it has become one of the axioms of modern science, '[t]he chemist, the physicist, and the physiologist, not only one and all take this for granted, but would severally profess themselves unable to realize any supposition to the contrary'.²² It is his reference, in this chapter, to a comet, 'all at once discovered in the heavens,' as an example of a phenomenon that has been scientifically proven 'not to be a newly-created body, but a body that was until lately beyond the range of vision', that may have triggered Miriam's mental association.

By the last decades of the nineteenth century Spencer's writings had gained a vast popular readership, his theories saturating the cultural consciousness of the period. As frequent references to the Spencer/Darwin/Huxley triumvirate across the first half of *Pilgrimage* demonstrate, evolutionary science unmistakably colours but also profoundly troubles Miriam's metaphysical questioning of human ontology. Deeply critical of the androcentrism of evolutionary accounts of physical and mental development, here she also challenges the hierarchy of indestructible matter over human finitude implicit in Spencer's biological determinism. Attempts to counter the problem of Cartesian dualism (the relationship of mind and body, or immaterial and material substance), typically move towards one of two opposing standpoints; Idealism on the one hand, according to which the ultimate nature of reality consists in thought (or 'ideas'), and what man understands as matter is defined as only a perception of the mind, or materialism on the other, for which the only reality that can be proven to exist consists of matter, and anything mental is regarded as ultimately depending on matter. Spencer's position, acknowledging the indestructibility of matter as axiomatic, while denying that the existence of consciousness could be regarded as similarly conclusive, in many eyes aligned him with the latter. In *First Principles* he substituted the hitherto common acceptance of

²² Herbert Spencer, *First Principles*, 2nd ed. (London: Williams and Norgate, 1867). Accessed from <http://oll.libertyfund.org/title/1390>

Descartes' *cogito ergo sum* ('I think, therefore I am') as 'the most incontrovertible of truths', with the physical law of the indestructibility of matter (or force) as the foundation of a 'synthetic' philosophy derived from unified scientific evidence. Where for Descartes, the *cogito* is an act of ultimate, intuitive apprehension, for Spencer, conversely, it fails the standards of empirical and quantifiable scientific method. "To say—"I am as sure of it as I am sure that I exist," is, in common speech, the most emphatic expression of certainty', he acknowledges, '[a]nd this fact of personal existence, testified to by the universal consciousness of men, has been made the basis of sundry philosophies; whence may be drawn the inference, that it is held by thinkers, as well as by the vulgar, to be beyond all facts unquestionable'. However, Spencer contends, it is a belief 'admitting of no justification by reason'. 'The mental act in which self is known,' he explains, 'implies, like every other mental act, a perceiving subject and a perceived object'. If these are one and the same then the basic premise for having knowledge collapses. Knowledge of the self is thus 'forbidden by the very nature of thought', and along with all other areas of ontological enquiry to be relegated to the realm of 'The Unknowable'.

Only scientifically observable phenomena can be justifiably claimed to be known, Spencer argued. The analysis of this empirical data or knowledge, and systematic identification of basic laws that can be deduced from it, is the aim of his 'synthetic' philosophy. 'The utmost possibility for us, is an interpretation of the process of things as it presents itself to our limited consciousness', Spencer states, 'but how this process is related to the actual process we are unable to conceive, much less to know'. Thus 'the deepest truths we can reach', he asserts, 'are simply statements of the widest uniformities in our experience of the relations of Matter, Motion, and Force'. The achievement of Science has been to identify these relations 'as differently-conditioned manifestations of this one kind of effect, under differently-conditioned modes of this one kind of uniformity'. Yet, as Spencer himself readily admits in the conclusion to *First Principles*, in so doing Science 'has done nothing more than systematize our experience; and has in no degree extended the

limits of our experience'. His rejection of absolute reality as 'rationally, as well as empirically' unknowable, and his immediate turn to the articulation of what is real in positivistic terms, was certainly met with little sympathy on the part of Richardson, frustrated as she was with science's refusal to admit its 'inability to plumb, unaided, the nature of reality'. It is a criticism that echoes Russell's attack on Spencer's attempt to draw absolute principles from empirical generalisations, although for both Richardson and Miriam it is not the problem of the approximate truth of scientific knowledge, but its failure to engage in metaphysical questions, and seek truths beyond empirical phenomena, that confirms its impotency in understanding the nature of reality. Struggling to reclaim any spiritual or moral meaning from the paradigms of physical law, she dryly comments of her father's enthusiasm for *First Principles*, 'I have argued and argued but he says he is too old to change his cosmos. It makes me simply ill to think of him living in a cosmos made by Herbert Spencer' (III 111).

Of all the philosophers that Miriam reads, it is the American transcendentalist Ralph Waldo Emerson who holds perhaps the most pervasive and lasting influence over her thought throughout *Pilgrimage*. In Emerson's writings Miriam finds a vision of existence in which consciousness is not made inferior to matter, and a statement of the self as a unique, centred consciousness that approximates her own sense of a 'strange mysterious life, far away below all interference, and always the same' (III 17). 'I always feel, all the time, all the day', she tells Shatov in *Deadlock*, 'that if people would only read Emerson they would understand, and not be like they are, and that the only way to make them understand what one means would be reading pieces of Emerson' (III 41-2). The 'precious book' with green covers that she lends him, seeking his scholarly corroboration of the 'lonely overwhelming impression' that Emerson's writings have made upon her, is probably the World Classics edition of *Essays*, published in green cloth by Grant Richards in 1901. 'He understands everything', she declares, 'since I have had that book, I have not wanted to read anything else'. Talking with Hypo Wilson in *Dimple Hill*, set some five to six years after the events of *Deadlock*, she repeats: 'Emerson saw everything. The outside, as well as the inside things you don't believe in' (IV

417).

Miriam's familiarity with Emerson's writings is clearly manifest in the detail of her conversations with both Michael Shatov and Hypo Wilson, as well as the free assimilation of his theories and imagery into her consciousness. Metaphors of sight such as she uses here, and the distinction between the sensory perceptions of the outer eye, and the intuitive insight of the mind, pervade Emerson's essays. In direct contrast to Spencer's relegation of ontological inquiry to the category of the unknowable, Emerson claimed in his first book *Nature* (1836) that man could have 'no questions to ask which are unanswerable', and 'must trust the perfection of the creation so far, as to believe that whatever curiosity the order of things has awakened in our minds, the order of things can satisfy'. According to Emerson, empirical science is only able to offer 'half-sight' of existence, because it assumes that man can study the world 'with his understanding alone'. Knowledge of true reality is 'not to be learned by any addition or subtraction or other comparison of known quantities', he holds, because the kind of questions such knowledge would require 'are precisely those which the physiologist and the naturalist omit to state', questions that aim 'to show *the relation* of the forms of flowers, shells, animals, architecture, to the mind, and build science upon ideas' (my italics).²³

Unlike in Spencer's philosophy, in which matter and mind are split off from each other, Emerson's own 'first philosophy', influenced by the Idealism of Kant and Coleridge, and his intellectual empathy with the ideas of Quakerism, sets out a theory of the relationship, or *correspondence*, between matter and consciousness, in which the laws of science are reconciled with the insights of the imagination. Indeed he defines transcendentalism not as a philosophical *system*, or set of principles to be followed, but rather as 'an angle of vision', in the light of which the correspondence of the mind and outward world could be glimpsed. The order of all thought, he summarised in 'The Transcendentalist' (1842), is in

²³ Ralph Waldo Emerson, *The Collected Works of Ralph Waldo Emerson: Vol. 1, Nature, Addresses, and Lectures* (1849; Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press, 1971), p.40.

essence either materialist, insisting upon the external world and the data of the senses, or Idealist, privileging consciousness and denying that sensory experience can be confirmed as anything other than representation or appearance. The only way beyond the empirical knowledge provided by sensory Understanding is through the act of intuitive Reason. Here Emerson follows the Kantian argument that conscious experience is not limited to the sensory registering of empirical objects, and rather that there are certain aspects of knowledge that the mind can directly perceive, unmediated by the senses. Intuition/Reason, 'which we call Spontaneity or Instinct', he states in the essay 'Self-Reliance', is 'at once the essence of genius, the essence of virtue, and the essence of life', through which man is able to glimpse the correspondence between his own unique self and the wider universe:

In that deep force, the last fact behind which analysis cannot go, all things find their common origin. For the sense of being which in calm hours rises, we know not how, in the soul, is not diverse from things, from space, from light, from time, from man, but one with them and proceeds obviously from the same source whence their life and being also proceed.²⁴

The 'moment of being' that Emerson evokes in this passage, an intuitive sense of an ultimate and original inner self at one with rather than separate from conscious experience, bears comparison with Miriam's impressions on seeing her boarding-house room when she first arrives at Tansley Street at the start of *The Tunnel*. The Idealist 'does not deny the sensuous fact', Emerson writes in 'The Transcendentalist', but 'he will not see that alone', and looking at a table, a chair or the walls of his room will recognise them not as individual objects distinct from himself, but rather as the correlates of his consciousness, their existence 'flowing perpetually outward from an invisible, unsounded centre in himself'.²⁵ This account of the sensory *and* spiritual oneness of

²⁴ Ralph Waldo Emerson, 'Self-Reliance', in *The Collected Works of Ralph Waldo Emerson: Vol. 2, Essays: First Series* (1841; Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press, 1979), p.37.

²⁵ Ralph Waldo Emerson, 'The Transcendentalist', in *The Collected Works of Ralph Waldo Emerson: Vol. 1, Nature, Addresses, and Lectures* (1849; Cambridge, Mass.:

consciousness and its objects is reflected in Miriam's sudden sense of self-illumination as she surveys her lodgings:

She was surprised now at her familiarity with the details of the room ... that idea of visiting places in dreams. It was something more than that ... all the real part of you coming true. You know in advance when you are really following your life. These things are familiar because reality is here. Coming events cast *light*. It is like dropping everything and walking backwards to something you know is there. (II 13)

The apparent familiarity of the room is something more than the mental trick of *déjà vu*, and the walls, the window lattice, the table and bed instead seem to Miriam to recognise and confirm her sense of her 'real' self, 'the untouched tireless self of her seventeenth year and all the earlier time' (16). Her sensory experience of the room expands and contracts in accordance with the fluctuations of her mood, her exhaustion at the end of the day, and her increasing loneliness. By *Deadlock* it has become 'often a cell of torturing mocking memories and apprehensions', yet can still come alive, 'now and again under some chance spell of the weather, or some book which made her feel that any life in London would be endurable for ever that secured her room with its evening solitude, now and again the sense of strange, fresh, invisibly founded beginnings' (III 31).

For all the sanguinity of Emerson's transcendental philosophy, he was yet unable to overcome the fundamental split between this ultimate and persisting self, glimpsed in moments of reflective transcendental tranquillity, and an external self, cast and recast by the activities of daily life. The faculty of understanding and that of intuition, he admits, are incompatible: 'one prevails now, all buzz and din; and the other prevails then, all infinitude and paradise; and, with the progress of life, the two discover no greater disposition to reconcile themselves'.²⁶ Acutely aware of the complexities of the conceptual models of self, consciousness and reality that she engages with, Miriam is alive to the element of self-

Belknap Press, 1971), p.203.

²⁶ Ibid, p.213.

doubt in Emerson's writings, acknowledging to Michael in *Deadlock* the 'chills and contradictions' of his thought. Nevertheless, he remains a significant influence on her thought throughout *Pilgrimage*, and she listens with 'incredulity and consternation' when her friend Amabel, one-time committed suffragette and now Shatov's wife, announces on its final page that they have 'done with Emerson' and 'both find him trite' (IV 658). Richardson herself, moreover, wrote as late as 1950 that 'Emerson was my earliest close friend & still remains dear'.²⁷

'The systematic study of the ultimate nature of Reality'

It is Miriam's imaginative grasp of a sense of reality that is not necessarily *beyond* sensory experience, but certainly not to her mind satisfactorily recorded or expressed by scientific or religious hypotheses about the nature of identity and the universe, that leads, in chapter seven of *Deadlock*, to her attendance at a series of introductory adult education lectures on metaphysics given by John Ellis McTaggart. Cambridge Apostle and lecturer at Trinity College, McTaggart was a significant influence on the young Moore and Bertrand Russell before their defection from Idealism in the 1900s. From Richardson's almost direct transcription of his published syllabus notes, it is clear that the lectures Miriam hears are based on his general 'Introduction to Philosophy' course, delivered to non-philosophy students at Cambridge, but also as an university settlement extension course at the London School of Ethics and Social Philosophy. Headed by Bernard Bosanquet, and drawing its staff from amongst the leading philosophers of the day, including not only McTaggart but also Leslie Stephen, T. H. Green, and the young G. E. Moore, the Society operated from 1897 to 1900, delivering the majority of its courses at the Passmore Edwards Settlement (now Mary Ward House) in Tavistock Place, close to the location of Miriam's Tansley Street boarding-house.²⁸ While established and, importantly, funded, to bring an understanding of philosophy to the London poor,

²⁷ Letter to Ferner Nuhn, in Gloria Glikin Fromm (ed.), *Windows on Modernism: Selected Letters of Dorothy Richardson* (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 1995), p.647.

however, the Society quickly found itself in the predicament that its distinguished speakers attracted an audience of a rather different social status to that of the typical Bloomsbury working man. Despite, as Bosanquet insisted in his first Society report, ‘a certain nucleus of people who attend regularly, drawn chiefly from the neighbourhood’, the vast majority were middle-class professionals from across London, and even Cambridge students.

Given this accumulative evidence, it is all but certain that Richardson was drawing upon the London School for the philosophy lectures in *Deadlock*. As Miriam enters the ‘broad low stone archway’ above the ‘shallow flight of grey stone steps’ (III 154), she is handed a syllabus headed ‘The Furthermore Settlement’, announcing its mission ‘to bring culture amongst the London poor’, only to be surprised on entering the hall by the ‘effect of massed intellectuality’ of the audience. ‘These people were certainly not the poor of the neighbourhood’, she observes, ‘They were a picked gathering; like the Royal Institution; but more glowing’ (III 156). Richardson’s portrait of the tall, eccentric figure of McTaggart is unmistakable, and only thinly disguised by the fictitious name ‘McHibbert’ in the original Duckworth edition, a tactic that she in any case dropped when revising the text for the collected edition with Dent in 1938. Moreover, she repeats from McTaggart’s course notes almost entirely word for word. Compare, for example, McTaggart’s statement in his opening lecture that, ‘Metaphysic and Science advance in quite different ways. Science, by small and frequent additions to a body of generally admitted truths. Metaphysic, by the substitution of one complete system for another’ with Richardson’s representation in *Deadlock*:

‘The progress of philosophy,’ went the words, in letters of gold across the dark void, ‘is by a series of systems; that of science by the constant addition of small facts to accumulated knowledge.’ In the slight pause, Miriam held back from the thoughts flying out in all directions round the glowing words. They would come again, if she could memorize the words from

²⁸ Bernard Bosanquet, ‘First Annual Report, The London School of Ethics and Social Philosophy, 1897-1898’. The Moore Papers, Cambridge University Library.

which they were born, coolly, registering the shape and length of the phrases and the leading terms. Before the voice began again she had read and re-read many times; driving back an exciting intruder trying, from the depths of her mind to engage her on the subject of the time-expanding swiftness of thought. (III 157)²⁹

Similarly, at the second lecture, to which Miriam is accompanied by Michael Shatov, the notes that she takes – ‘Materialism has the recommendation of being a monism, and therefore a more perfect explanation of the universe than a dualism can be’ (III 171) - are a straight transcription of McTaggart’s summary of the materialist position in section four of ‘Introduction to the Study of Philosophy’.³⁰ It is unusual for Richardson not to fictionalize the people and events that she draws from in her quasi-autobiographical *Bildungsroman*, and the scenic set-pieces of the two lectures are significant for the light they shed, not only on her representation of her own youthful study of philosophical issues, but also the aesthetic manipulations of her later writing practice in overlapping the memory of past events and thought with the awareness of her subsequent perspective.

McTaggart was renowned for his lucid manner of expression, his clarity of reasoning and his meticulous logic, all aspects of his influence that Moore and Russell retained. His introductory lectures were extremely popular. They were intended, he wrote in the syllabus preface, ‘for those students who, though not engaged in the systematic study of Philosophy, may desire to learn something of the objects, methods, and present problems of Metaphysic’.³¹ The course provided a concise summary of the respective positions of scepticism, dualism, materialism and Idealism on the question of the relationship of matter and mind, the existence and purpose of the universe, and the problem of good and evil. Metaphysic, he explained in the opening lecture, is

²⁹ J. McT. Ellis McTaggart, ‘Introduction to the Study of Philosophy’, in *Philosophical Studies*, ed. S. V. Keeling (1934; Bristol: Thoemmes Press, 1996), 183-209, p.186.

³⁰ *Ibid*, p.191.

³¹ Quoted in editorial note, McTaggart, *Philosophical Studies*, p.183.

‘the systematic study of the ultimate nature of Reality’; to be distinguished from both Science on the one hand, which, while systematic in method, concerns itself with the *surface* of reality rather than its essence, making no attempt to deal with such subjects as God, immortality, or the problem of good and evil, and from Theology on the other, which does not deny the problems of metaphysics, but answers them in a way that is unsystematic, and that the reasoning mind therefore cannot accept. Idealist metaphysics offered a means of reconciling reason and spiritual life, McTaggart argued, and was of increasing importance in an age when more and more people were finding themselves unable to hold religious beliefs that they could not systematically justify. Indeed, the ‘utility of Metaphysic’, he states, ‘is to be found [...] in the comfort it can give’ in dealing with questions about the relationship of the self and environment, the harmony or disharmony of the universe, and the existence of evil.³² McTaggart’s own metaphysical arguments pursued exactly this purpose. Epistemologically, he noted, he was a realist, in that he agreed in the definition of knowledge as true belief, and the argument that a belief is true only when it corresponds to fact. The fundamental objects of philosophy, however, he argued – the nature of Reality and Existence – cannot be explored by recourse to epistemology. What he described as his ‘ontological’ Idealism posited a timeless, non-material reality beyond the superficial surface appearance of existence that he argued is perceived in error by the empirical senses. It was only through what he fervently believed to be the transcendental experience of love between selves that a vision of this true reality was to be achieved.

McTaggart’s insistence on the spiritual nature of reality, his argument that the self is real because spiritual and eternal, and his belief in the unity of eternal selves within a transcendent absolute reality, continue many of the principles that Miriam had found in Emerson’s writings, asserting a faith in the quasi-mystical capacity of the individual mind while avoiding the logical contradictions of the latter’s thought. Of course she also eagerly embraces his attack that science assumes its fundamental premises, ‘without inquiry’

³² Ibid, p.184.

(III 184).³³ “‘I’m so awfully relieved to find that science is only half true’, she murmurs to the woman next to her in the audience. ‘But I *can’t* see why he says that metaphysic is no practical use’, she continues, ‘It would make all the difference every moment, to know for certain that mind is more real than matter’ (III 162). McTaggart’s point, referred to by Miriam here, is that the concepts of metaphysic do not approximate the same kind of practical use as those of science, but he does claim that metaphysic has use for the support it can provide, which he regards as ‘more directly practical’, in contemplating the existence of evil or misery in an advancing society. For Miriam this promise certainly seems true, with McTaggart’s Idealism seeming to provide a response to the evolutionary laws and theories of natural selection and biogenetics that Miriam had struggled with in the earlier part of the novel, as she rushes to explain to her friends Mag and Jan once the lecture is over. ‘It *must* be important to Jan that what Hegel meant was only just beginning to be understood’, she thinks: ‘[i]f Jan’s acceptance of Haeckel made her sad, here was what she wanted’.³⁴ What she possibly refers to here is the Hegelian definition of the universe as a differentiated unity, briefly outlined by McTaggart in sections seven and eight of ‘Introduction to Philosophy’. The concept of an absolute unity in which, as he explains it, ‘the nature of the whole must be in each part in such a way as to render each part self-determined, and therefore free’, promises a harmony rather than duality of self and environment, in which neither acts causally upon the other, that directly opposes the material determinism of Darwinian theories of evolutionary development.³⁵

It is in Michael Shatov, waiting for her in the darkness of the Tansley Street drawing-room, that Miriam finds a ready if gently

³³ Of course this is a critique that Russell shared, as his comments on Spencer in ‘On Scientific Method’ demonstrate.

³⁴ Miriam refers to Ernst Haeckel (1834-1919, German biologist and promoter of Darwinism, and exponent of ‘recapitulation theory’; the argument that ontogeny, or social development, follows phylogeny, genetic or evolutionary development. The indication here is that Haeckel’s theories hold the same troubling significance for Miriam’s German friend Jan as those of Darwin and Huxley for Miriam herself.

³⁵ McTaggart, ‘Introduction to the Study of Philosophy’, pp.201, 203-4.

challenging ear to the ideas forming and pulsing in her excited mind. 'It is a *relief* to know that science is a smaller kind of truth than philosophy', she tells him, as she summarises McTaggart's lecture; 'The real difficulty is not between science and religion at all, but between religion and *philosophy*. Philosophy seems to think science assumes too much to begin with and can never get any further than usefulness' (III 170). Her following words, however, reveal that Richardson must have been familiar with more of McTaggart's philosophy than simply the notes to 'Introduction to Philosophy', as they turn instead to his theory of existence, barely discussed in the introductory lectures and only fully outlined in *The Nature of Existence*, the first volume of which appeared in 1921, the same year as *Deadlock* itself. 'Something exists. Metaphysics admits that', Miriam declares, 'I nearly shouted when Dr McTaggart said that. It's enough. It answers everything. [...] Descartes should have said, "I am aware that there *is* something, therefore I am"' (III 171). There is no mention of Descartes in 'Introduction to Philosophy', however, and no assertion that 'something exists' beyond a brief mention of the starting point of Hegel's theory of the dialectic as 'the assertion Something Is', in section seven.³⁶ The basic assumption that something exists - the Cartesian justification for this being that everyone knows that he himself exists, and to deny this is in fact to confirm it through the very act of doing so - is instead articulated at the start of *The Nature of Existence*, from which McTaggart sets out to determine 'the characteristics which belong to all that exists'.³⁷ Despite the otherwise *a priori* reasoning of the volume, it is these two empirical principles within McTaggart's argument that hold most import for Miriam. When, in the discussion following the second lecture, Shatov asks 'What the lectchooroor makes of the psycho-physical parallelism?' (the theory that mental and physical acts have no causal connection, and when they seem to do so are in fact only occurring in parallel with each other), McTaggart's confession that, 'The correlation between physical and mental gives an empirical support to materialism' catches Miriam's attention. 'That couldn't be spirited away', she thinks, 'The scientists swore there was no

³⁶ McTaggart, 'Introduction to the Study of Philosophy' p.199.

³⁷ John Ellis McTaggart, *The Nature of Existence*. Volume I. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1921), p.38.

break; so convincingly; perhaps they would yet win and prove it' (III 174). '[T]he empirical method is a most important method, and jolly' she states to Shatov. His attention has already moved on, following the next question and ensuing answer, but the exchange has triggered in Miriam's mind a memory of excited schoolroom study long buried by the monotony of her working life:

[S]he had travelled back enraptured across nine years to the day, now only yesterday, of her first meeting with her newly recovered word. Jevons. From the first the sienna brown volume had been wonderful, the only one of the English books that had any connection with life. [...] Something about the singing, lifting word appearing suddenly on the page, even before she had grasped its meaning, intensified the relation to life of the little hard motionless book, leaving it, when she had read on, centred round the one statement. (III 175)

George Thomson suggests the word that Miriam refers to here is 'materialism', but it is clear from the context that it is in fact 'empiricism'.³⁸ William Stanley Jevons, professor of economics and logic at University College London, was a leading advocate of empiricism, and Miriam presumably studied his popular textbook *Elementary Lessons on Logic* (1870), which includes a chapter on empirical and deductive methods of reasoning, with the enthusiastic Miss Donne. 'The recovery of the forgotten word at the centre of "the philosophical problems of the present day," cast a fresh glow of reality across her school days', Miriam thinks, 'How differently the word now fell into her mind, with "intuition" happily at home there to keep it company' (III 175).

The aligning of empiricism with the promise of the intuitive sense that she has already derived from Emerson, is an important stage in Miriam's pondering of the metaphysical and epistemological question of reality. When Miriam says to Shatov after the second lecture, that 'Descartes should have said, "I am aware that there is something, therefore I am"', she seems to be arguing that her existence is confirmed not simply by her own inner thought, but

³⁸ See Thomson, *Notes on Pilgrimage*, pp.165-166. Thomson also claims that the book by Jevons that Miriam has read is his *The Theory of Political Economy* (1871).

by her thought or experience of something. In other words, it is not just that she thinks that confirms her existence, but that that thought is empirically determined. Up until this point her emotional attraction to a mystical Idealism has jostled awkwardly with her intellectual recognition of the strength of the arguments of a scientific materialism. This mystical inclination continues throughout the novel, indicated perhaps most overtly in the appeal of Quakerism, to which she is first introduced in *Revolving Lights* (1923), the book that follows *Deadlock* in the *Pilgrimage* series. 'How can't there be direct perception of ultimate reality?' she is still questioning, in the penultimate book, *Dimple Hill* (1938), during much of which, recovering from a breakdown, she lives with a Quaker family in Sussex; 'How could we perceive even ourselves, if we did not somehow precede what we are?' (IV 419). By drawing together intuition and empiricism, however, Miriam holds to the inspirational role of the mystical as an *attitude to life*, while appealing to empirical sense as a method for asserting knowledge about reality. The result in *Pilgrimage* is her assertion of an intuitive capacity that is itself based in a *sensory* consciousness of the world around her.

Pathway to Reality

Where the previous sections of this essay have focused on delineating some of the key philosophical influences and allusions in *Deadlock*, I want to conclude by arguing for the significance of Miriam's thoughts on metaphysics for a reading of *Pilgrimage* as a whole. Richardson's representation of Miriam's contemplation of the nature of the relationship between existence and perception, and her struggle to formulate a theory of self and experience based in the perceptions of her own mind, illuminates the groundwork from which the novel evolved as a philosophical and aesthetic project. The intuitive-empirical vision of reality that Miriam starts to evolve in *Deadlock*, I suggest, closely approximates Richardson's formal, aesthetic vision of the 'feminine equivalent' to the 'current masculine realism' (I 9) that she was attempting in *Pilgrimage*.

One of the few early readers to recognize to posit a significant relationship between the Idealist versus New Realist debate in contemporary philosophical thought, and what Richardson was doing in *Pilgrimage*, was May Sinclair in her essay 'The Novels of Dorothy Richardson', published in *The Egoist* in 1918. Sinclair's application of William James' description of consciousness as a 'stream', in his *Principles of Psychology* (1890), to Richardson's narrative method is well-known, but all too often read out of the context of the wider essay, which is in fact a lengthy argument about the nature of reality as it is experienced and understood in the twentieth century, and the attempt of writers to represent this. When considered as part of this more substantial discussion, it is arguably to his later doctrine of *radical empiricism*, first outlined in his essay 'Does "Consciousness" Exist?' in 1904, that Sinclair, a proficient philosophical thinker in her own right, and well-versed in the differing positions of contemporary debate, more broadly refers. '[I]t seems to me that the first step towards life is to throw off the philosophic cant of the nineteenth century', she writes, in recommendation of how to approach Richardson's novels, 'it is absurd to go on talking about realism and Idealism, or objective and subjective art, as if the philosophies were sticking where they stood in the eighties'.³⁹

Writing the review at the same time as she was vigorously defending Idealist theory against the successive attacks of James and the 'New Realists' in *A Defence of Idealism*, Sinclair would have been well aware of James' radical empiricist rejection of the traditional subject/object dualism. Given the common assumption of Sinclair's endorsement of both James' description of consciousness and Richardson's narrative method, it is thus significant to note that she aligns *Pilgrimage*, which defies the reader's attempt to interpret its 'methods and forms as definitely objective or definitely subjective', with this 'new trend of the philosophies of the twentieth century' in which '[a]ll that we know of reality at first hand is given to us through contacts in which those interesting distinctions are lost'.⁴⁰ Outlining this position in

³⁹ May Sinclair, 'The Novels of Dorothy Richardson', in Kime Scott, *The Gender of Modernism*, 442-448, p.442.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

his review of James' collected *Essays in Radical Empiricism* for the journal *Mind* in 1912, Bertrand Russell summarized:

“Does ‘Consciousness’ Exist?” contends that the dualism of thought and things is an error: that the very self-same entity is at once a table and the perception of a table. [...] There is no stuff out of which thoughts, as opposed to matter, are made; pure experience is the only stuff of the world; what distinguishes consciousness is a certain function, namely the function of knowing, which is a relation between different parts of pure experience.⁴¹

Radical empiricism posits that only things that are directly experienced can be the object of philosophical study, but also that direct experience is possible not only of things in themselves but also of the relations between things. The distinction between the radical empiricist position and traditional empiricism, Russell explained, is James' emphasis on the complex relational quality of experience, in contrast to the traditional empiricist refusal that experience is anything more than a stream of sense-data. Radical empiricism was ‘not intended to rule out the possibility that there may *be* “transempirical” objects, but only methodologically to exclude the consideration of them from philosophy’. In this it corresponded with the New Realist rejection of mystical intuition as a method of philosophy, without advocating a purely objective analysis, as experience, according to radical empiricism, blurs any distinction between the natural and mental, the objective and the subjective. ‘It would be a mistake to name the doctrine materialism, or to name it Idealism’, Russell states, as ‘both these names operate within the distinction of mental and physical’. For James, he notes, ‘there is an absolute identification of the mental and the physical, giving to each the characteristics of the other, making alternately the impression of materialism and of Idealism, according to the context’.⁴²

⁴¹ Bertrand Russell, Review of William James, *Essays in Radical Empiricism*, *Mind* 21: 84 (Oct 1912), 571-5, p.572.

⁴² Ibid.

As Sinclair explains, Richardson works something similar to these ideas through the very focus and texture of the narrative form of *Pilgrimage*. Within contemporary philosophy, Sinclair states, 'Reality is thick and deep [...] and at the same time too fluid to be cut with any convenient carving knife. The novelist who would be close to reality must confine himself to this knowledge at first hand'.⁴³ This, by confining her narrative entirely to Miriam's experience, by refusing to move outside the 'first hand, intimate and intense reality' of Miriam's mind, Richardson does. The effect of this single-minded 'perfection of her method', Sinclair asserts, is that Richardson's representation of experience, of 'the thing seen or felt', appears closer to reality than any of our novelists who are trying so desperately to get close'.⁴⁴ It was of course the constant assertion of what she regarded as 'the damned egotistical self' that Virginia Woolf claimed ruined the work of both Richardson and James Joyce; a self, she critiqued in her essay 'Modern Fiction' (1925), 'which, in spite of its tremor of susceptibility; never embraces or creates what is outside itself and beyond'.⁴⁵ Yet Richardson's representation of Miriam's interiority should not be taken as ignoring empirical reality, nor, as other readers by contrast complained, simply recording, in a conventionally empirical manner, the everyday sense-data passing un contemplated before the mind. Miriam's empirical experience, when read across the thirteen *Pilgrimage* books, is far from being just a mechanical, cinematic reel of surface perceptions, and as she matures her interior monologue evolves into a striking mix of the empirical and the intuitive in which the 'egotistical self' is more than simply the sum of its thoughts, memories and impressions.

Regular instances of this Jamesian conception of empirical experience would include Miriam's feeling of relationship and oneness, sometimes but not always positive, with spaces such as her room, the Tansley Street house as whole, the London streets and certain tea shops and restaurants, or objects such as her desk,

⁴³ May Sinclair, 'The Novels of Dorothy Richardson', pp.442-443.

⁴⁴ Ibid, pp.444, 446.

⁴⁵ Virginia Woolf, *A Writer's Diary* (London: Hogarth Press, 1953), p.23; Virginia Woolf, 'Modern Fiction', in *Selected Essays*, ed. David Bradshaw (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), p.10.

or the Saratoga trunk that accompanies her travels. More subtle are scenes in which Miriam's intuitive sense of the 'thickness' of reality, as Sinclair describes it, is briefly felt in relationship with others. One example is the short, three page scene that makes up chapter ten of *Deadlock*, in which Miriam contemplates the nature of reality as experienced by 'people alone in themselves when time is not moving' (III 188), as Shatov reads to her from Spinoza. 'All the time people were helplessly doing things that made time move', she thinks, 'rushing here and there with words that had lost their meaning' (III 188). Only silence would seem to allow for an awareness of the relational quality of things that is overlooked amidst the speed of daily existence. 'Silence is reality', she thinks, 'Life ought to be lived on a basis of silence, where truth blossoms' (III 188). A pause in Shatov's reading voice draws her attention, and she suddenly experiences the moment as containing exactly this kind of life, 'alive [...] pouring down into stillness' (III188), while contemplating in amazement his masculine indifference:

It did not occur to him that this serenity, in which was accumulated all the hours they had passed together, was realization, the life of the world in miniature, making a space where everything in human experience could emerge like a reflection in deep water, with its proportions held true and right by the tranquil opposition of their separate minds. [...] Why did he not *perceive* the life there was, the mode of life, in this sitting tranquilly together? (III 190).

'Life' as Miriam describes it here is something that is felt and sensed, but in a manner that combines the empirically perceived with the intuited, in which sensory awareness is imbued with relational meaning. It is a mode of experience, however, that to Miriam seems specifically feminine, unperceivable by the analytic consciousness of the male Shatov, who remains concentrated on the words of his book, unable to sense the thick reality of the moment as it appears to Miriam.

The empirical-intuitive act of consciousness as Miriam proposes it in *Pilgrimage*, and the radical empiricist concept of experience as Richardson takes it up for the method and form of the novel,

confirm the existence of both the self and things external to that self, escaping the mental suffocation of a pure subjectivism whilst still affirming her resolute individualism. When Shatov accuses Miriam of being 'too individualistic' (III 149), and warns her to beware solipsism, it is probably not so much an Idealist subjectivism that he has in mind, as the egoism of her declaration that, 'If I am, other people are; but that does not seem to matter' (III 171). It is a specifically female form of intuitive individualism that is Miriam's ultimate creed. Expressed in staunchly feminist terms as a fundamental faith in 'feminine' selfhood, and in an uncompromising commitment to its preservation at the expense of all personal or social relationships and commitments that might impinge upon it, it informs Miriam's essentialist belief in the total separation of the male and female minds. Richardson had articulated exactly this gendered taxonomy of ways of thought in her essay 'The Reality of Feminism', published in 1917. Arguing that the male impulse to '*create metaphysical systems, religions, arts, and sciences*' (my italics), and 'to fix life, to fix aspects', results only in conflicting theories that do battle and eventually are superseded and become lifeless, she claims that 'Woman', by contrast, '*is metaphysical, religious, an artist and scientist in life*' (my italics). The synthetic quality of her mind and spirit, unlike the analytic drive of that of men, means that she is able to move and think 'as it were in all directions at once', and intuitively 'solve and reconcile, revealing the points of unity between a number of conflicting males – a number of embodied theories furiously raging together'.⁴⁶ In a later essay, 'Women and the Future' (1924), Richardson would personify this notion of the 'synthetic consciousness of woman' in the figure of the 'womanly woman', the 'essential egoist', who 'lives, all her life, in the deep current of eternity, an individual, self-centered'.⁴⁷ *Pilgrimage* is a philosophical, feminist and formal assertion of this specifically female egoistic individualism; as Richardson herself put it in the retrospective preface, it is 'a book about the inviolability of feminine solitude or,

⁴⁶ Dorothy Richardson, 'The Reality of Feminism', in Kime Scott, *The Gender of Modernism*, 401-407, pp.405, 406.

⁴⁷ Dorothy Richardson, 'Women and the Future', in Kime Scott, *The Gender of Modernism*, 411-414, p.413.

alternatively loneliness'.⁴⁸

In concluding this essay, I return to the scene of the first McTaggart lecture, and the point at which, as the audience departs, Miriam's neighbour recommends that she read Richard Haldane's *Pathway to Reality*. '[T]he title was unforgettable' Miriam thinks, and 'one day she would come across the book somewhere and get at its meaning in her own way' (III 163). Described by William Cauldwell in *The Philosophical Review* in 1904 as 'one of the most readable presentations of the Idealism of the nineteenth century', the book, based on Haldane's Gifford Lectures at the University of St Andrews in 1902 and 1903, again took up the question of 'the meaning and nature of Ultimate Reality', the analysis of which, the author argued, should proceed systematically and critically through a process of largely empirical study:

The true view of experience would seem to be that it is for us what it is in all its complexity as the result of habitual reflection at many and different standpoints scientific, ethical, aesthetic, religious, etc., at each of which abstraction and hypostasis take place under different conceptions or categories, adopted because of the purpose or end to be realised in each case. The ultimate nature of reality can only be found when these conceptions and categories have been carefully criticised and their limits ascertained.⁴⁹

⁴⁸ Where Miriam's turn-of-the-century philosophy of individualism finds its support in Emerson, however, Richardson's own later essays speak to, and implicitly reference, a vision of radical egoism being played out more widely across the gendered politics and aesthetics of modernism during the first decades of the twentieth century. A full discussion of Richardson's philosophical and aesthetic egoism is beyond the scope of the current paper. Please see 'The Essential Egoist: Dorothy Richardson's Womanly Woman' (forthcoming; available from the author). For a sophisticated account of the influence of the ideas of Max Stirner and Friedrich Nietzsche on a modernist philosophy of egoistic individualism see Jean-Michel Rabaté, *James Joyce and the Politics of Egoism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001). Rachel Potter offers a pertinent analysis of the gender politics of modernist egoism, set within the context of the publication history of Stirner and Nietzsche in Britain in the early twentieth century, in *Modernism and Democracy: Literary Culture 1900-1930* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006).

⁴⁹ Haldane, *The Pathway to Reality*, p.xiii.

It is this task that the *Pilgrimage* books register, as Miriam Henderson explores the differing standpoints of science, theology, politics, psychology, suffragism, mysticism and more, embracing and detaching herself from each in turn, along her own pathway to reality. The metaphysical study to which Miriam is introduced in *Deadlock* is not so much just one of those standpoints, taken up and rejected in turn – although in the sense of any one philosophical theory this probably is the case – but rather provides the framework and stimulus for Richardson's evolving conception of the individual female consciousness and its relationship to reality, underlying the method and direction of *Pilgrimage* as a whole.