

## ARTICLE

# HEGEL, BRITISH IDEALISM, AND THE CURIOUS CASE OF THE CONCRETE UNIVERSAL

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Like the terms ‘dialectic’, ‘*Aufhebung*’ (or ‘sublation’), and ‘*Geist*’, the term ‘concrete universal’ has a distinctively Hegelian ring to it. But unlike these others, it is particularly associated with the British strand in Hegel’s reception history, as having been brought to prominence by some of the central British Idealists.<sup>1</sup> It is therefore perhaps inevitable that, as their star has waned, so too has any use of the term, while an appreciation of the problematic that lay behind it has seemingly vanished: if the British Idealists get any sort of mention in a contemporary metaphysics book (which is rarely), it will be Bradley’s view of relations or truth that is discussed, not their theory of universals,<sup>2</sup> so that the term has a rather antique air, buried in the dusty volumes of *Mind* from the turn of the nineteenth century. This is not surprising: the episode known as British Idealism can appear to be a period that is lost to us, in its language, points of historical reference (Lotze, Sigwart, Jevons), and central preoccupations (the Absolute). Even while interest in Hegel continues to grow, interest in his *Logic* has grown more slowly than in the rest of his work, with Book III of the *Logic* remaining as the daunting peak of that challenging text – while it is here that the British

<sup>1</sup>The following remark is typical in this respect: ‘The central idea in nineteenth century Idealist philosophy is the notion of the concrete universal. The English Idealists took it over from Hegel and it played a most important part in all their work’ (A. J. M. Milne, *The Social Philosophy of English Idealism* (London, 1962) 15).

<sup>2</sup>The topic is not only neglected in the current general literature on metaphysics; it is also little discussed in recent specialist studies of Anglo-American Idealism. As far as I know, only the following works give the topic any consideration (and some of these only briefly): Milne, *The Social Philosophy of English Idealism*, esp. 15–55, 165–202; Richard Wollheim, *F. H. Bradley*, 2nd edn (Harmondsworth, 1969), esp. 36–9; Lionel Rubinoff, *Collingwood and the Reform of Metaphysics* (Toronto, 1970), esp. 154–60 and 384, n6; Stewart Candlish, ‘Bradley On My Station and Its Duties’, *Australasian Journal of Philosophy*, 56 (1978) No. 2: 155–70; Marcus Clayton, ‘Blanshard’s Theory of Universals’, in *The Philosophy of Brand Blanshard* (LaSalle, 1980) 861–8; Anthony Manser, *Bradley’s Logic* (Oxford, 1983), esp. 79–98; T. L. S. Sprigge, *James and Bradley: American Truth and British Reality* (Chicago and LaSalle, 1993), esp. 382–5; W. J. Mander, ‘Bosanquet and the Concrete Universal’, *The Modern Schoolman*, 77 (2000) No. 4: 293–308.

Idealists focussed their attention and claimed to have uncovered that ‘exotic’ but ‘vanished specimen’, the concrete universal.<sup>3</sup> Finally, as the trend of reading Hegel pushes ever further in a non-metaphysical direction, it might be thought that the future of the concrete universal is hardly likely to be brighter than its recent past – for it may seem hard to imagine how a conception championed by the British Idealists, who were apparently shameless in their metaphysical commitments,<sup>4</sup> can find favour in these more austere and responsible times.

In this paper, however, I want to make a case for holding that there is something enlightening to be found in how some of the British Idealists approached the ‘concrete universal’, both interpretatively and philosophically. At the interpretative level, I will argue that while not everything these Idealists are taken to mean by the term is properly to be found in Hegel, their work nonetheless relates to a crucial and genuine strand in Hegel’s position, so that their discussion of this issue is an important moment in the reception history of his thought. At a philosophical level, I think that the question that concerned Hegel and these British Idealists retains much of its interest, as does their shared approach to it: namely, how far does our thought involve a mere abstraction from reality, and what are the metaphysical and epistemological implications if it turns out it does not? As such, I will suggest, taking seriously what these British Idealists have to say about the concrete universal can help us both in our understanding of Hegel, and in our appreciation of the contribution Hegel’s position can make to our thinking on the issues that surround this topic.

## I

At first sight, however, it must be admitted that the doctrine of the concrete universal looks distinctly unpromising as a source of interpretative and philosophical insights, in so far as the central claim generally associated with its leading proponents appears to be both unHegelian and incoherent.

This central claim, that came to be identified as characteristic of the British Idealists, and which was much criticized in their time, was summarized by one of those critics as the view that ‘the individual, *qua* individual, is a universal’.<sup>5</sup> The thought behind this conception of the universal is taken to be that universals have a ‘one-over-many’ structure in

<sup>3</sup>Mander, ‘Bosanquet and the Concrete Universal’, 293.

<sup>4</sup>But for a corrective to this commonly held view, see Robert Stern, ‘British Hegelianism: A Non-Metaphysical View?’, *European Journal of Philosophy*, 2 (1994) No. 3: 293–321.

<sup>5</sup>Norman Kemp Smith, ‘The Nature of Universals’, *Mind*, 36 (1927) No. 142: 137–57, esp. p. 144, No. 143: 265–80, No. 144: 393–422.

relation to their instances, and so are the same amid diversity, and in so far as individuals also have this structure in relation to their attributes, they should be thought of as ‘concrete universals’.

Support for this reading of the position occupied by the British Idealists is taken from various comments by leading figures such as Bradley and Bosanquet. Thus, Bradley writes that while from one ‘point of view’ an individual (such as a man) is a particular because it excludes all other individuals, from another ‘point of view’ a man ‘is universal because he is one throughout all his different attributes’;<sup>6</sup> and, he goes on to remark, ‘In “Caesar is sick”, Caesar is not affirmed to be nothing but sick: he is a common bond of many attributes, and is therefore universal’,<sup>7</sup> so that ‘[t]he individual is . . . a concrete universal’.<sup>8</sup> Bosanquet writes:

Let us take such a judgment as ‘Caesar crossed the Rubicon’ . . . Precisely the point of the judgement is that the same man united in himself or persisted through different relations, say, of being conqueror of Gaul and of marching into Italy. The Identity is the Individual, or the concrete universal, that persists through these relations.<sup>9</sup>

Bosanquet’s suggestion that we should ‘[take] an individual as designated by a proper name for the example of a [concrete] universal’<sup>10</sup> seems to be what is central and distinctive about the British Idealists’ position on this issue.

It is also, clearly, what is most problematic, both in itself and as an interpretation of Hegel. The difficulty with the position in itself, is that it appears to involve a confusion: for how can an individual be a universal, concrete or otherwise? There is of course a one/many relation between an individual and its parts, temporal parts, attributes etc, and also between a universal and its instances: but this structural similarity is no reason to confound the two, as these British Idealists seem happy to do. It is hard to

<sup>6</sup>F. H. Bradley, *Principles of Logic*, 2nd edn, corrected, 2 vols (Oxford, 1928) Vol. I, p. 188.

<sup>7</sup>*Ibid.*, 191.

<sup>8</sup>*Ibid.*, 188.

<sup>9</sup>Bernard Bosanquet, ‘The Philosophical Importance of a True Theory of Identity’, reprinted in his *Essays and Addresses*, 2nd edn (London, 1891) 162–80, esp. pp. 165–6. Cf. also Bernard Bosanquet, *The Essentials of Logic* (London, 1895) 65:

So the reference of a proper name is a good example of what we called a universal or an identity. That which is referred to by such a name is a person or thing whose existence is extended in time and its parts bound together by some continuous quality – an *individual* person or thing and the whole of this individuality is referred to in whatever is affirmed about it. Thus the reference of such a name is universal, not as including more than one individual, but as including in the identity of the individual numberless differences – the acts, events, and relations that make up its history and situation.

<sup>10</sup>Bosanquet, *Essays and Addresses*, 167.

disagree with an early critic of this conception, Norman Kemp Smith, when he writes:

It has, of course, been usual to define the universal as ‘the one in the many,’ meaning by ‘the many’ numerically distinct particulars. But what, we may well ask, are we being committed to, when required to interpret ‘the one in the many’ in this other very different sense which renders it applicable to each particular thing or self? If the original meaning of the term ‘universal’ involves its distinction from the term ‘particular,’ can this meaning, by any legitimate process of analogy, be so extended as to render the term synonymous with the particular? A term cannot signify its own opposite, not even if that opposite be a counterpart which it presupposes for its own completion. The term ‘husband’ does not signify ‘wife,’ though each term has meaning only in and by reference to the other.<sup>11</sup>

Here, it may seem, the Idealists’ attempt to think dialectically unfortunately got the better of them, and led to the absurdity of treating the individual as a universal, and thus as concrete, simply on the grounds that individuals can resemble universals in standing a ‘one-over-many’ relation to their attributes just as a universal can stand in a ‘one-over-many’ relation to their instances, and so both combine identity with a diversity. It may appear the best that can be done at this point is to say that these British Idealists were using the term ‘universal’ in a *sui generis* manner;<sup>12</sup> but this is to admit that what at first looked like a substantive but dubious doctrine is in the end no more than a terminological shift, with little apparent rationale.

<sup>11</sup>Kemp Smith, ‘The Nature of Universals’, 145. Cf. also Michael B. Foster, ‘The Concrete Universal: Cook Wilson and Bosanquet’, *Mind*, 40 (1931) No. 157: 1–22, esp. p. 7, where he speaks about the ‘well-known and paradoxical doctrine, derived from Bradley, that the concrete universal is the individual’, and asks whether ‘it is not simply an abuse of language to call the individual “universal” at all’. Another contemporary critic of this view is John Cook Wilson:

A notable example of loose thinking about unity in diversity is the modern representation of the individual as a universal because it is a unity in the diversity of its qualities, &c. This doctrine, which is taken as advanced metaphysics, is nothing but deplorable confusion, due to a mere verbal analogy helped out by the metaphysician’s inclination to paradox, and the absurdest results may be developed from it. The unity of the universal *in* its particulars is totally different from the unity of the individual substance as a unity *of* its attributes (or attribute-elements). The particulars of a universal are not elements in its unity.

(John Cook Wilson, *Statement and Inference*, edited by A. S. L. Farquharson, 2 vols, corrected edn (Oxford, 1969), Vol. I, p. 156 n1)

It is likely that Cook Wilson’s later reference to ‘the puerilities of certain paradoxical recent authors’ on the topic of universals is also a reference to this Bradleyan view (see *ibid.*, 348).

<sup>12</sup>Cf. Mander, ‘Bosanquet and the Concrete Universal’, 301:

Bosanquet’s understanding of the word ‘universal’ is a very generous one. Any connection which brings together any sort of many under one heading, any union or connection or identity, any mechanism that allows any kind of general talk, for Bosanquet, is a universal.

In defence of the British Idealists, however, it might be argued that those who criticized them for holding this seemingly incoherent doctrine misrepresented their position. It is notable that in the way it is presented by Bradley in the discussion from *The Principles of Logic* that we have cited, he says not just that ‘The individual is both a concrete particular and a concrete universal’, but also that these are ‘names of the whole from different *points of view* [my emphasis]’, namely when we see the individual as having ‘limiting and exclusive relations to other phenomena’ on the one hand and when we see it as ‘one throughout all [its] different attributes’ on the other.<sup>13</sup> This may then suggest that in calling the individual a concrete universal, Bradley does not mean to collapse the distinction between these ontological categories on the grounds that both involve identity-in-diversity, but rather to say that the individual can be viewed as akin to a universal in this respect, just as it can also be viewed as akin to a bare particular when considered in isolation from all other things.<sup>14</sup>

However, even if a defence of Bradley (and perhaps also of Bosanquet) could be mounted along these lines, it might be argued that the claim that ‘the individual, *qua* individual, is a universal’ because it is the same amid diversity should still be seen as part of the doctrine of the concrete universal, on the grounds that a view of this sort can be traced back to Hegel. For Hegel to be a source of this view, we would have to find a place where Hegel states that an individual is (or can be seen as) a universal, on the grounds that the individual combines unity in diversity; and commentators have claimed to find such places. One example is said to be §175 of the *Encyclopaedia Logic*, and another Hegel’s discussion of sense-certainty in the *Phenomenology of Spirit*. However, I think we should not be persuaded by these claims.

The section from the *Encyclopaedia Logic* is cited,<sup>15</sup> presumably on the grounds that Hegel writes here: ‘The subject, the singular *as* singular (in the “singular” judgment), is something-universal’.<sup>16</sup> But Hegel’s point here is not to say that the identity-in-difference of the individual

<sup>13</sup>Bradley, *The Principles of Logic*, Vol. I, p. 188.

<sup>14</sup>A more radical defence of the Bradleyean position, suggested to me by Fraser MacBride, might be to follow Ramsey in attempting to challenge the whole universal/individual distinction: see F. P. Ramsey, ‘Universals’ in *The Foundations of Mathematics and other Logical Essays*, edited by R. B. Braithwaite (London, 1931), pp. 112–34; but I take Bradley’s more moderate talk of ‘points of view’ to suggest that he would not want to adopt that line (though I would agree that there are some intriguing parallels between the two positions that deserve to be explored further).

<sup>15</sup>Mander, ‘Bosanquet and the Concrete Universal’, 296, n8.

<sup>16</sup>G. W. F. Hegel, *The Encyclopaedia Logic: Part I of the Encyclopaedia of Philosophical Sciences*, translated by T. F. Geraets, W. A. Suchting and H. S. Harris (Indianapolis, 1991), §175, p. 252 [‘Das Subjekt, das Einzelne als Einzelnes (im singulären Urteil), ist ein Allgemeines’, G. W. F. Hegel, *Werke in zwanzig Bänden*, edited by Eva Moldenhauer and Karl Markus Michel (Frankfurt, 1970), Vol. VIII, p. 326].

(‘*das Einzelne*’)<sup>17</sup> makes it a universal; rather, he is commenting that there are judgements where we predicate attributes not just of the individual as such, but of the individual as a member of a class, and thus as falling under a universal. Hegel makes this clear when he comments in the Addition (*Zusatz*) to this paragraph: ‘When it is determined in the *singular* judgment as a universal, the subject therefore goes beyond itself as this merely single instance. To say “This plant is curative”, implies that it is not merely this single plant that is curative, but that some or many plants are ...’<sup>18</sup> I therefore do not think that this can count as a place where Hegel adopted the view with which the British Idealists were later identified.

Another place where textual support for this claim is said to be found, however, is in Hegel’s discussion of sense-certainty (which, along with Book III of the *Logic*, and the *Philosophy of Right*, is one of the three parts of Hegel’s work that had the strongest influence on the British Idealists). In the course of that discussion, Hegel considers the claim of sense-certainty that it can pick out the ‘now’ and the ‘here’ as individuals by pointing at an individual moment or an individual place; and he counters it by arguing that every such moment or place is further divisible, where he writes that

The pointing-out of the Now is thus itself the movement which expresses what the Now is in truth, viz. a result, or a plurality of Nows all taken together; and the pointing-out is the experience of learning that the Now is a *universal*,<sup>19</sup>

and similarly he says of ‘Here’:

The Here that is *meant* would be the point; but it *is* not: on the contrary, when it is pointed out as something that *is*, the pointing-out shows itself to be not an immediate knowing [of the point], but a movement from the Here that *is meant*

<sup>17</sup>In their translation, Geraets, Suchting and Harris use ‘singular’ rather than ‘individual’ to translate ‘*Einzelne*’, for reasons they give in the translators’ introduction, xix–xx. While appreciating some of the points they make in favour of this practice, and while I will retain its use when quoting from their translation, in the text I will continue to talk of ‘individual’ rather than ‘singular’, in part because this is the terminology used by the British Idealists I am also discussing.

<sup>18</sup>Hegel, *Encyclopaedia Logic*, §175 Addition, p. 252:

Das Subjekt, indem es im *singulären* Urtheil als Allgemeines bestimmt ist, schreitet damit über sich, als dieses bloß Einzelne, hinaus. Wenn wir sagen: »diese Pflanze ist heilsam«, so liegt darin, daß nicht bloß diese einzelne Pflanze heilsam ist, sondern mehrere oder einige.

(*Werke*, Vol. VIII, p. 327)

<sup>19</sup>G. W. F. Hegel, *The Phenomenology of Spirit*, translated by A. V. Miller (Oxford, 1977) 64:

Das *Aufzeigen* ist also selbst die Bewegung, welche es ausspricht, was das Jetzt im Wahrheit ist, nämlich ein Resultat oder eine Vielheit von Jetzt zusammengefaßt; und das *Aufzeigen* ist das Erfahren, daß Jetzt *Allgemeines* ist.

(*Werke*, Vol. III, p. 89)

through many Heres into the universal Here which is a simple plurality of Heres, just as the day is a simple plurality of Nows'.<sup>20</sup>

On the basis of these passages, one commentator has argued that Hegel is guilty of just the same conflation between individual and universal that was identified in the work of the British Idealists:

Hegel argues that the here and now, in having extension and duration, and hence an indefinitely large number of subdivisions, are universals and thus not particulars. But unless one conflates the notion of instances of a universal and the parts of a whole (as Hegel seems to have done), all the arguments would show, if they work at all, is that *here* and *now* are divisible *wholes*, not that they are *universals*. It is in no way obvious that a whole having parts cannot be a particular, and Hegel, not having made the distinction between wholes and universals, does not even address himself to this issue.<sup>21</sup>

On this reading of this part of the *Phenomenology*, then, it may seem that Hegel is using 'universal' in a manner similar to that for which the British Idealists were later criticized.

It is not possible to enter here into a detailed interpretative analysis of this highly complex and abstract section of the *Phenomenology*: but it does seem to me that this way of reading Hegel's position here is mistaken. As I would read it, Hegel is arguing at this point that sense-certainty cannot claim to be able to 'apprehend' things without 'comprehending' them, where sense-certainty thinks this is possible because it believes it can have immediate awareness of things in their unique individuality and so has no need for general concepts: if there were only *one* 'now' and only *one* 'here' this might make sense, but the fact that each 'now' and 'here' is always divisible into further 'nows' and 'heres' means that sense-certainty cannot claim access to just such a unique individual in its experience of a temporal or spatial moment. Thus, even when it points and says 'now' or 'here', it is conscious of many instances of the same kind, and thus individuals that share the same property or universal (the property of being 'now' or 'here'). Hegel's claim in talking about temporal and spatial instants in terms of universals is thus not that they are universals because they are complex individuals rather than simple 'atoms' (in the manner of the British Idealists); his claim is rather that

<sup>20</sup>Ibid:

Das Hier, das gemeint wird, wäre der Punkt; er *ist* aber nicht; sondern indem er als seiend aufgezeigt wird, zeigt sich das Aufzeigen, nicht unmittelbares Wissen, sondern eine Bewegung von dem gemeinten Hier aus durch viele Hier in das allgemeine Hier zu sein, welches, wie der Tag eine einfache Vielheit der Jetzt, so eine einfache Vielheit der Hier ist.

(*Werke*, Vol. III, p. 90)

<sup>21</sup>Ivan Soll, 'Charles Taylor's *Hegel*', reprinted in *Hegel*, edited by Michael Inwood (Oxford, 1985) 54–66, esp. pp. 63–4. Cf. also Michael Inwood, *A Hegel Dictionary* (Oxford, 1992) 303.

even being ‘now’ and ‘here’ does not make a temporal or spatial instant unique and thus purely individual, for there are always further instants that are ‘now’ and ‘here’ in the same way, so that particular ‘nows’ and ‘heres’ have been shown to be instances of universals in this fairly standard sense.<sup>22</sup>

## II

Thus, whether or not we think it is right to attribute to the British Idealists the view that ‘the individual, *qua* individual, is a universal’ in any strong sense, we might accept that this view is highly problematic, and also can offer us few interpretative insights into Hegel’s position; for it seems we must admit (and that Hegel would agree) that it takes more to be a concrete universal than to be a unified diversity, for the unified diversity of an individual (such as Julius Caesar) surely does not make that individual a universal of *any* type, but merely a substance with attributes, or a whole with parts. On the other hand, if all the doctrine of the concrete universal amounts to is the claim that ‘you may call’ an individual a universal as a way of ‘emphasizing’ its unity-in-diversity, then it this may suggest it is in fact a rather trivial position.

However, it would be premature to abandon all interest in the doctrine of the concrete universal straightaway, as there is more to the British Idealists’ discussion than this, where they came to conceive of the concrete universal as a particular type of universal: ‘the universal in the form of a world’, as Bosanquet put it,<sup>23</sup> rather than in the form of a class. By the ‘the universal in the form of a world’, Bosanquet meant that individuals which exemplify this universal are thereby related with one another in a system of mutual interdependence, whereas individuals that merely belong to the same class are not. Josiah Royce (not of course, strictly a *British* Idealist, but nonetheless greatly influenced by them) puts this idea as follows:

This universal is no abstraction at all, but a perfectly *concrete* whole, since the facts are, one and all, not mere examples of it, but are embraced in it, are brought forth by it as its moments, and exist only in relation to one another and to it. It is the vine; they, the individuals, are the branches.<sup>24</sup>

<sup>22</sup>For a reading that is also critical of Soll’s account for claiming that Hegel (like the British Idealists) ‘has clumsily conflated universals . . . with complex individuals’, but on somewhat different grounds, see Edward Craig, *The Mind of God and the Works of Man* (Oxford, 1987) 211–12.

<sup>23</sup>Bernard Bosanquet, *The Principle of Individuality and Value* (London, 1912) 38.

<sup>24</sup>Josiah Royce, *The Spirit of Modern Philosophy* (Boston, 1892) 224. Cf. also Edward Caird, *Social Philosophy of Auguste Comte* (Glasgow, 1885) 109 (incorrectly cited by Royce, 499, n1): ‘The universal of science and philosophy is . . . not merely a generic name, *under* which things are brought together, but a principle which unites them and determines their relation to each other’; and also John Caird (Edward Caird’s brother), who Royce also cites extensively:

But thought is capable of another and deeper movement. It can rise to a universality which is not foreign to, but the very inward nature of things in themselves, not the

This conception of the concrete universal has the advantage that it avoids the peculiar conflation of individuality with universality that we saw earlier,

universal of an abstraction from the particular and different, but the unity which is immanent in them and finds in them its own necessary expression; not an arbitrary invention of the observing and classifying mind unifying in its own imagination things which are yet essentially different, but an idea which expresses the inner dialectic, the movement or process towards unity, which exists in and constitutes the being of the objects themselves. This deeper and truer universality is that which may be designated *ideal or organic universality*.

(John Caird, *An Introduction to the Philosophy of Religion*  
(Glasgow, 1904) 217–18)

Cf. also Bosanquet, *The Principle of Individuality and Value*, 37:

A world or cosmos is a system of members, such that every member, being *ex hypothesi* distinct, nevertheless contributes to the unity of the whole in virtue of the peculiarities which constitute its distinctness. And the important point for us at present is the difference of principle between a world and a class. It takes all sorts to make a world; a class is essentially of one sort only. In a word, the difference is that the ultimate principle of unity and community is fully exemplified in the former, but only superficially in the latter. The ultimate principle, we may say, is sameness in the other; generality is sameness in spite of the other; universality is sameness by means of the other.

Similar comments include Bernard Bosanquet, 'Life and Philosophy', in *Contemporary British Philosophy*, edited by J. H. Muirhead, first series (London, 1924) 51–74, esp. p. 62: 'The universal, the very life and spirit of logic, did not mean [to me] a general predicate, but the plastic unity of an inclusive system'; and Bernard Bosanquet, *The Distinction Between Mind and its Objects* (Manchester, 1913) 34: 'a universal is a working connection within particulars'. Cf. also Richard Lewis Nettleship, *Philosophical Remains of Richard Lewis Nettleship*, edited by A. C. Bradley, 2nd edn (London, 1901) 158–9:

The universal is said to *contain* or *include* its particulars. This, of course, is a spatial metaphor, and we always have to guard against the influence of spatial associations. But the metaphor helps some minds to realize the truth, and it is convenient as bringing out the fact that particulars, while excluding one another, also make up, or are included in, one whole. To say, for example, that humanity includes all men may help one to realize the truth that, though men exclude one another, they still form a unity.

and R. G. Collingwood, *Speculum Mentis* (Oxford, 1924) 220–1:

This absolute whole is the concrete universal; for concrete universality is individuality, the individual being simply the unity of the universal and the particular. The absolute individual is universal in that it is what it is throughout, and every part of it is as individual as itself. On the other hand it is no mere abstraction, the abstract quality of individualness, but an individual which includes all others. It is the system of systems, the world of worlds.

This view of the concrete universal persists in the thinking of later generations of British writers on Hegel, such as T. M. Knox: see, e.g. his translator's notes to his translation of Hegel's *Philosophy of Right* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1952) 323–4 [my emphasis]:

An abstract universal has no organic connexion with its particulars. Mind, or reason, as a concrete universal, particularizes itself into differences *which are interconnected by its universality* in the same way in which parts of the organism are held together by the single life which all things share. The parts depend on the whole for their life, but on the other hand the persistence of life necessitates the differentiation of the part.

Cf. also T. L. S. Sprigge, 'Bradley' in *Routledge History of Philosophy VII: The Nineteenth Century*, edited by C. L. Ten (London, 1994) 437–58, esp. p. 440: '[P]roponents of the concrete universal usually take the totality of its instances as itself the universal in question, arguing that it is a kind of whole which is present in each of its parts'.

associated by its critics with the Bradleyan claim that '[a man] is universal because he is one throughout all his different attributes'; instead, universals are here understood in a more usual way, as properties that are instantiated in individuals, but where concrete universals 'embrace' the individuals into a holistic system, and so make these individuals parts of a larger individual entity, whereas abstract universals do not. Therefore, we might say (to use the sort of example employed by the British Idealists) there are certain properties by virtue of which citizens of the state form a community or social whole, while nonetheless the state is an individual. We are therefore preserving here more of the traditional universal/individual distinction (because we are not saying that the state qua individual is a universal), while still giving a distinctive sense to the idea of a concrete universal (as a property that connects individuals into larger wholes, in an inter-individual manner).

This view of the concrete universal of course belongs together with the metaphysical holism (tending towards monism) of some of the British Idealists more generally, so that in the end it is not clear whether they would allow that some universals are 'concrete' in this sense, and others are 'abstract'; rather, they would seem to hold that in fact *all* universals are concrete, although our lack of insight into the full systematic interconnection of individuals may prevent us from recognizing this.<sup>25</sup> This appears to be the implication of Bradley's famous example of the red-haired men:

By being red-haired the two men are related really, and their relation is not merely external. . . . 'But I am a red-haired man', I shall hear, 'and I know what I am, and I am not altered in fact when I am compared with another man, and therefore the relation falls outside.' But no finite individual, I reply, can possibly know what he is, and the idea that all his reality falls within his knowledge is even ridiculous. . . . But, as he really is, to know perfectly his own nature would be, with that nature, to pass in knowledge endlessly beyond himself. For example, a red-haired man who knew himself utterly would and must, starting from within, go on to know everyone else who has red hair, and he would not know himself until he knew them. . . . Nothing in the whole and in the end can be external, and everything less than the Universe is an abstraction from the whole, an abstraction more or less empty, and the more empty the less self-dependent. Relations and qualities are abstractions, and depend for their being always on a whole, a whole which they inadequately express, and which remains always less or more in the background.<sup>26</sup>

<sup>25</sup>Cf. Sprigge, *James and Bradley*, 514:

[T]he doctrine of concrete universals, as propounded by such as Bradley and Bosanquet, does not really concern one special type of universal called 'concrete', which they contrast with another called 'abstract', but is presented as the correct account of all genuine universals as opposed to the more usual but inadequate account of them as merely abstract.

<sup>26</sup>F. H. Bradley, *Appearance and Reality*, 2nd edn, 9<sup>th</sup> impression (Oxford, 1930) 520–1.

It seems that Bradley is arguing here that a universal such as ‘red-hairedness’ may appear to be an abstract universal, in the sense that no internal relation may seem to hold between all the different individuals that have red hair; but then in fact the universal is concrete, because by exemplifying the same universal, each red-haired individual is internally related to each other red-haired individual within a totality.

Clearly, a proper assessment of this conception of the concrete universal would require a much broader analysis of the philosophical position that goes with it, such as Bradley’s view of relations; and that cannot be undertaken here. We can, however, raise the interpretative question: how far does this holistic conception of the concrete universal present a plausible way of understanding the position adopted by Hegel?

A first, and most obvious, difference between Hegel’s position and the Bradleyean one, is that Hegel *does* seem to allow that the concrete universal is a *type* of universal, rather than claiming that *all* universals are in fact concrete. For example, Hegel says that the property ‘red’ is ‘an abstract universal’ (*ein abstrakt Allgemeines*),<sup>27</sup> and he contrasts this with a property like ‘good’. Therefore, even if Hegel does believe that some universals can be viewed holistically as ‘embracing’ individuals into a ‘concrete whole’, he would not appear to believe that *all* universals can be so viewed, *contra* Bradley.

More substantively, perhaps, we can also raise doubts about whether Hegel has this holistic conception of the concrete universal *at all*. That this *was* Hegel’s conception is widely held, not least by the Idealists themselves. Thus, Royce writes in his exposition of what he takes to be Hegel’s view:

The universal of the understanding, applying to a nature which is only exemplified by each individual, and which exists nowhere but in such individual examples (as *animality* exists only in individual animals), tells us nothing about the interrelationship of the individuals themselves, gives us therefore no *Einheit des Begriffes*<sup>28</sup> . . . *Das Wahre ist konkret* means for [Hegel] equally, ‘The truth is an organic union of interrelated aspects, characters, qualities’, and ‘The truth is the Universal in which the particulars and individuals are organically joined’.<sup>29</sup>

The Anglo-American Idealists therefore saw in Hegel a fellow holist, and treated his doctrine of the concrete universal as central to his holism, as it was to theirs. It seems to me, however, that this puts Hegel’s own conception of the concrete universal in the wrong light.

<sup>27</sup>Hegel, *Encyclopaedia Logic*, §172 Addition, p. 250 (translation modified) (*Werke*, Vol. VIII, p. 324).

<sup>28</sup>Royce, *The Spirit of Modern Philosophy*, 495.

<sup>29</sup>*Ibid.*, 500.

To see why, we need to look more closely at the way in which Hegel himself draws a contrast between universals that are abstract and universals that are concrete. This we will do in the next section, at the end of which we will return to consider the issue we have just raised, concerning the extent to which Hegel's conception of the concrete universal is holistic.

### III

The distinction between the abstract and the concrete universal principally arises in the course of Hegel's discussion of the Concept or Notion (*Begriff*)<sup>30</sup> and the different levels of judgement and syllogism that are associated with that discussion, as this occurs in the first part of Book III of the *Logic*. Hegel's central aim here is to demonstrate that

The progression of the Concept is no longer either passing-over or shining into another, but *development*; for the [moments] that are distinguished are immediately posited at the same time as identical with one another and with the whole, and [each] determinacy is as a free being of the whole Concept.<sup>31</sup>

The 'moments' of the Concept are universality, particularity and individuality; and the claim here is therefore that these categories have a peculiar kind of interrelation (of *development* [*Entwicklung*]) that was not seen either with the categories of Being (where the 'dialectical process' was one of 'passing over into another' [*Übergehen*]) or Essence (where it was 'shining into another' [*Scheinen in Anderes*]): 'in contrast, the movement of the *Concept* is *development*'. Hegel's reasons for wanting to argue for this relation between the moments of the Concept, I would claim, stem from his conviction that many of the problems of philosophy are bound up with the fact that this relation has been misconceived hitherto, where the categories of universality, particularity and individuality have been set apart from one another.<sup>32</sup>

Now, Hegel's main aim in drawing the contrast between the 'abstract' and the 'concrete' universal is related to the way in which the relation between the categories of universality, particularity and individuality should be viewed:

<sup>30</sup>'Notion' or 'Concept' are the two terms used for the translation of *Begriff*: in quotations, I follow the usage of the translation referred to, although in my text I use 'Concept'.

<sup>31</sup>Hegel, *Encyclopaedia Logic*, §161, p. 237:

Das Fortgehen des Begriffs ist nicht mehr Übergehen noch Scheinen in Anderes, sondern *Entwicklung*, indem das Unterschiedene unmittelbar zugleich als das Identische miteinander und mit dem Ganzen gesetzt, die Bestimmtheit als ein freies Sein des ganzen Begriffes ist.

(*Werke*, Vol. VIII, p. 308)

<sup>32</sup>For further discussion, see my *Hegel and the 'Phenomenology of Spirit'* (London, 2002) 18–21.

for, whereas the ‘abstract universal... is opposed to the particular and the individual’,<sup>33</sup> the concrete universal is not, where it is characteristic of the latter that ‘we cannot speak of the universal apart from the determinateness which is more precisely its particularity and individuality, for the universal, in its absolute negativity, contains determinateness in and for itself’.<sup>34</sup> Hegel goes on:

As negativity in general or in accordance with the *first, immediate* negation, the universal contains determinateness generally as *particularity*; as the *second* negation, that is, as negation of the negation, it is *absolute determinateness* or *individuality* and *concreteness*. The universal is thus the totality of the Notion; it is concrete, and far from being empty, it has through its Notion a *content*, and a content in which it not only maintains itself but one which is its own and immanent in it. We can, indeed, abstract from the content: but in that case we do not obtain a universal of the Notion but only the *abstract* universal, which is an isolated, imperfect moment of the Notion and has no truth.<sup>35</sup>

<sup>33</sup>G. W. F. Hegel, *Science of Logic*, translated by A. V. Miller (London: 1969) 602 (‘Vom Allgemeinen, welches ein vermitteltes, nämlich das *abstrakte*, dem Besonderen und Einzelnen entgegengesetzte Allgemeine ist, ist erst bei dem bestimmten Begriffe zu reden’, *Werke* Vol. II, p. 275).

<sup>34</sup>Hegel, *Science of Logic*, 603 (‘Es kann aber von dem Allgemeinen nicht ohne die Bestimmtheit, welche näher die Besonderheit und Einzelheit ist, gesprochen werden’, *Werke*, Vol. II, p. 277).

<sup>35</sup>*Ibid.*, 603–4:

Als Negativität überhaupt oder nach der *ersten, unmittelbaren* Negation hat es die Bestimmtheit überhaupt als *Besonderheit* an ihm; als *Zweites*, als Negation der Negation ist es *absolute Bestimmtheit* oder *Einzelheit* und *Konkretion*. – Das Allgemeine ist somit die Totalität des Begriffes, es ist Konkretes, ist nicht ein Leeres, sondern hat vielmehr durch seinen Begriff *Inhalt* – einen Inhalt, in dem es sich nicht nur erhält, sondern der ihm eigen und immanent ist. Es kann von dem Inhalte wohl abstrahiert werden; so erhält man aber nicht das Allgemeine des Begriffes, sondern das *Abstrakte*, welches ein isoliertes, unvollkommenes Moment des Begriffes ist und keine Wahrheit hat.

(*Werke*, Vol. II, pp. 277–8)

Cf. also G. W. F. Hegel, *Hegel's Philosophy of Mind: Part Three of the Encyclopaedia of the Philosophical Sciences*, translated by William Wallace and A. V. Miller (Oxford, 1971), §467 Addition, p. 227:

Only on the third stage of pure thinking is the Notion as such known. Therefore, this stage represents comprehension in the strict sense of the word. Here the universal is known as self-particularizing, and from the particularization gathering itself together into individuality; or, what is the same thing, the particular loses its self-subsistence to become a moment of the Notion. Accordingly, the universal here is no longer a form external to the content, but the true form which produces the content from itself.

(Erst auf der dritten Stufe des reinen Denkens wird der *Begriff als solcher* erkannt. Diese Stufe stellt also das *eigentliche Begreifen* dar. Hier wird das Allgemeine als sich selber besondernd und aus der Besonderung zur Einzelheit zusammennehmend erkannt oder, was dasselbe ist, das Besondere aus seiner Selbständigkeit zu einem Momente des Begriffes herabgesetzt. Demnach ist hier das Allgemeine nicht mehr eine dem Inhalt äußerliche, sondern die wahrhafte, aus sich selber den Inhalt hervorbringende Form.)

(*Werke*, Vol. X, pp. 286–7)

Hegel thus conceives of the concrete universal as ‘the universal of the Notion’, in so far as it involves a dialectical relation to particularity and individuality, whereas the abstract universal does not.

What this means can be seen by looking at the examples Hegel gives of each kind of universal, particularly as these are presented in his discussion of the hierarchy of judgements and syllogisms.<sup>36</sup> At the most basic level of the qualitative judgement and the qualitative syllogism,<sup>37</sup> the universal is an accidental property of an individual, which fails to differentiate it from other individuals:

When we say: ‘This rose is red’, the copula ‘is’ implies that subject and predicate agree with one another. But of course, the rose, being something concrete, is not merely red; on the contrary, it also has a scent, a definite form, and all manner of other features, which are not contained within the predicate ‘red’. On the other hand, the predicate, being something abstractly universal, does not belong merely to this subject. For there are other flowers, too, and other objects altogether that are also red.<sup>38</sup>

Thus, with a universal such as ‘red’, there is a clear distinction we can draw between the universal and the individual that possesses that property, and that universal and the other properties it possesses, so there is no dialectical unity here between these elements. At the next level, in the judgement and syllogism of reflection, we get a closer interrelation: for here we predicate properties of individuals that we take to belong to other individuals of the same kind, where being of this kind then comes to be seen as *essential* to the individual, and where some properties are seen as essential to any member of the kind. Thus, in the case of a judgement such as ‘All men are mortal’, we treat being a man as an essential property of each individual man, and not a mere feature that these individuals happen to have in common, such as possessing earlobes.<sup>39</sup> Here, then, we have a closer interconnection between the universal and the individual, in so far as the universal is now seen as an essential property of the individual; and we also have a closer connection between the universal and the particular properties that make

<sup>36</sup>For the sake of simplicity and brevity, I deal with the hierarchy of judgements and syllogisms together, and so have not here explicitly mentioned ‘the judgement of the concept’ (*Das Urteil des Begriffs*), which has no corresponding syllogism, and forms the transition from the level of judgements to that of syllogisms.

<sup>37</sup>Or the judgement and syllogism of existence (*Dasein*) as they are called in the *Science of Logic*.

<sup>38</sup>Hegel, *Encyclopaedia Logic*, §172 Addition, p. 250 (where the translators use ‘object’ as their rendering of ‘*Gegenstand*’ as opposed to ‘*Objekt*’):

Wenn wir sagen: »diese Rose ist rot«, so liegt in der Kopula »ist«, daß Subjekt und Prädikat miteinander übereinstimmen. Nun ist aber die Rose als ein Konkretes nicht bloß rot, sonder sie duftet auch, hat eine bestimmte Form und vielerlei andere Bestimmungen, die in dem Prädikat »rot« nicht erhalten sind.

(*Werke*, Vol. VIII, p. 324)

<sup>39</sup>Cf. *ibid.*, §175 Addition, p. 253 [*Werke*, Vol. VIII, p. 327].

something an individual, because it is only qua individual of a certain *kind* that the individual has these properties, and not as a ‘bare’ individual:

[I]t would not make sense to assume that Caius might perhaps be brave, learned, etc., and yet not be a man. The single human is what he is in particular, only insofar as he is, first of all, human as such, and within the universal; and this universal is not just something over and above the other abstract qualities or mere determinations of reflection, but is rather what permeates and includes within itself everything particular.<sup>40</sup>

This then leads to the judgement and syllogism of necessity, where the particular properties that distinguish one individual from another (e.g. this straight line from this curved line) are seen as different manifestations of a shared substance universal (linearity) by virtue of being different particularizations of the way that universals can be (lines are either straight or curved). Therefore, not only do we see how universality is essential to particularity (Caius can only be a particular individual if he is a man); we also see how particularity is essential to universality (Caius cannot be a ‘man in general’, but must be a determinate example of a man, whose differences from other men nonetheless do not prevent him exemplifying the same universal ‘man’).<sup>41</sup> At this point, Hegel says, we have arrived at the

<sup>40</sup>Ibid., translation modified:

... es keinen Sinn haben würde, anzunehmen, Gajus könnte etwa auch nicht Mensch, aber doch tapfer, gelehrt usw. sein. Was der einzelne Mensch im Besonderen ist, das ist er nur insofern, als er vor allen Dingen Mensch als solcher ist und im Allgemeinen ist, und dies Allgemeine ist nicht nur etwas außer und neben anderen abstrakten Qualitäten oder bloßen Reflexionsbestimmungen, sondern vielmehr das alles Besondere Durchdringende und in sich Beschließende.

(*Werke*, Vol. VIII, p. 327)

Cf. Hegel, *Science of Logic*, pp. 36–7:

[E]ach human being though infinitely unique is so primarily because he is a *man*, and each individual animal is such an individual primarily because it is an animal: if this is true, then it would be impossible to say what such an individual could still be if its foundation were removed, no matter how richly endowed the individual might be with other predicates, if, that is, this foundation can equally be called a predicate like the others.

(... wie jedes menschliche Individuum, [ob]zwar ein unendlich eigentümliches, das Prius aller seiner Eigentümlichkeit darin, *Mensch* zu sein, in sich hat, wie jedes einzelne Tier das Prius, *Tier* zu sein, so wäre nicht zu sagen, was, wenn diese Grundlage aus dem mit noch so vielfachen sonstigen Prädikaten Ausgerüsteten weggenommen würde, ob sie gleich wie die anderen ein Prädikat genannt werden kann, – was so ein Individuum noch sein sollte.)

(*Werke*, Vol. V, p. 26)

<sup>41</sup>Cf. Hegel, *Encyclopaedia Logic*, §24 Addition, pp. 56–7:

[I]n speaking of a definite animal, we say that it is [an] ‘animal.’ ‘Animal as such’ cannot be pointed out; only a definite animal can ever be pointed at. ‘The animal’ does not exist; on the contrary, this expression refers to the universal nature of single animals, and each existing animal is something that is much more concretely

Concept,<sup>42</sup> and the universal as it is now envisaged is truly concrete, in the following respects:

1. It is not merely a property, in the sense of being a way an individual may be: rather, it is *what* the individual *is*, in so far as that individual is an instance of that kind of thing; it is therefore a substance universal (e.g. ‘man’ or ‘rose’) and not a property universal (e.g. ‘red’ or ‘tall’).<sup>43</sup>
2. It supports generic propositions, such as statements of natural law (‘human beings are rational agents’) and normative statements (‘because this person is irrational, he is a poor example of a human being’); these are therefore to be distinguished from universally quantified statements (‘all human beings have earlobes’, ‘all swans are white’), which tell us about the shared characteristics of a group of individuals, rather than the characteristics of the kind to which the individuals belong (men qua men are rational).<sup>44</sup>

determinate, something particularized. But ‘to be animal,’ the kind considered as the universal, pertains to the determinate animal and constitutes its determinate essentiality. If we were to deprive a dog of its animality we could not say what it is. Things as such have a persisting, inner nature, and an external thereness. They live and die, come to be and pass away; their essentiality, their universality, is the kind, and this cannot be interpreted merely as something held in common.

(... wenn wir von einem bestimmten Tiere sprechen, wir sagen, es sei *Tier*. Das *Tier als solches* ist nicht zu zeigen, sondern nur immer ein bestimmtes. *Das Tier* existiert nicht, sondern ist die allgemeine Natur der einzelnen Tiere, und jedes existierende Tier ist ein viel konkreter Bestimmtes, ein Besonderes. Aber *Tier zu sein*, die Gattung als des Allgemeine, gehört dem bestimmten Tier an und macht seine bestimmte Wesentlichkeit aus. Nehmen wir das Tiersein vom Hunde weg, so wäre nicht zu sagen, was er sei. Die Dinge überhaupt haben eine bleibende, innere Natur und ein äußerliches Dasein. Sie leben und sterben, entstehen und vergehen; ihre Wesentlichkeit, ihre Allgemeinheit ist die Gattung, und diese ist nicht bloß als ein Gemeinschaftliches aufzufassen.)

(*Werke*, Vol. VIII, p. 82)

<sup>42</sup>Cf. *ibid.*, §177 Addition, p. 255: ‘it is the Concept that forms the content of the judgement henceforth’ [‘und [der Begriff] ist es, welcher nunmehr den Inhalt des Urteils bildet’, *Werke*, Vol. VIII, p. 330].

<sup>43</sup>Cf. Hegel, *Philosophy of Mind*, §456 Addition, p. 209, where Hegel distinguishes the genus as a concrete universal, from the particular properties of the individual:

This common element is either any one *particular* side of the object raised to the form of *universality*, such as, for example, in the rose, the red colour; or the *concrete universal*, the genus, for example, in the rose, the plant.

(Dies Gemeinsame ist entweder irgendeine in die *Form* der *Allgemeinheit* erhobene *besondere* Seite des Gegenstandes, wie z. B. an der Rose die *rote Farbe*, oder *das konkret Allgemeine*, die *Gattung*, z. B. an der Rose die *Pflanze*.)

(*Werke*, Vol. X, p. 266)

<sup>44</sup>Cf. Hegel, *Science of Logic*, 649–50:

[With the judgement of necessity] The subject has thus stripped off the form determination of the judgement of reflection which passed from *this* through *some* to *allness*; instead of *all men* we now have to say *man*... *What belongs to all the individuals of a genus belongs to the genus by its nature*, is an immediate consequence and the expression of what we have seen, that the subject, for example *all men*, strips off its form determination, and *man* is to take its place. This intrinsic and explicit connection constitutes the basis of a new judgement, the *judgement of necessity*.

3. It can be exemplified in individuals which have different properties, so that there need be nothing *further* in common between these individuals than the fact they exemplify the same concrete universal (the way in which one individual is a man may be different from the way in which another individual is a man).<sup>45</sup>

Thus, having begun with a characterization of the Concept as the dialectical interrelation of universality, particularity and individuality, Hegel has proceeded through a discussion of the types of judgement and syllogism to lead us back to the Concept and this interrelation, by moving from abstract to concrete universality. I take this to be vital to Hegel's conception of the concrete universal: whereas 'the abstract universal . . . is opposed to the particular and the individual', the concrete universal is not. We can now see

(Das Subjekt hat insofern die Formbestimmung des Reflexionsurteils, welche vom *Diesen* durch *Einiges* zur *Allheit* hindurchging, abgestreift; statt »alle Menschen« ist nunmehr zu sagen »der Mensch«. . .) »Was allen Einzelnen einer Gattung zukommt, kommt durch ihre Natur der Gattung zu« – ist eine unmittelbare Konsequenz und der Ausdruck dessen, was sich vorhin ergab, daß das Subjekt, z. B. *alle Menschen*, seine Formbestimmung abstreift und *der Mensch* dafür zu sagen ist. – Dieser an und für sich seiende Zusammenhang macht die Grundlage eines neuen Urteils aus, – *des Urteils der Notwendigkeit.*)

(*Werke*, VI, pp. 333–5)

<sup>45</sup>Cf. Hegel, *Encyclopaedia Logic*, §163 Addition, p. 240:

When people speak of the Concept, they ordinarily have only abstract universality in mind, and consequently the Concept is usually also defined as a general notion. We speak in this way of the 'concept' of colour, or of a plant, or of an animal, and so on; and these concepts are supposed to arise by omitting the particularities through which the various colours, plants, animals, etc., are distinguished from one another, and holding fast to what they have in common. This is the way in which the understanding apprehends the Concept, and the feeling that such concepts are hollow and empty, that they are mere schemata and shadows, is justified. What is universal about the Concept is indeed not just something common against which the particular stands on its own; instead the universal is what particularizes (specifies) itself, remaining at home with itself in its other, in unclouded clarity.

(Wenn vom Begriff gesprochen wird, so ist es gewöhnlich nur die abstrakte Allgemeinheit, welche man dabei vor Augen hat, und der Begriff pflegt dann auch wohl [als] eine allgemeine Vorstellung definiert zu werden. Man spricht demgemäß vom Begriff der Farbe, der Pflanze, des Tieres usw., und diese Begriffe sollen dadurch entstehen, daß bei Hinweglassung des Besonderen, wodurch sich die verschiedenen Farben, Pflanzen, Tiere usw. voneinander unterscheiden, das denselben Gemeinschaftliche festgehalten werde. Dies ist die Weise, wie der Verstand den Begriff auffaßt, und das Gefühl hat recht, wenn es solche Begriffe für hohl und leer, für bloße Schemen und Schatten erklärt. Nun aber ist das Allgemeine des Begriffs nicht bloß ein Gemeinschaftliches, welchem gegenüber das Besondere seinen Bestand für sich hat, sondern vielmehr das sich selbst Besondernde (Spezifizierende) und in seinem Anderen in ungetrübter Klarheit bei sich selbst Bleibende.)

(*Werke*, Vol. VIII, pp. 311–12)

what Hegel means by this claim: A rose is not an individual rose by virtue of exemplifying the abstract universal 'red', whereas it is an individual rose by virtue of exemplifying the concrete universal 'rose' – so the latter is dialectically related to individuality in the way the former is not; and it exemplifies the abstract universal 'red' in the same way as other red things, whereas it exemplifies the concrete universal 'rose' differently from other roses, in so far as some roses are scented and others are not, some are evergreen and others are not, etc. – so the latter is dialectically related to particularity in the way the former is not. Thus, whereas it may appear that we can conceive of 'red' in abstraction from individuality and particularity, we cannot conceive of 'rose' in this manner, so that this kind of universality involves 'the totality of the Concept' (i.e. the other 'moments' of particularity and individuality) in the way that an abstract universal does not.

Taken in this way, Hegel's position can be viewed as a distinctive contribution to the metaphysical discussion concerning universals (though with echoes of other positions in the tradition, particularly Aristotle's). The trouble with abstract universals like 'red', Hegel argues, is that instances of such universals are not individuals in themselves, so that individuals are reduced to 'bundles' of such universals, while difficulties in individuating these bundles lead to the 'substratum' view of objects: but because this substratum is 'bare' (i.e. property-less), it is hard to see how it can do the individuating job required of it. However, if we recognize that there are also concrete universals such as 'man', we will avoid these problems: for, while instances of 'red' are not individuals, instances of substance universals such as 'man' are; but for this to be the case, it must be possible to exemplify a universal such as 'man' in many different ways, such that each of us can be a man uniquely, in a way that constitutes our individuality. Hegel thus offers a way of solving the problem of individuation, without appealing either to the idea of a 'bare individual' or to trope theory (according to which the universal as it is instantiated in different individuals is not identical between them, but is a distinct particular in each): while there is nothing more to the individual than the universals it exemplifies, those universals are a combination of property and substance universals, so that it is qua man that I have the particular set of properties that make me into an individual, not as a bare 'this'. Unless we recognize Hegel's way of drawing a distinction between abstract and concrete universals, this way of solving the problem is something we will miss.

Hegel's doctrine of the concrete universal may therefore be summarized as follows: the individual is no more than an instantiation of universals (there are no 'bare' individuals); but the universals that constitute the individual are not just property universals, as these just tell us what attributes the individual has, not what the individual *is* (so the 'bundle view' is false). The substance universals which constitute the nature of the individual qua individual do not exist in the abstract, but only as particularized through property universals, and thus as instantiated in the form of individuals

(so Platonism is false).<sup>46</sup> Therefore, starting from any one of the categories of the Concept (universality, particularity, individuality), this category can only be made intelligible in the light of the other two: individuality is constituted by the particularized substance universal (as an individual, I am a man with a determinate set of properties that distinguish me from other men); the substance universal exists only in individuals, through its particularization (the universal 'man' exists *in rebus*, as instantiated in *different* men); and particularity is the differentiation of a substance universal, whereby it constitutes an individual (it is qua man that I have the properties that distinguish me from other men). It is the dialectical interconnection between the three categories which Hegel characterizes as 'development', and which he thinks we can obtain only when we conceive of the universal as 'concrete' rather than as merely 'abstract', as only then will we be able to distinguish between substance and property universals in the way that is required.

Now, if the account I have presented here adequately captures the force of Hegel's view of the concrete universal, it should be clear why I earlier denied that this doctrine commits Hegel to any sort of holistic conception, of the kind favoured by the British Idealists. While the Concept, as the interrelation of universality, particularity and individuality, has a holistic structure, in the sense that (as we have seen) each 'moment' is claimed to be

<sup>46</sup>In his early work *Ethical Studies*, Bradley seems to have made just this the basis of his conception of the concrete universal, before he came to the more problematic position discussed in section I: see *Ethical Studies*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn, revised (Oxford, 1927) 162, where he speaks of the 'the will which is above ourselves' as a universal which

is not abstract, since it belongs to its essence that it should be realized, and it has no real existence except in and through its particulars. The good will (for morality) is meaningless, if, whatever else it be, it be not the will of living finite beings. It is a concrete universal, because it not only is above but is within and throughout its details, and is so far only as they are.

Cf. G. W. F. Hegel, *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*, translated by H. B. Nisbet, edited by Allen W. Wood (Cambridge, 1991), §260, p. 282:

[In the state] the universal does not attain validity or fulfilment without the interest, knowledge, and volition of the particular, and . . . individuals do not live as private persons merely for these particular interests without at the same time directing their will to a universal end and acting in conscious awareness of this end.

(. . . so daß weder das Allgemeine ohne das besondere Interesse, Wissen und Wollen gelte und vollbracht werde, noch daß die Individuen bloß für das letztere als Privatpersonen leben und nicht zugleich in und für das Allgemeine wollen und eine dieses Zwecks bewußte Wirksamkeit haben.)

(*Werke*, Vol. VII, p. 407)

Even here, however, Bradley's position begins to take a holistic turn, by way of an organicist analogy, where Bradley continues:

It is the life which can live only in and by them, as they are dead unless within it; it is the whole soul which lives so far as the body lives, which makes the body a living body, and which without the body is as unreal an abstraction as the body without it. It is an organism and a moral organism; and it is conscious self-realization, because only by the will of its self-conscious members can the moral organism give itself reality.

only intelligible in relation to the others and through the others, and while the substance universal characterizes the individual as a whole in a way that unifies its particular properties, there is no suggestion here that individuals *as such* are interrelated by the universal, in the manner of Bradley's red-haired men. When Royce writes that '[the universal 'man'] is thus *konkret* in two senses, namely, in so far as in it all men are together, and in so far as through it all *Qualitäten* of each man are united',<sup>47</sup> I would accept only the second of these senses as being part of Hegel's conception of the concrete universal, and not the first. It would seem, then, that even if previously (in section I) it was possible to interpret their position in such a way that there was no divergence between Hegel's position on the concrete universal and that of the British Idealists, there is a genuine divergence here.

#### IV

It might be said, however, that my argument in the previous section exaggerates the contrast between Hegel and the British Idealists on this issue, and that this can be seen by looking at the role both gave to the concrete universal in their political philosophies, where it was used by both Hegel and the British Idealists to the same effect – to argue for their organic or holistic view of the state. It can be argued that this holistic conception of the concrete universal underpins the British Idealist's organic conception of the state, whereby all individuals within the community are said to embody a common universal that makes them into parts of a whole; and, it might therefore be argued, Hegel's social holism (which he and the British Idealists could be said to share) has a similar basis in this holistic model of the concrete universal.<sup>48</sup>

That the British Idealists based their picture of the unity of the state on something like this holistic conception of the concrete universal is suggested in several of their writings (although perhaps not as explicitly or strongly as some of their critics have generally assumed); so, for example, in his (in)famous discussion of 'the English nation' in Essay V of *Ethical Studies*,

<sup>47</sup>Royce, *The Spirit of Modern Philosophy*, 501.

<sup>48</sup>For a classic account along these lines, which attributes the social holism of the British Idealists to the holistic model of the concrete universal that is said to be found in Hegel, see L. T. Hobhouse, *The Metaphysical Theory of the State* (London, 1918), esp. pp. 62–6, where Hobhouse distinguishes this sort of position from his own:

We are contending for individuality, for the irreducible distinction between self and others, and we have met some of the arguments directed against that distinction. But now we have admitted a 'universal' running through thousands and millions of selves. This admission, according to the idealist, will be fatal to the separateness which we have maintained. The universal for him unites the instances which fall under it just in the manner which we dispute . . . We come, therefore, to that theory of the universal which, as we said above, underlines the whole question. This theory is due to Hegel. (ibid., 62)

Bradley appears to contrast the ‘individualism’ that he rejects with a more holistic model of a community like England, on the grounds that there is an underlying common nature that unifies its citizens into a whole:

If we suppose then [as Bradley has argued] that the results of the social life of the race are present in a latent and potential form in the child, can we deny that they are common property? Can we assert that they are not an element of sameness in all? Can we say that the individual is this individual, because he is exclusive, when, if we deduct from him what he includes, he loses characteristics which make him himself, and when again he does include what the others include, and therefore does (how can we escape the consequences?) include in some sense the others also, just as they include him? By himself, then, what are we to call him? I confess I do not know, unless we name him a theoretical attempt to isolate what can not be isolated; and that, I suppose, has, out of our heads, no existence. But what he is really, and not in mere theory, can be described only as the specification or particularization of that which is common, which is the same amid diversity, and without which the ‘individual’ would be so other than he is that we could not call him the same.<sup>49</sup>

Here Bradley seems to be using the idea that each individual exemplifies something common as part of their essential nature (‘the social life of the race’) to underpin his social holism (his view that ‘the ‘individual’ apart from the community is an abstraction’<sup>50</sup>), in a way that could well be taken to be Hegelian; thus, in so far as Bradley’s view expresses the characteristically holistic view of the concrete universal, so it could be argued that Hegel’s position has a similar basis.

Likewise, in *The Philosophical Theory of the State*, Bosanquet argues that ‘the social whole’ has ‘the nature of a continuous self-identical being,

<sup>49</sup>Bradley, *Ethical Studies*, 170–1.

<sup>50</sup>*Ibid.*, 173. Cf. also *ibid.*, 168–9:

The ‘individual’ man, the man into whose essence his community with others does not enter, who does not include relations to others in his very being, is, we say, a fiction, and in the lights of facts we have to examine him . . . It is, I believe, a matter of fact that at birth the child of one race is not the same as a child of another; that in the children of the one race there is a certain identity, a developed or undeveloped national type, which may be hard to recognize, or which at present may even be unrecognizable, but which nevertheless in some form will appear. If that be the fact, then again we must say that one English child is in some points, though perhaps it does not as yet show itself, the same as another. His being is so far common to him with others; he is not a mere ‘individual’.

It should perhaps be remarked that when he came to revisit *Ethical Studies* in 1924, Bradley came to see that what is held in common is perhaps not best thought of along racial lines, commenting in his notes on the paragraph we have just quoted: ‘Perhaps, but “race” and “nationality” are not conterminous. This paragraph can hardly stand without large qualification. How far is identity of race an effective bond of union?’

pervading a system of differences and realized only in them',<sup>51</sup> on the grounds that individuals within the state are 'the true particularisation of the human universal':<sup>52</sup> that is, they are each different types of human being (doctors, workmen, architects and so on), which makes them aspects of the more general kind, which cannot be embodied individually but only collectively. Bosanquet uses this idea of 'the human universal' to argue that on the one hand individuals or groups of particular types of individual cannot ultimately be opposed to one another,<sup>53</sup> and that individuals cannot ultimately be isolated from each other.<sup>54</sup>

It may thus appear that for British Idealists such as Bradley and Bosanquet, their holistic view of the concrete universal (as being, in Royce's words, 'a perfectly concrete whole' in which individuals are 'embraced') provides part of the background to their social holism; and in so far as Hegel is also a social holist, can it not also be argued that his social holism incorporates a holistic conception of the concrete universal in a similar manner? If so, this would imply that my analysis of Hegel's position in the previous section is mistaken.

In fact, I think that even in the case of the British Idealists, it is less clear that the holistic model of the concrete universal straightforwardly underpins their social holism in the way that this objection assumes; but whatever the rights and wrongs of that interpretative issue (which we cannot go into fully here), I think that in the case of Hegel, no such role for the holistic model of the concrete universal can be found. While I think that it is indeed true that Hegel is a social holist in a way that involves his conception of the Concept, and thus his account of universality, particularity and individuality, this is nonetheless *not* a holism based on the idea that individuals form parts of a totality because they share some common nature that holds them together into a whole: there is consequently no place here for this holistic conception of the concrete universal. As I see it, the key to Hegel's holism with regard to the relations of individuals to the state lies in his account of the *will*, where individuals are brought into unity through the structure of the will, rather than any underlying universal nature (such as 'Englishness' or 'humanity'), that holds them together qua individuals of the same kind.<sup>55</sup>

<sup>51</sup>Bernard Bosanquet, *The Philosophical Theory of the State' and Related Essays*, reprint edition, edited by Gerald F. Gaus and William Sweet (South Bend, Indiana, 2001) 174.

<sup>52</sup>*Ibid.*, 176.

<sup>53</sup>*Cf. ibid.*, 169:

Assuming, indeed, that all the groupings are organs of a single pervading life, we find it incredible that there should ultimately be irreconcilable opposition between them.

That they should contradict one another is not more or less possible than that human nature should be at variance with itself.

<sup>54</sup>*Cf. ibid.*, 175: '[A]ctual individuals are not ultimate or equal embodiments of the true particulars of the social universal. We thus see once more that the given individual is only in making, and that his reality may lie largely outside him'.

<sup>55</sup>The case for arguing that the social holism of the British Idealists is also not best seen as being grounded in the holistic model of the concrete universal would also begin here, with the role

Hegel's crucial discussion of the will can be found in the 'Introduction' to the *Philosophy of Right*, §§5–7:

The will contains ( $\alpha$ ) the element of *pure indeterminacy* or of the 'I's pure reflection into itself, in which every limitation, every content... is dissolved. This is the limitless infinity of *absolute abstraction* or *universality*, the pure thinking of oneself... ( $\beta$ ) In the same way, 'I' is the transition from undifferentiated indeterminacy to *differentiation, determination*, and the *positing* of a determinacy as a content and object... Through this positing of itself as something *determinate*, 'I' steps into existence [*Dasein*] in general – the absolute moment of the *finitude* or *particularization* of the 'I... ( $\gamma$ ) The will is the unity of both these moments – *particularity* reflected into *itself* and thereby restored to *universality*. It is *individuality* [*Einzelheit*], the *self-determination* of the 'I', in that it posits itself as the negative of itself, that is, as *determinate* and *limited*, and at the same time remains with itself [*bei sich*], that is, in its *identity with itself* and universality; and in this determination, it joins together with itself alone... This is the *freedom* of the will, which constitutes the concept or substantiality of the will, its gravity, just as gravity constitutes the substantiality of a body.<sup>56</sup>

In very brief terms, I take Hegel's idea here to be this: as a subject, I may view myself and my will in two ways that are at first apparently opposed to each other: on the one hand, I can abstract from all my particular projects and concerns, and see myself in purely universal terms, as just an 'I' or universal subject, not tied to anything determinate, but able to view things from an utterly universal point of view; but if I do so, I will lose my will, for to act is always to act in some particular way or other, which thus can never feel like a proper expression of my universality, so that if I *do* act, I must always destroy the product of my action in a cycle of negation – or at least feel that that

they give to the *will* in underpinning their holism, in a way that I will now ascribe to Hegel: see, for example, Bosanquet's discussion of the will in Chap IX of *The Philosophical Theory of the State*.

<sup>56</sup>Hegel, *Philosophy of Right*, §§5–7, pp. 37–41

Der Wille enthält  $\alpha$ ) das Element der *reinen Unbestimmtheit* oder der reinen Reflexion des Ich in sich, in welcher jede Beschränkung, jeder... Inhalt aufgelöst ist; die schrankenlose Unendlichkeit der *absoluten Abstraktion* oder *Allgemeinheit*, das reine Denken seiner selbst...  $\beta$ ) Ebenso ist *Ich* das Übergehen aus unterschiedsloser Unbestimmtheit zur *Unterscheidung, Bestimmen* und *Setzen* einer Bestimmtheit als eines Inhalts und Gegenstands... Durch dies Setzen seiner selbst als eines *bestimmten* tritt *Ich* in das *Dasein* überhaupt; – das absolute Moment der *Endlichkeit* oder *Besonderung* des Ich...  $\gamma$ ) Der Wille ist die Einheit dieser beiden Momente; die *in sich* reflektierte und dadurch zur *Allgemeinheit* zurückgeführte *Besonderheit*; – *Einzelheit*; die *Selbstbestimmung* des Ich, in einem sich als das Negative seiner selbst, nämlich als *bestimmt, beschränkt* zu setzen und bei sich, d. i. in seiner *Identität mit sich* und *Allgemeinheit* zu bleiben, und in der Bestimmung, sich nur mit sich selbst zusammenzuschließen... Dies ist die *Freiheit* des Willens, welche seine Begriff oder Substantialität, seine Schwere so ausmacht wie die Schwere die Substantialität des Körpers.

product is not an expression of the ‘real (universal) me’.<sup>57</sup> On the other hand, I can take myself to be nothing but a set of particular projects and concerns, and so identify myself fully with what makes me not just a pure ‘I’, but the particular person I am, and the activities of the will that stem from that (I did this because I am a father, a husband, a teacher, etc.). However, because I can also go back to the universal standpoint of the ‘I’, it may always come to seem to me that these particular concerns and projects are merely arbitrary and ‘given’, and so not worthy expressions of what my will should be as something more universal (why did I do this to help my children, rather than children more generally?). I take it that Hegel is saying in §7 that this oscillation can be brought to a satisfactory end when we see our will as equally expressing *both* universality *and* particularity, such that although my will is expressive of my particular concerns and projects, these are not *merely* mine, but can be recognized as valid from a more universal perspective that is not just mine, although not one that is *so* universal, that it regards any particular action by an individual as compromising to that individual (in caring for my children, I am not just following my private interests and desires, but fulfilling a role that fits into a wider framework, whereby a more universal good can also be realized, and which could not be realized without the particular concerns of individuals for their own children).

In my view it is essentially this picture of the will that takes Hegel towards his social holism: for, as the *Philosophy of Right* argues, it is ultimately only within the state that the will can be properly realized in this form, for it is only within the state that there is the right connection between the general and individual interest, in a way that will enable us to balance the pull of universality on the one hand and particularity on the other, into a stable picture of the individual will. Thus, in Hegel’s state, individuals are part of an interconnected system of mutual dependence regulated for the general good, so that in acting as a particular will (father, teacher, etc.) my will feeds into a system that also realizes the good of society as a whole, which raises my actions beyond ‘mere’ particularity and adds to them an element of universality, while this universality is not ‘abstract’ because it can only be realized through each of us taking on a series of determinate projects, thereby harmonizing both ‘moments’ of the will in the way Hegel thinks is required, in a way that is characteristic of the concrete universal.<sup>58</sup> So,

<sup>57</sup>I have argued elsewhere that this issue is at the heart of Hegel’s diagnosis of the way in which the French Revolution became the Terror: see Robert Stern, *Hegel and the ‘Phenomenology of Spirit’* (London: Routledge, 2002) 157–68.

<sup>58</sup>Cf. Hegel, *Philosophy of Right*, §24, pp. 54–5, where Hegel refers to his account of universality in the *Encyclopaedia Logic* as part of his discussion of the will, where he says that the free will ‘permeates its determination and is identical with itself in this determination’ (‘durch seine Bestimmung hindurchgehende Allgemeine, das in ihr mit sich identisch ist’, *Werke*, Vol. VII, p. 75) – that is, a will that has a particular content or determination, but for which that determination is not a limitation on itself, but an expression of its nature (just as Caius is not a ‘limitation’ on the universal man, but a proper realization of it).

Hegel's social philosophy is indeed holistic, in the sense that for him the structure of the individual's will when rightly constituted has 'moments' of universality and particularity, and these moments must be properly realized for the individual to be free, which is only possible (Hegel believes) within a shared social project;<sup>59</sup> but this is different from saying that what unifies individuals within the state is some property or universal essence belonging to them all, that as a result ties them together into a social whole. Thus, in stemming from Hegel's social conception of the will, his social holism is not

<sup>59</sup>Cf. *ibid.*, §260, p. 282:

The state is the actuality of concrete freedom. But *concrete freedom* requires that personal individuality and its particular interests should reach their full *development* and gain *recognition of their right* for itself (within the system of the family and of civil society), and that they should, on the one hand, *pass over* of their own accord into the interest of the universal, and on the other, knowingly and willingly acknowledge this universal interest even as their own *substantial spirit*, and *actively pursue it* as their *ultimate end*. The effect of this is that the universal does not attain validity or fulfilment without the interest, knowledge, and volition of the particular, and that individuals do not live as private persons merely for these particular interests without at the same time directing their will to a universal end and acting in conscious awareness of this end.

Der Staat ist die Wirklichkeit der konkreten Freiheit; die *konkrete Freiheit* aber besteht darin, daß die persönliche Einzelheit und deren besondere Interessen sowohl ihre vollständige *Entwicklung* und die *Anerkennung ihres Rechts* für sich (im Systeme der Familie und der bürgerlichen Gesellschaft) haben, als sie durch sich selbst in das Interesse des Allgemeinen teils *übergehen*, teils mit Wissen und Willen dasselbe und zwar als ihren eigenen *substantiellen Geist* anerkennen und für dasselbe als ihren *Endzweck tätig* sind, so daß weder das Allgemeine ohne das besondere Interesse, Wissen und Wollen gelte und vollbracht werde, noch daß die Individuen bloß für das letztere als Privatpersonen leben und nicht zugleich in und für das Allgemeine wollen und eine dieses Zwecks bewußte Wirksamkeit haben.

(*Werke*, Vol. VII, pp. 406–7)

Cf. also §308, p. 347:

The concrete state is *the whole, articulated into its particular circles*. Each member of the state is a *member* of an *estate* of this kind, and only in this objective determination can he be considered in relation to the state. His universal determination in general includes two moments, for he is a *private person* and at the same time a *thinking being* with consciousness and volition of the *universal*. But this consciousness and volition remain empty and lack *fulfilment* and actual *life* until they are filled with particularity, and this is [to be found in] a particular estate and determination. Otherwise, the individual remains a *generic category*, but only within the *next* generic category does he attain his *immanent universal actuality*.

(Der konkrete Staat ist das in *seiner besonderen Kreise gegliederte Ganze*; das Mitglied des Staates ist ein *Mitglied* eines solchen *Standes*; nur in dieser seiner objectiven Bestimmung kann es im Staate in Betracht kommen. Seine allgemeine Bestimmung überhaupt enthält das gedoppelte Moment, *Privatperson* und als *denkendes* ebenso sehr Bewußtsein und Wollen des *Allgemeinen* zu sein; dieses Bewußtsein und Wollen aber ist nur dann nicht leer, sondern *erfüllt* und wirklich *lebendig*, wenn es mit der *Besonderheit* – und diese ist der besondere Stand und Bestimmung – erfüllt ist; oder das Individuum ist *Gattung*, hat aber seine *immanente* allgemeine *Wirklichkeit* als *nächste Gattung*.)

(*Werke*, Vol. VII, p. 477)

based on any claim that this unity is grounded in some common nature that the individuals share, as on the holistic model of the concrete universal.

It might be argued, however, that in emphasizing the role that Hegel gives to the will, rather than anything like ‘Englishness’ or ‘humanity’, I have not yet shown that the holistic model of the concrete universal is not operative in his political philosophy: for (it could be said), does not this conception of the will involve attributing to individuals a will they possess in common, where it is this communality that is supposed to underpin their unity, much as the holistic model of the concrete universal suggests?

It is indeed true that the British Idealists have sometimes been interpreted in this way. For example, this is how Hobhouse appears to have understood Bosanquet’s social holism, where Hobhouse focuses on Bosanquet’s conception of the will, but adopts the holistic model of the concrete universal in doing so. Thus, he argues that for Bosanquet, because our ‘real will’ is supposed to be something shared and thus a universal, it makes us parts of a whole:

But when we pass from the conception of like persons or like selves to a corporate person or a common self, there is an inevitable transition from qualitative sameness to the sameness of continuity and numerical unity. The assumptions are (1) There is in me a real self, my real will, which is opposed to what I very often am. (2) This real will is what I ought to be as opposed to what I very often am. (3) There is in you a real will and in every other member of society a real will. All these real wills are what you and every other member of society ought to be. In quality and character these real wills are indistinguishable. They are therefore the same. (4) This sameness constitutes of all the real wills together one self.<sup>60</sup>

It might seem, then, that even if I am right to make the will central to Hegel’s political philosophy, this can be conceived of in a way that still involves the holistic model of the concrete universal, just as it does (Hobhouse claims) for an Idealist such as Bosanquet.

However, whatever the justice of this reading of Bosanquet,<sup>61</sup> it seems clear that it would involve a misunderstanding of Hegel’s position, and what constitutes the ‘universality’ of the will as he conceives it. For, as we have outlined, for Hegel the will contains a universal moment in so far as each of us can abstract from particular interests, where what underpins his holism is then the claim that we cannot prevent that abstraction becoming vicious except by seeing those interests as forming part of some general social good; this then provides the social context within which my interests and the actions that flow from them have a ‘universal’ as well as a ‘particular’ value.

<sup>60</sup>Hobhouse, *The Metaphysical Theory of the State*, 50.

<sup>61</sup>Hobhouse was of course a hostile witness: for a corrective, see Peter P. Nicholson, *The Political Philosophy of the British Idealists* (Cambridge, 1990) 205–221.

This way of moving from the structure of the will to a social holism is clearly very different from the sort of position envisaged by Hobhouse, and would thus seem to do without any appeal to the holistic conception of the concrete universal, of the kind that Hobhouse attributes to Bosanquet.

Even if this much is accepted, however, it might still be said that it cannot do full justice to the way in which Hegel speaks of the state in organic terms: for how can different individuals constitute the state as a kind of organism, unless there is ‘an element of sameness in all’, akin to the ‘single pervading life’<sup>62</sup> that flows through different organs of the body and makes them one? Does not this conception once more suggest that Hegel had a holistic view of the concrete universal, as precisely constituting this ‘element of sameness’?

It is important to note here, however, that the primary focus of Hegel’s discussion of the state in organic terms is the *political constitution* of the state. In this context, Hegel talks of the state as an organism not because it is a whole of which its individual citizens are parts,<sup>63</sup> but rather that the elements that make up the constitution of the state depend on one another in the way that the categories that comprise the Concept are dependent on one another.<sup>64</sup> Put very simply, this means that while the monarchy is a

<sup>62</sup>Bosanquet, *The Philosophical Theory of the State*, 169.

<sup>63</sup>Cf. Dudley Knowles’s recent discussion of Hegel’s organicism in his *Hegel and the ‘Philosophy of Right’* (London: Routledge, 2002), 323, where Knowles writes: ‘Citizens are “not parts, but members”, Hegel says (§286R), exploiting the primary sense of *Glied* as a bodily member or limb’. But, taken in context, it seems that Hegel is not talking here about individual citizens; for this context is a discussion of feudal monarchies where ‘vassals, pashas, etc.’ had a role in ‘political business’ and so formed part of the constitution of the state, but in an atomistic way, because ‘each part [of this political structure] maintains *itself alone*, and in so doing, it promotes only itself and not the others along with it, and has within itself the complete set of moments which it requires for independence and self-sufficiency’ (Hegel, *Philosophy of Right*, §286, p. 328 [‘So erhält und bringt jeder Teil, indem er sich erhält, *nur sich* und darin nicht zugleich die anderen hervor und hat zur unabhängigen Selbständigkeit alle Momente vollständig an ihm selbst’, *Werke*, Vol. VII, pp. 456–7]). In contrasting this structure with an organic one, Hegel is therefore speaking here about an organic view of *the constitutional parts* of the state, rather than of the state in relation to its individual citizens.

The only other place I know of in the *Philosophy of Right* where an organicist view of citizens in relation to the state might be found is the Addition to §270, where Hegel expresses the idea that ‘human beings should have respect for the state as a whole of which they are the branches’ (ibid., 303 [‘daß die Menschen Achtung vor dem Staat, vor diesem Ganzen, dessen Zweige sie sind, haben sollen’, *Werke*, Vol. VII, p. 430]). However, even here Hegel is not expressing so much his *own* view, but that of a position he is discussing, in the context of a consideration of the relation between the church and the state. The specific issue is the claim that ‘the state must be founded on religion’, where the proponent of this view may mean by this not that they can thereby be better oppressed by the state, but brought to have respect for it ‘as that whole of which they are branches’, which Hegel (not surprisingly) thinks is a better way of conceiving of the role of religion.

<sup>64</sup>Cf. ibid., §272 Addition, p. 307:

W]hile the powers of the state must certainly be distinguished, each must form a whole in itself and contain the other moments within it. When we speak of the distinct activities of these powers, we must not fall into the monumental error of taking this to mean that each power should exist independently and in abstraction; on the contrary, the powers should be distinguished only as moments of the concep.

manifestation of individuality, the executive is a manifestation of particularity, and the legislature is a manifestation of universality, each also embodies aspects of the other ‘moments’ (so, for example, the monarch acts as an individual, but in his person represents the universal interest, where that interest involves the interest of a state comprising different particular groups). Thus, the conception of the universal that Hegel is using here is concrete in the sense that it cannot be conceived as something separable from the categories of particularity and individuality, but not in the sense that it somehow ties together individuals into a totality, as might be suggested if we read Hegel as the British Idealists are sometimes read, as basing their social holism on the holistic model of the concrete universal.

## V

Looking at the accounts of the concrete universal associated with the British Idealists that we have considered so far, therefore, we have found little reason to take these accounts to be genuinely Hegelian; and while Hegel’s position could be said to have philosophical value in offering a potential solution to certain familiar metaphysical problems (concerning the question of individuation, or the relation between substances and their attributes, for example),<sup>65</sup> the conceptions of the concrete universal taken from the British Idealists that we have discussed up to now may only seem to be of interest to those few with a commitment to their characteristic philosophical views (such

(Die Gewalten des Staates müssen so allerdings unterschieden sein, aber jede muß an sich selbst ein Ganzes bilden und die anderen Momente in sich enthalten. Wenn man von der unterschiedenen Wirksamkeit der Gewalten spricht, muß man nicht in den ungeheuren Irrtum verfallen, dies so anzunehmen, als wenn jede Gewalt für sich abstract dastehen sollte, da die Gwalten vielmehr nur als Momente des Begriffs unterschieden sein sollen.)

(*Werke*, Vol. VII, pp. 434–5)

And §272, p. 305:

The constitution is rational in so far as the state *differentiates* and determines its activity within itself *in accordance with the nature of the concept*. It does so in such a way that *each* of the *powers* in question is in itself the *totality*, since each contains the other moments and has them active within it, and since all of them, as expressions of the differentiation of the concept, remain wholly within itself ideality and constitute nothing but *a single individual whole*.

(Die Verfassung ist vernünftig, insofern der Staat seine Wirksamkeit *nach der Natur des Begriffs* in sich *unterscheidet* und bestimmt, und zwar so, daß *jede* dieser *Gewalten* selbst in sich die *Totalität* dadurch ist, daß sie die anderen Momente in sich wirksam hat und enthält und daß sie, weil sie den Unterschied des Begriffs ausdrücken, schlechthin in seiner Idealität bleiben und nur *ein individuelles Ganzes* ausmachen)

(*Werke*, Vol. VII, p. 432)

<sup>65</sup>For further discussion, see my ‘Individual Existence and the Philosophy of Difference’, in *Oxford Handbook to Continental Philosophy*, edited by Brian Leiter and Michael Rosen (Oxford, 2007).

as ontological holism or monism). However, if we dig a little deeper, we will find a way to connect Hegel's position as I have outlined it to the thinking of some of the British Idealists, and to see that the questions and issues that drew them to the doctrine of the concrete universal in this properly Hegelian form are not as alien to us as may have appeared hitherto.

Where a doctrine of the concrete universal emerges that is close to the one I have attributed to Hegel, is in the way that some of the British Idealists sought to attack empiricist claims concerning 'the abstractness of thought'. This issue, which was of widespread concern, has several different aspects. The first is epistemological: thought has only a subordinate role to play in knowledge, because our primary engagement with the world comes directly through the senses, from which thought abstracts. The second is psychological: the general ideas through which we think about the world are generated via a process of abstraction from the simple ideas we acquire through sensible experience. The third is logical: logical thought involves ever more abstraction, as we move away from the content of our experience into higher and higher levels of generality. And the fourth might be termed 'existential': thought leads us into a realm of unreal abstractions, away from the concrete reality of lived experience and an immediate grasp of things in their unique individuality. To many of the Idealists, this conception of the abstractness of thought was mistaken; to quote a summary of their position: '[T]hought is essentially a process of concretion, not a process of abstraction from an experience which, as given, is already concrete'.<sup>66</sup> As we shall show, it is when addressing this issue that a number of the British Idealists<sup>67</sup> come closest to adopting the Hegelian doctrine of the concrete universal as characterized above, and in a way that shows that doctrine to have contemporary interest.

We can see most clearly how the attack on the thesis that thought involves abstraction enabled a properly Hegelian doctrine of the concrete universal to emerge by looking in some detail at one of the first British Idealists to launch such an attack, namely T. H. Green. Green outlines the abstractionist picture of thought, with its various problematic dimensions, as follows:

Give sensation this first inch, and it takes an ell. If sense gives a knowledge of properties, nothing remains for thought but to abstract and combine them, and it is vain then to re-assert for the data of thought, for its abstractions and 'mixed modes,' the dignity of the 'things themselves.' Thought has abdicated

<sup>66</sup>George H. Sabine, 'The Concreteness of Thought', *Philosophical Review*, 16 (1907) No. 2: 154-69, esp. p. 154.

<sup>67</sup>The question of whether Bradley is an exception here is too complex to be dealt with properly in what follows: for on the one hand, while Bradley may seem to be more insistent than other Idealist writers on the abstractive nature of thought, and thus more pessimistic about its capacity to grasp the unique individuality of reality, he nonetheless also seems to have shared their view that thought is required in order to give experience a particular content, where this once again relies on a non-abstractionist account of our concepts. For an enlightening discussion of these issues, see Phillip Ferreira, *Bradley and the Structure of Knowledge* (Albany, 1999), where 41-4 are particularly relevant to the themes of this paper.

its proper prerogatives. It has admitted that experience is something given to it from without, not that in which it comes to itself. It inevitably follows that in what it does for itself, when not simply receptive of experience, it is merely draining away in narrower and more remote channels the fulness of the real world. We cannot know by abstraction, for properties must be known before they can be abstracted. If thought, then, is a process of abstraction – as it is according to the Aristotelian logic – we think by other methods than we know. Thought, therefore, cannot give us knowledge, but only lead us away from it.<sup>68</sup>

The main focus of Green's attack on this picture is the 'popular philosophy' of 'Locke and his followers',<sup>69</sup> where abstraction was seen to play a role both in Locke's epistemology and his psychology. Beginning from a stock of simple ideas delivered by sensory perception, Locke argued that the mind can then form complex ideas by abstraction from more or less resembling simple ideas, where the complex idea lacks features which distinguish the latter from one another. This account thus makes sensory experience a prior and independent source of knowledge, to which thought is subordinate. It also allows Locke to adopt a nominalist or 'particularist' view of properties, kinds and relations: for Locke holds that at the level of the senses or simple ideas, what we experience is not identity, but merely resemblances; but when the mind comes to form complex ideas, the differences are abstracted away, so we come to believe that properties, kinds and relations are the same, and thus come to attribute universality to them to explain this, when in fact what we are explaining is a shadow of our capacity for abstraction, rather than a genuine feature of the world. On this basis, Locke can conclude that 'All things, that exist, [are] Particulars',<sup>70</sup> and it is only the abstractionist processes of thought that make us believe otherwise.

As is well known, Green believed that everything in this Lockean picture was mistaken, and that if accepted, it lead to disastrous philosophical results (illustrated, Green held, in the scepticism of Hume, who carried the Lockean programme through to its logical, but absurd, conclusions). Locke's essential error, Green argued, was that he took for granted a dualistic conception of feeling and thought, treating the former as a source of knowledge that was independent of and prior to the latter, on which we must rely to provide us with direct and immediate access to reality. Green held that this position had seemed intelligible to Locke because he thought our senses could provide us with experience of particular properties in the world and thus provide us with simple ideas corresponding to these properties, prior to thought's merely abstractive role in forming complex

<sup>68</sup>T. H. Green, 'The Philosophy of Aristotle', in *Works of Thomas Hill Green*, edited by R. L. Nettleship, 3 vols (London, 1885–1888), Vol. III, pp. 46–91, esp. pp. 61–2.

<sup>69</sup>Green, 'The Philosophy of Aristotle', 48.

<sup>70</sup>John Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, edited by Peter H. Nidditch (Oxford, 1975), Book III, Chapter III, §1, p. 409.

ideas; but, Green argued, without complex ideas, we could not pick out objects and relations, and thus our sense experience would not be of *properties* at all, but of sensations lacking the kind of content which Locke requires to make his abstractionist story intelligible. Thus, according to Green, there is no way Locke can coherently adopt his abstractionist account of thought: either Locke allows thought a role in providing experience with sufficient content from which abstraction might be possible, but then he must allow that thought does more than merely abstract; or he must confine thought's role to an abstractionist one, but then rob sensory experience of the kind of content needed to make abstraction possible. Green argues, therefore, that 'where [Locke] speaks of general ideas as formed by abstraction of certain qualities from real things, or of certain ideas from other ideas which accompany them in real existence', '[s]uch a notion of the really existing thing' cannot be arrived at via abstraction, because this something 'Locke [already] has before him' as without this notion, we could not have formed the idea of *qualities* from which the process of abstraction is meant to begin. Green makes this clear in his criticism of Locke's well-known account of how we form the complex idea of 'gold':

[Locke says] 'When some one first lit on a parcel of that sort of substance we denote by the word *gold* . . . its peculiar colour, perhaps, and weight were the first he abstracted from it, to make the complex idea of that species . . . another perhaps added to these the ideas of fusibility and fixedness . . . another its ductility and solubility in aqua regia. These, or part of these, put together, usually make the complex idea in men's minds of that sort of body we call *gold*'. (*An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, Bk II. Ch. xxxi. §. 9) Here the supposition is that a thing, multitudinously qualified, is given apart from any action of the understanding, which then proceeds to act in the way of successively detaching ('abstracting') these qualities and recombining them as the idea of a species. Such a recombination, indeed, would seem but wasted labour. The qualities are assumed to be already found by the understanding and found as in a thing; otherwise the understanding could not abstract them from it. Why should it then painfully put together in imperfect combination what has been previously been given to it complete? Of the complex idea which results from the work of abstraction, nothing can be said but a small part of what is predicable of the known thing which the possibility of such abstraction presupposes.<sup>71</sup>

Green thus holds that Locke's position is fundamentally incoherent, where this incoherence stems from the dualistic conception of thought and feeling which it adopts. For Green, thought cannot be conceived as making a

<sup>71</sup>T. H. Green, 'Introductions to Hume's "Treatise of Human Nature"', *Works*, Vol. I, pp. 1–371, esp. pp. 37–8.

separate contribution to our knowledge of the world from that of feeling, because both are equally required in order to have experience, a fact that Locke's abstractionist model obscures:

The 'sensible thing' thus reappears, no longer, however, as a 'sensible' but as a 'cogitable,' not as a complex of attributes, but as the emptiest of abstractions. The antithesis between thought, as that in which we are active, and experience, as that in which we are simply receptive, vanishes, for thought appears as a factor in experience even in its remotest germs. Thought again appears as a process of concretion, at least as much as of abstraction.<sup>72</sup>

Having sketched Green's general argument against abstractionism, how might this have led him to adopt a conception of the concrete universal that is more properly Hegelian than any we have so far discussed? I think we can see how, by looking at his early essay 'The Philosophy of Aristotle' (first published in the *North British Review* in September 1866), which was to lay the groundwork for much of his subsequent thought. Green begins that essay by first criticizing Locke, along the lines we have discussed; but he traces the source of Locke's position to one side of the intellectual legacy left by Plato and Aristotle, while arguing that another side of that legacy could have prevented anything like Lockean empiricism emerging, if it had been properly developed. Green therefore claims that 'we may distinguish two really inconsistent theories of knowledge running through Greek philosophy',<sup>73</sup> one with affinities to Locke's, and one antithetical to it and closer to his own; and the source of this inconsistency in their position lies in the fact that Plato and Aristotle saw universality in both abstract and concrete terms.

Thus, on the one hand, Green argues, Plato and Aristotle had a superficial view of universality, because they saw the universal in terms of the property or properties that enable us to group individuals into a class on the basis of their perceptible similarities – so, for example, on this view, 'the essence of an acid will be that it sets the teeth on edge, that being the obvious property by which the sensation is first defined in thought, and which is thus associated with its name'.<sup>74</sup> However, Green remarks, '[b]y the identification of the universal with a class, the true view of it is lost as soon as it is gained',<sup>75</sup> because then the universal can only come to seem accidental to the individual, and as such the latter is treated as ontologically distinct from the former, as a 'bare individual' accessible to the senses alone:

By such a process [the] emptiness [of the universal] becomes yet more empty, and meanwhile the individual thing is asserting its independence. Instead of

<sup>72</sup>Green, 'The Philosophy of Aristotle', 52.

<sup>73</sup>Ibid., 53.

<sup>74</sup>Ibid., 57.

<sup>75</sup>Ibid.

being regarded as that which becomes universal so soon as it is judged of or known, in virtue of the property under which it is known, it is connected with the universal as a thing with the class to which it belongs. In this position it is vain to deny its [i.e. the individual's] priority and independence. Thus individuals come to be regarded as one set of knowable things, universals another. But the 'sensible,' according to the ideal theory, is the merely individual. It is so because it is in no determinate relation to anything else, and therefore nothing positive. The mere individual, however, having by the wrong path just traced been raised to the position of a real entity, the 'sensible' is so raised likewise. The ideal theory has built again that which it destroyed, and the sensible thing becomes, as such, the determinate subject of properties.<sup>76</sup>

On this account, then, one side of the Platonic and Aristotelian picture of the universal is responsible for leading to the metaphysics of the 'bare individual' and to the priority of sensation over thought, where the argument behind this account is recognizably Hegelian: once our view of universality is 'abstract' and hence allows for the possibility that individuality might be something over and above universality, giving this individuality 'priority and independence', the notion of the 'bare individual' will inevitably emerge, and with it the idea of treating 'apprehension' as prior to and separable from 'comprehension', 'sensation' from 'thought'.<sup>77</sup> It is this side of the Platonic and Aristotelian position that Green sees as leading to the emergence of full-blown nominalism, and thus eventually to the Lockean position:

The fault of this crude 'realism,' it will be observed, whether Platonic, Aristotelian, or scholastic, is that it is virtually nominalism. It holds the universal to be real, but it finds the universal simply in the meaning of a name... [T]he realism of the ancient logic, taking for its reality the species denoted by a common noun, is doubly at fault. It makes its universal a class instead of a relation, and it takes as the essential attributes of the class those only which are connoted by its name, *i.e.* the most superficial. Having thus begun with a meagre conception as its first reality, it passes on in its process of abstraction to which is more meagre still, ending in that which has no properties at all.<sup>78</sup>

However, Green argues, there is another side to the Platonic and Aristotelian position, which suggests a different picture, and 'a more thorough and therefore truer idealism'.<sup>79</sup> This can be seen, Green claims, in Aristotle's theory of matter: for, while on the one hand Aristotle treats

<sup>76</sup>Ibid.

<sup>77</sup>Cf. the account of Hegel's argument concerning sense-certainty offered above, in section I.

<sup>78</sup>Green, 'The Philosophy of Aristotle', 60–1.

<sup>79</sup>Ibid., 62.

matter as the ‘substratum’ underlying the properties and relations of the individual, on the other hand he treats the individual as the particularization of the universal, so that the matter out of which the individual is formed is not inaccessible to thought:

According to [the first view], ‘matter’ is constituted by the individual things which ‘are nearest the sense,’ and from which thought abstracts the properties which constitute the ‘form’ or species. By a further abstraction of properties the ‘genus’ – ultimately the ‘summum genus’ – is arrived at, which thus stands at the end of the process farthest from ‘matter.’ In the ‘Metaphysics,’ on the other hand, the ‘summum genus’ itself appears as the ‘matter’ which is *formed* by successive *differentiae* till the most determinate complex of attributes has been reached. Here we see that matter has changed places.<sup>80</sup>

As a result of this turn-around, Green argues, ‘[t]he process of thought appears as one not of abstraction but of concretion’, for now the individual

is no longer a bare unit, but a unity of differences, a centre of manifold relations, a subject of properties. It is not an ‘abstract universal’, but it has an element of universality in virtue of which it can be brought into relation to all things else. Its universality is the condition of its particularisation.<sup>81</sup>

Despite what he takes to be the nominalistic tendencies of the Aristotelian position, therefore, Green also sees in it the seeds of something more like the conception we have found in Hegel, where he makes clear that he shares this conception, and that the correct picture is one that views universality and individuality as mutually dependent notions:

‘Substance,’ as the outward thing . . . is individual or exclusive of all things but itself; otherwise it would be no object of definite knowledge. But it is not *merely* individual. If it were, it would be, as it is sometimes presented to us by Aristotle, an indeterminate, and therefore unknowable ‘matter’ . . . It is an individual universalised through its particular relations or qualities. Here again the process may be reversed. If there is no universal element in things known, there can be no unity of knowledge or community of thought. But this universal is not merely such. If it were ‘ever the same,’ so as to be void of all distinction, like the shadowy goal of the Platonic dialectic, it would be, as it in turn is exhibited by Aristotle, the indeterminate and unknowable. It must be that which is the negation of all particular relations so as to be determined by the sum of them. In virtue of this negative relation, as identical with itself in exclusion of all things, it is individual. It is a universal individualized through its particularity. Thus we see that the *πρώτη οὐσία*, or individual substance,

<sup>80</sup>Ibid.

<sup>81</sup>Ibid., 63.

and the δευτέρα οὐσία, or essence constituted by general attributes, are not to be placed, as Aristotle placed them, over-against each other, as if one excluded, or even could be present without, the other. They are as necessarily correlative as subject and object, as the self and the world. Each, by its native energy, which is the hidden ‘spontaneity’ of thought, necessarily creates its opposite. Nor is one, as Aristotle supposed, in any special sense ‘matter,’ the other ‘form.’ Each, taken by itself, is matter, as the indeterminate and negation of the knowable. Each, again, so taken, is matter, as the ‘subject’ (ὕποκειμενον), receptive of a form – of a form, however, not imposed from without, but projected from within. Each, lastly, may be regarded either as a void ‘substratum,’ or as a complex of attributes, according as it is isolated or regarded in the realisation which it only attains by passing into its opposite.<sup>82</sup>

In a passage such as this, therefore, we have uncovered a conception of the universal employed by one of the British Idealists which I think has a claim to be viewed as genuinely Hegelian,<sup>83</sup> where the motivation behind it also connects to a recognizable set of epistemological concerns: for, what leads Green to claim that ‘an individual [is] universalised through its particular relations and qualities’, while ‘a universal [is] individualised through its particularity’ is not a commitment to holism or the metaphysics of the Absolute, but a rejection of the kind of metaphysical picture that might make empiricist claims concerning the ‘abstractness of thought’ in relation to the ‘concreteness of sense’ seem coherent.

Moreover, seen in the light of this issue, other prominent Idealists can also be viewed as being closer to the Hegelian conception of the concrete universal than was apparent hitherto. In Bosanquet, for example, concern with the ‘abstractness of thought’ was predominantly a question that involved the status of logic, as Passmore has observed:

The Idealist opponents of logic, Bosanquet argued, did not know what logic is. For them, Ward for example, logical thinking is the process of working towards ever emptier abstractions, departing from the concreteness of everyday life into a world of general formulae which completely fail to convey the richness and diversity of our everyday experiences. But to think of logic thus, Bosanquet protested, is to set up the abstract, rather than the concrete, universal as the logical ideal.<sup>84</sup>

<sup>82</sup>Ibid., 70–1.

<sup>83</sup>For an account of Green’s awareness of Hegel’s thought at the time of this essay on Aristotle, and some discussion of how that awareness may have influenced it (though with no mention of Hegel’s conception of the concrete universal) see Ben Wempe, *T. H. Green’s Theory of Positive Freedom: From Metaphysics to Political Theory* (Exeter, 2004) Ch. 1.

<sup>84</sup>John Passmore, *A Hundred Years of Philosophy*, 2nd edn (Harmondsworth, 1966), 86. Cf. Green, ‘The Philosophy of Aristotle’, pp. 58–9, where Green is critical of the logical methods of Plato, Aristotle, and the ‘scholastic syllogism’, for enshrining this view of logic, for example in the ‘logical tree’ of Porphyry.

Like Green, Bosanquet therefore opposed '[t]he tradition of the British school', which 'start[s] from a theory for which thought is decaying sense', so that on this view, 'thought is an abstracting and generalising faculty, and science is a departure from our factual experience'.<sup>85</sup> Against this view, Bosanquet argues that 'it is thought which constructs and sustains the fabric of experience, and . . . it is thought-determinations which invest even sense-perception with its value and meaning'.<sup>86</sup> Thus, although he allows that thought 'presses beyond the given, following the "what" beyond the limits of the "that"', the bare individual is unintelligible as a mere "something", so that 'in following the 'what' [thought] tends always to return to a fuller "that";<sup>87</sup> universality of thought is therefore seen to take nothing away from the individuality of the given, but in fact as enabling that individuality to be made determinate:

[A]s constituting a world [thought] tends to return to the full depth and roundness of experience from which its first step was to depart. In a 'world,' a 'concrete universal,' we do not lose directness and significance as we depart from primary experience; on the contrary, every detail has gained incalculably in vividness and meaning, by reason of the intricate interpenetration and interconnection, through which thought has developed its possibilities of 'being.' The watchword of concrete thinking is '*Philosophiren ist dephlegmatisiren, vivificiren*.'<sup>88</sup>

Bosanquet thus uses the emptiness of the 'that' in relation to the 'what' to argue against the abstractionist picture of thought in general and of logic in particular:

It is important that we should dismiss the notion that the higher degrees of knowledge are necessarily and in the nature of intelligence framed out of abstractions that omit whatever has interest and peculiarity in the real world. Nothing has been more fatal to the truth and vitality of ideas than this prejudice . . . If the present reaction against formal logic should end in establishing a more vital conception of universality than that which sets it down to mere abstraction, a fundamental reform will have been made in philosophical first principles.<sup>89</sup>

<sup>85</sup>Bosanquet, *The Principle of Individuality and Value*, 54–5.

<sup>86</sup>Ibid., 55.

<sup>87</sup>Ibid.

<sup>88</sup>Ibid., 55–6. The slogan '*Philosophistisiren ist dephlegmatisiren – Vivificiren*' is taken from Novalis: see '*Logologischen Fragmenten*', No. 15; Novalis, *Schriften. Die Werke Friedrich von Hardenbergs*, edited by Paul Luckhohn and Richard Samuel, 6 vols, 3rd edn (Stuttgart, 1977–) Vol. II, p. 526.

<sup>89</sup>Bernard Bosanquet, *Logic, or the Morphology of Knowledge*, 2 vols, 2nd edn (Oxford, 1911) Vol. I, pp. 60–1. Cf. also *Essentials of Logic*, 94–7. For further discussion of this aspect of Bosanquet's view, see Mander, 'Bosanquet and the Concrete Universal', 298–300 and 303–7,

Like Bosanquet, Richard Lewis Nettleship also cites Novalis's dictum to argue against the abstractness of thought, paraphrasing it as follows: 'to philosophise is to get rid of one's phlegm, to acquire a vivid consciousness of some aspect of reality'.<sup>90</sup> His argument here again relies on the claim that universality and individuality are dialectically interrelated: 'when we say that all concepts are general, we must add that no concept is "general" if this means that it is *not* individual. The most general concept in the world has its own unique individuality'.<sup>91</sup> Nettleship argues that to have a concept such as 'triangle' is not to have a general idea in which all particularity is lost, as having the concept requires us to see that there can be different *types* of triangle, and that these types can all be exemplified in different ways, down to the individual, so that thought can grasp universals like 'triangle' without losing sight of individuality:

Taking the generality of a concept in this sense, we cannot properly say that the general concept is 'got by abstraction,' for this concept is not *made* general by being abstracted, its generality *means* its capability of being abstracted. Nor can we properly say that it is abstracted from particulars; for its generality does not exclude, but implies, particularity.<sup>92</sup>

Another related, but more complex case, is that of McTaggart. On the one hand, McTaggart did not use the terminology of the 'concrete universal', and so may appear to be uninfluenced by Hegel's thinking on this issue. On the other hand, in his conception of substances and their individuation, McTaggart adopted something very like what I have characterized as the Hegelian view, offering an account that (like Green's) follows Hegel in rejecting both bundle and substratum views. Thus, while McTaggart refuses to reduce an individual to a collection of properties (as on the bundle view), he holds that an individual cannot exist in abstraction from its properties (as on the substratum view);<sup>93</sup> and as a result (like Hegel) he defends Leibniz's principle of the Identity of Indiscernibles (which McTaggart re-labels 'the Dissimilarity of the Diverse'),<sup>94</sup> as it is on the basis of their divergent properties that substances come to be individuated. In these respects, we can now see, McTaggart's thought has aspects that related to Hegel's treatment

and W. J. Mander, 'Life and Finite Individuality: The Bosanquet/Pringle-Pattison Debate', *British Journal for the History of Philosophy*, 13 (2005) No. 1: 111–30, esp. section V.

<sup>90</sup>Nettleship, *Philosophical Remains*, 128.

<sup>91</sup>Ibid., 226.

<sup>92</sup>Ibid., 222.

<sup>93</sup>J. McT. E. McTaggart, *The Nature of Existence*, edited by C. D. Broad, 2 vols (Cambridge, 1927) Vol. I, Ch. VI. For helpful discussion of McTaggart's position, see P. T. Geach, *Truth, Love and Immortality: An Introduction to McTaggart's Philosophy* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1979) Ch. III.

<sup>94</sup>McTaggart, *The Nature of Existence*, Vol. I, Chap X. Cf. Hegel, *Science of Logic*, 422–4 (*Werke*, Vol. VI, pp. 52–5).

of the concrete universal; however, he perhaps did not express himself in these terms because he accepted a simpler set of categories than Hegel, and so did not adopt the distinction between property universals and substance universal on which (as we have seen) Hegel's distinction between abstract and concrete universals is based.<sup>95</sup>

As a final example, we can briefly consider one of the later Idealists, Brand Blanshard.<sup>96</sup> In Chapters XVI and XVII of *The Nature of Thought*, Blanshard also criticizes the abstractionist picture of general ideas, in a way that is now familiar:

It is often said that we reach such ideas by 'abstracting from particular things what they have in common'. But we have seen that these 'particular things' are from the beginning more than particulars, that even to perceive a thing is to perceive it *as* something, and hence to use the very generality supposed to be reached by later abstraction.<sup>97</sup>

However, if it is only as a thing of a certain type that the individual can be perceived, and that type is a universal, how is this compatible with the individuality of the thing? This problem arises, Blanshard argues, if the universal is treated as 'an element that remains precisely the same through all its instances, an element that, like a Ford part, can be removed from one context and used in another without the slightest modification',<sup>98</sup> in the manner of an abstract universal. Against this, however, Blanshard argues that the universal can be concrete, by which he means that it can retain its identity even while being particularized in one way rather than another, and that nothing more than this is required to constitute the individual:

The universal, far from being a separable element, is thus so sunk in its differentiations that without them it would be nothing. The converse relation

<sup>95</sup>As Geach observes:

McTaggart accepted from the contemporary Cambridge jargon a simple dichotomy of characteristics into qualities and relations: any characteristic expressed by a one-place predicate is a quality. This is a drastic simplification of the Aristotelian categories, cutting the list down by omission of several members.

*(Truth, Love and Immortality, 48)*

<sup>96</sup>Similar themes are also to be found in Collingwood: cf. his discussion of 'the point of view of concrete thought' in Collingwood, *Speculum Mentis*, pp. 159ff.

<sup>97</sup>Brand Blanshard, *The Nature of Thought*, 2 vols (London, 1939) Vol. I, p. 571. Cf. also *ibid.*, pp. 613–14:

To appropriate means, at the least, to identify, and to identify means to find in something the embodiment of a universal . . . [I]f the thing did not present itself as the specification of any universal whatever, if it were a thing of no kind at all, I could not so much as perceive it. In all knowledge universals are being realized. And to grow in knowledge is to exchange a more generic grasp for a more specific. It is a movement in which the indefinite defines itself, the potential realizes itself, the relatively formless gains body and outline.

<sup>98</sup>*Ibid.*, 576.

is, if anything, clearer still. Take away from the various figures what makes them figures and nothing remains. It may be said that lines might still exist, even if they did not enter into figures. But such lines would not be *these* lines, for these *are* the sides of a figure, and if figure went, they too would go. Thus, just as figure has being only in its differentiations, so these have being only as differentiations of it.<sup>99</sup>

## VI

We have found, then, that there is a constant thread running through the thought of the Anglo-American idealists, and the origins of that thread can be traced back to Hegel.<sup>100</sup> Thus, while not everything these Idealists say about the concrete universal makes sense in Hegelian terms (at least, given my reading of Hegel), a central part of their conception does. Moreover, we have seen that the issues behind that conception are not in fact alien to us, but relate directly to debates concerning the content of experience, and the metaphysical implications of the claim that this content is conceptual all the way down: the doctrine of the concrete universal, therefore, perhaps deserves to be seen as a live option in that debate, and not the peculiar piece of exotica it is so often presented as being.<sup>101</sup>

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<sup>99</sup>Ibid., 584.

<sup>100</sup>I would not want to claim that the influence of Hegel here is always *direct*: it is doubtless often mediated by other figures who helped to shape Anglo-American Idealism, such as Lotze and Sigwart, for whom the Hegelian conception also played an important role; but that story cannot be explored here.

<sup>101</sup>I have presented versions of this paper at the 2004 conference of the Hegel Society of Great Britain; at departmental seminars at Sheffield and York; and at the History of Political Thought Seminar at Cambridge; I am grateful to those who made helpful comments on these occasions. I am also grateful to Fraser MacBride and Peter Nicholson, and to an anonymous referee for this journal, for a number of suggestions that led to improvements to the text. I would also like to acknowledge the support of the Arts and Humanities Research Council, for funding the research leave during which this paper was largely written.