

Alberto Voltolini

From Hegel to Kaplan

Abstract. Da Hegel fino a Bradley, l'attacco idealista ad una concezione pluralistica della realtà come una credenza non suffragata dalla verità delle cose si è valso dell'argomento semantico secondo il quale le espressioni indicali, su cui da ultimo riposerebbe tutta la valenza referenziale del linguaggio, non si riferiscono a segmenti discreti del reale ma si limitano ad esprimere universali. Dal versante ontologico opposto, Russell ha guidato la reazione all'idealismo assoluto (inaugurando così uno dei filoni di riflessione della filosofia analitica) facendo perno proprio sulla capacità da parte di tali espressioni di designare direttamente atomi distinti di realtà. L'argomento idealista, nelle sue linee generali, funziona così. Anche ammesso che un termine singolare "N" non possa denotare un'entità reale finché non è disambiguato da un completamento indicale (del tipo "questo N"), un'operazione del genere è inutile perché un'espressione indicale è a sua volta incapace di designare univocamente un individuo. Quando uso "questo", ad es., un tale uso non designa alcunché perché ogni cosa è un questo e il questo in sé stesso non è alcun individuo. Quello che faccio in tale uso è piuttosto dare luogo all'espressione di un universale, nella fattispecie del concetto (individuale) di *questità*. L'argomento idealista è fallace. Ma la replica russelliana, che pure ha dalla sua tutta la forza del senso comune, non è in grado di metterlo fuori gioco integralmente. Infatti, entrambi assumono - l'uno come premessa all'interno di un ragionamento *ad absurdum*, l'altro come tesi positiva - che riferirsi mediante un indicale ad un individuo reale corrisponde a discriminarlo da tutti gli altri individui del suo dominio. Questo significa, in altre parole, che entrambi assumono la tesi dell'indistinzione di semantica ed epistemologia. Solo una dottrina che condivide le tesi semantiche di Russell sugli indicali ma non presupponga il collassare di semantica ed epistemologia può far decadere del tutto l'argomento idealista. Questa è la dottrina degli indicali di Kaplan, che si basa sulla distinzione tra contenuto, o riferimento contestuale di un indicale, e carattere, il significato linguistico comune a tutte le occorrenze referenzialmente differenti di una tale espressione. Le altre premesse dell'argomento idealistico, peraltro, possono essere salvaguardate una volta riformulate opportunamente. Proprio la nozione kaplaniana di carattere consente di spiegare l'uso predicativo che si fa di un indicale quando si dice p.es. che ogni cosa è un questo come la denotazione di quella proprietà che è espressa, ma non denotata, sotto forma di carattere dall'indicale in posizione di soggetto. Ma nello stesso uso in posizione di soggetto di un indicale, infine, dobbiamo distinguere tra uso referenziale e uso generico, che è per l'appunto quanto viene chiamato in causa quando si dice p.es. che il questo non è alcuno degli individui di un dominio.

(29.3.1994) A: "The world will end tomorrow"
 (30.3.1994) A: "The world will end tomorrow"
 (31.3.1994) A: "The world will end tomorrow"
 (1.4.1994) A: "The world will end tomorrow"
 B (who day after day is amazed and amazed):
 "Aren't you afraid of being wrong?"
 A: "There is *always* a tomorrow"
 (adaptation of a B.C. strip)

In the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, 58-66, Hegel puts forward a well-known thesis against the metaphysics of discrete individuals. According to such a thesis, we can only *believe* that there are such individuals, but we cannot *say* that there are any. As soon as we indeed attempt to refer to one such individual by means of the simplest linguistic denoting expression we have at our disposal - namely, an indexical, a singular term like "this" "here" "now" etc. - we fail to do so. By means of that expression we indeed only manage to express a universal, a concept.

This thesis characterizes one of the main lines of attack of Absolute Idealism against a pluralistic conception of reality. Thus, in order to defend the latter point of view one has to start from the repudiation of the Hegelian thesis. This is what actually happened at the beginning of analytic philosophy. B. Russell's defense of an atomistic metaphysics indeed involved the dismissal of the Absolute Idealist F.H. Bradley's metaphysics, which was founded on a Hegel-like argument according to which (indexical) reference is always universal, never singular.

In actual fact, however, Russell limited himself to framing his atomism within an alternative semantic account according to which indexicals refer directly to their referents. Besides, the epistemical bases on which he wanted to root such an account made it unable to rule out the Hegelo-Bradleyan thesis. Indeed, Russell defended an issue that Bradley and Hegel implicitly maintained within their **reductio ab absurdum** of the thesis of indexical reference to discrete objects: that is, that if there were such reference, to refer indexically to an object would be the same as to discriminate it from any other object.

Thus, we will have to pass to a revised Russellian framework such as that developed by D. Kaplan in order to ultimately show that the Hegelo-Bradleyan argument which is put forward to support the afore-mentioned metaphysical thesis does not work from a semantic point of view. However, by appealing to the Kaplanian distinction between the two main semantic components of an indexical, namely *character*, i.e. its linguistic meaning, and *content*, i.e. its semantic value, we will also be able to see that some of the issues the Hegelo-Bradleyan thesis raises can be accounted for insofar as character, but not content, is taken into play. That thesis indeed calls properties of the former but not of the latter into issue. But insofar as this is the case it does not succeed to prevent singular reference to discrete objects.

1. Hegel's thesis

Suppose we are sightseeing on a bus around Rome; the more the bus moves, the more a tour operator utters sentences like: "*This* is the Coliseum", "*This* is Constantin's Ark" "*This* is the Domus Aurea" and so on. As most of us are ignorant tourists, we are

satisfied with the operator's indications. All but one of us; surprisingly enough, a fellow comes up and complains that the operator has shown us nothing at all. Requested to explain what he means, he replies:

"Each time she utters 'This...', the operator attempts to single out a different object. But if the Coliseum, the Ark, the Domus Aurea, is *this*, then everything is *this*. If everything is such, then nothing has been singled out in its specificity by uttering 'this'. (No more than if, one might add, the operator had each time uttered 'an object!'^[1]) But this is not the whole truth on the matter. If everything is *this*, *this* is on its part no thing at all. Once we had passed the Coliseum by, our operator might simply have said, while pointing towards something, that this is not the Coliseum, but rather, say, Constantin's Ark. A moment later, the same destiny concerns Constantin's Ark; this is no longer the Ark, but rather the Domus. If we imagine to play such a game indefinitely, we must end up by concluding that *this* is neither the Coliseum nor the Ark nor the Domus nor... any thing at all, as I assumed^[2]. Do not think, moreover, that such an outcome is only confined to the limited case of the demonstrative pronoun 'this'. I here bet that I might get the same result, say, with 'here' and 'now'^[3]. Thus, our operator has not succeeded in showing places or in indicating times either. I can well imagine, dear friends, that you will be upset for this devastating conclusion: if we have been shown nothing, why did we pay the fare? Keep on be calm. If, addressing me, any of you now said 'I do not agree', who precisely would be saying that he does not agree? Any of us is *I*; but *I* is none of us^[4]. Thus, our result is quite universal: insofar as we cannot single out any of them, there are no single objects as well as there are no subjects ... it is therefore better to remain on our seats and continue the journey."

By making explicit the different uses of the demonstrative "this" in the above reasoning, we may provide the following rational reconstruction of the argument of our Hegelian fellow (with respect to "this"; but we can generalize it, as we have seen, with respect to any other indexical):

- a) everything is a this;
- b) the this is no thing, in that insofar as it is B, it is not A, and insofar as it is C, it is not B, and so on;
therefore,
- c) by uttering "this" we fail to single out any individual thing, i.e. to designate it; in actual fact, we rather mean an universal, a concept^[5];
as a corollary,
- d) our belief that there are individual things to be denoted is unveridical, since the device by means of which we claimed to be put in touch with such things, thereby demonstrating that they exist - i.e., indexical reference - has turned out to be unusable.

2. Bradley's Holism^[6]

In the previous Section, we have written down the argument a Hegelian fellow might use in order to deny singular demonstrative reference to discrete objects. What is interesting to know is that we do not need to consider such an argument as a mere rational reconstruction of the Hegelian position. In point of fact, something very close to argument a)-d) has been held by F.H. Bradley within his reprise of Absolute Hegelian Idealism. One may indeed recover in Bradley's *Principles of Logic* a semantic doctrine whose ultimate aim is precisely that of deying a metaphysics of discrete things.

Bradley's *Principles of Logic* main attack in favour of semantic holism + absolute idealism substantially runs as follows:

i) even if singular reference were parasitic on indexical reference, ii) this kind of reference would be unable to pick up individual things. Thus, iii) since we cannot but mean universals by uttering indexicals, we can by means of singular terms only refer to Reality as a whole (which is the only thing that there is).

Suppose, Bradley remarks, that we have a definite description such as "last Tuesday", used for instance within the judgement "it rained last Tuesday". We might say that by means of it we mean *this* last Tuesday, a certain particular day. First of all, we should acknowledge that that description expresses a content which may be satisfied by infinitely many Tuesdays, i.e. all the days which have had the property of being the most recent second day of the week^[7]. But, Bradley comments, nothing would fare any better if we tried to deal with this inconvenient and select our desired day by adding a demonstrative element in the description: "the Tuesday that came before *this* day". As point i) explains, we would have made this move because we thought that, if there is something which directly denotes a referent, this is a demonstrative expression. But this way of securing singular reference **via** indexical reference is hopeless, Bradley argues for in ii). The demonstrative indeed means nothing but an universal concept^[8]. The purported individual designated by a given use of "this" is a certain member of a series which excludes all other members. But "exclusiveness within a given series does not carry with it absolute uniqueness"; in other words, the property of being a certain member of a series is common to any individual which is allegedly designated by "this"^[9]. Thus, no use of "this" can pick a up a specific individual; moreover, to add that the intended individual is the member of *this* series patently inaugurates an infinite regress^[10]

To be sure, one might try to reply to Bradley that the singularity and uniqueness one wants to attain by uttering "this" is not at all rendered by the fact that "this" expresses the general property of *thisness*, i.e. of exclusiveness within a series. Indeed, what we mean by an utterance of "this" is a given and particular thing, although this thing shares with any other possible **denotatum** of "this" the general property of being a certain member of a series^[11].

Bradley's answer to this reply has two steps. First, even if we mean a unique and particular thing by uttering "this" what we get is again an universal. Second, although admittedly this universal has a nature which is different from that of ordinary qualitative universals (as *thisness* also is, for example), one cannot rely on

this peculiarity of such an universal to attain a particular referent for a given use of "this". One indeed gets the paradoxical result that the way this referent should be picked up, i.e. **via** that universal, precisely makes it the case that there is no such referent to be picked up. So Bradley can arrive at his holistic and idealist thesis iii).

Let us explain the first step of the Bradleyan rejoinder. According to Bradley, what "this" expresses over and above thisness is another universal, that of being immediately present to the mind of its utterer. If I am the utterer of "this", such a property is what everything I would like to direct my attention upon by uttering "this" would possess. So again, why should I pick up a thing rather than the other, since both are what is immediately present to my mind when I utter "this"?[12]

There is however a difference between this universal and any other universal, thisness above all, as Bradley himself acknowledges^[13]. One may lay it down as follows. Any ordinary universal is such, that one can distinguish it from any of the things to which it (allegedly) applies. This is not the case with the property of being immediately present to my mind. Many things can instantiate cathood, beauty, or even thisness, at one and the same time; but only the thing which is now focussed by me can be immediately presented to my mind at one and the same time. Now, one might sustain that **via** an universal of this special type we succeed, **pace** Bradley, in attaining discrete things demonstratively. Indeed, an object A is what I pick up now by uttering "this" as what is *now* uniquely immediately present to my mind. But a different object B will be picked up in a second by my next uttering "this" as what is *then* uniquely immediately present to my mind. And so on.

Bradley might have immediately retorted that one risks here to have an infinite regress, since the above formulation specifies the special conceptual content of the demonstrative "this" **via** another indexical ("now"). But what Bradley actually replied is what constitutes the second step in his rejoinder: if the above were the case we could not even assert that this is the case. I for instance should indeed start by formulating the judgement "A is what is immediately present to my mind". Since this judgement is true, I might think I have picked A up by means of the corresponding use of "this". I would then move to B and I would now like to judge veridically that B is immediately present to my mind. By so doing, the previous judgement should turn out to be false. But I could not assert it any longer, since I would have so to say lost the terms of the judgement. By making the special universal in question to be possessed by B, I would have subtracted it to A. Since A was given to me through that universal only, A itself would disappear, so that I could not formulate that judgement any longer. One might of course hypothesize a similar situation as far as B is concerned, and so on. Thus, Bradley's conclusion is that if we maintain that we pick up things demonstratively, **via** the property of being what is immediately present to our mind, we must conclude that there are no such things^[14]. "I trust to have shown that the use of 'this', as a symbol in judgement, is not only impossible, but that, if it existed, it would be wholly nugatory" (Bradley (1883:69))[15].

3. Russell's Acquaintance

Assumed that our reconstruction of Bradley's argument is correct, one might immediately remark that the above conclusion is highly problematic. That an object A does no longer possess the property, even one which it uniquely possesses in a given time, by means of which it is identified does not **eo ipso** imply that A does no longer exist. This implication would obtain only if A had an ephemeral nature, such as that of a sense impression for instance. But in neither case it would be further implied that we could not singularly refer to A within the (now false) judgement "This is what is immediately present to my mind". As far as indexicals are concerned, a simple distinction between context of utterance and circumstances of evaluation (as to its truth or falsity) of an indexical sentence will suffice to rule out this Bradley's paradoxical result^[16].

From a historical point of view, however, this is not the way Bradley's argument has been given up. As we have said, the paradoxical argument illustrated above constitutes only the second step in Bradley's rejoinder to the remark that the fact that "this" expresses thisness is irrelevant for its successfully referring to something. Thus, we must scrutinize whether what has been actually criticized has been the first step of that rejoinder (which is independent of the second), according to which "this" also expresses another special universal over and above thisness.

As we have outlined in the Introduction, one of the origins of so-called analytic philosophy lies in the rejection of the Idealist metaphysics linked to Bradley's semantic holistic thesis. B. Russell is indeed responsible for the development of an utterly different metaphysical standpoint, a pluralistic atomism of discrete things, whose semantic counterpart is the doctrine of direct reference to individual things which has in demonstrative reference its cornerstone. As is well known, as far as pluralism in Russellian ontology is concerned there is a more and a less liberal Russell (a Meinongian and a 'robust' realist Russell as it were^[17]). But this is out of our present concerns, insofar as the restriction of ontological pluralism does not prevent Russell from maintaining that there are at least some discrete entities which can be directly referred to. On the semantical side, there must therefore be at least some singular terms which directly refer to such things, that is, exhaust their meaning in standing each for its own distinct referent^[18]. As everybody knows, moreover, in Russell's semantical development this semantical thesis became tantamount to saying that, **qua** logical proper names, demonstratives are the expressions that primarily refer directly to discrete things^[19].

Thus, Russell was steady in maintaining, against Bradley, that one can directly refer indexically to discrete things. But Bradley might have immediately retorted that this is what his argument put into question; as he said, unless his argument is shown to be wrong direct reference is nothing but "a curious illusion" (1883:59). It is probably in order to answer such a doubt that Russell advanced a general principle of a theory of thought. Let us label it with G. Evans Russell's Principle: "it is not possible for a person to have a thought about something unless he knows which particular individual in the world he is thinking about" (Evans (1980:44)). This principle applies both to the case in which one thinks descriptively of something and to that in which one thinks directly (viz. demonstratively) of it (in Russell's famous terms, when one has a knowledge by description and a knowledge by acquaintance respectively^[20]).

When the latter is the case, Russell's Principle becomes the well-known Principle of Acquaintance: "one is to be, or to have a memory of being, 'acquainted' with the object concerned" (Evans:ib.). Thus, it is the Principle of Acquaintance which according to Russell justifies the thesis that we can refer directly to objects ultimately by means of demonstratives; indeed, a given use of "this" picks up a particular **denotatum** since its utterer is acquainted with the denoted object.

But a further doubt may be raised. "To be acquainted with" patently alludes to an epistemical relation that one entertains with a thing. However, such an epistemical relation with a thing was not in its turn put by Hegel and Bradley into question when they said that their argument showed that our certainty of being directed towards individual things is indisputable and still ultimately ungrounded? Russell would probably retort that this Hegelo-Bradleyan worry is not justified, since acquaintance with an object is what allows one to discriminate it. To be sure, this would not be a descriptive or conceptual discrimination, in conformity with the general Russell's principle stated above which precisely distinguishes between selective descriptive and selective non-descriptive knowledge of an object. Nevertheless, insofar as the problem of securing reference to objects is concerned, such a non-descriptive knowledge linked to a given use of "this" plays the same role as that played by the special conceptual identification of an object as what is immediately present to the utterer of a given token of "this". As we saw before, this special conceptual identification was what Bradley hypothesized for the sake of argument as what allows one to refer directly to a given object. But such a role was precisely put into question by the first step of the Bradleyan rejoinder seen in the previous Section. To reformulate this question, how can the (admittedly special) property of being what one is acquainted with help one to discriminate a particular object as what is referred to while uttering "this", since everything is or may be what such an utterer of "this" is acquainted with?

Now, we think that Russell has laid down the basis for a convincing theory of indexical reference, according to which a demonstrative directly refers to its contextual referent. But we also believe that he has unmotivatedly mixed up things when he has grounded such a doctrine on the epistemical theory of acquaintance. Indeed, by so doing he ends up to concede a point that serves to the Hegelo-Bradleyans as an implicit premise of their argument: that is, that to refer indexically to things also amounts to discriminating them. Russell and Bradley, so to say, disagree only on the result of the discrimination: successful for the first, unsuccessful for the second. Moreover, Bradleyans might argue that Russell has not provided a convincing answer as to why such a discrimination should be successful. But it is not necessary to concede Hegelo-Bradleyans this premise. In order to see this, we must make use of the semantic apparatus drawn by Kaplan with respect to indexicals. This will indeed allow us both to retain Russell's semantic intuitions and to finally dismiss the Hegelo-Bradleyan argumentation.

4. What is dead and what is alive of Hegel's thesis

In the light of Bradley's reflections on the matter, let us try to give a more rigorous formulation to the Hegelian argument a)-d). It is well known that one of Hegel's main theoretical ambitions is to find a presupposition-free ground from which

the spirit itself can begin its own development as well as its **Aufhebung** of unveridical beliefs. Let us see whether this holds true of the above argument. First of all, in order to answer Hegelian requirements, premises a) and b) should be general data whose acceptance cannot be questioned. Now, we do not have anything against premise a), once we reformulate it in a slightly different manner:

a') everything is a *this*, insofar as it is immediately attended to by the present utterer of "this".

a') is intended to deal with the fact that in order for something to be a *this*, it must be immediately presented to someone as soon as s/he directs her/himself towards it by uttering "this". Suppose there were an inhabited atoll in the Pacific nobody has still either reached or been put in touch with by means of any sensorial apparatus (telescopes, TV, etc.). Such an atoll, therefore, is available to nobody able to utter "this" when confronted with it^[21]. Thus, it would be false that such an atoll is a *this*. Since it would then no longer be the case that everything is a *this*, we must replace the false premise a) with the true a').

As a matter of fact, premise a') discovers an important datum as far the use of indexicals is concerned. That is, it reveals that indexicals may also be used predicatively, i.e. in predicate position. Moreover, it also gives a criterion according to which an indexical may be truly predicated of something; in the case in question, an individual is a *this* insofar as it is currently attended to by the present utterer of "this". We might of course repeat the same reasoning with another indexical, say "he": every individual is a *he*, insofar as he is the most salient male in the vicinity of both the speaker and the utterer^[22].

Let us now pass to premise b). Here we must primarily note that b) is something more than a general datum, in that it has a subargument which is put forward by the secondary clause contained in it. Such a clause accounts for *the particular way* in which *this* turns out to be no thing. The point is that if we replaced "the this" by, say, "the cat" in b), we would get a false statement. True, it is likely that *the cat* also is no thing at all. However, such an 'individual nothingness' of the cat cannot be explained along the lines of b): it is not the case that insofar as *the cat* is Jemina is not Nana, and insofar as it is Nana it is not Tibbles, etc. *The cat*, in fact, is Jemina, Nana, Tibbles and so on, even though it is properly speaking none of them and in this sense is no thing. To get a true statement again, we may substitute e.g. "the king of England" to "the this" in b): in fact, insofar as *the king of England* is John Lackland, he is not Richard Coeur-de-Lion, and insofar as he is Henry VIII, he is not John Lackland, and so on. This comparison with English kings, moreover, is relevant under another respect, in that it shows that "not" as used in b) may be paraphrased by "no longer", that is, it has immediately a temporal meaning. Thus, we accept b) once we reformulate it as:

b') *the this* is no thing, in that insofar as it is B, it is no longer A, and insofar as it is C, it is no longer B, and so on.

Before proceeding in the present rational reformulation of the Hegelian argument, two sorts of reflections impose themselves. Let us see them in detail.

To start with the first reflection, one may give a proper ontological account for the different way in which we have just discovered that 'things' like *the cat* and *the king of England* are no individual. We may say that both such 'things' are abstract entities of a particular kind, i.e. *general entities*, which however stand at a different level of generality. On the one hand, the general entity THE CAT (let us now stick to the device of indicating general entities by means of definite descriptions written in capital letters) may be simultaneously instantiated by different individuals, such as Jemina, Nana, Tibbles, and so on. On the other hand, only one individual at a given time may instantiate THE KING OF ENGLAND, which we may therefore call a *definite* general entity^[23]. Moreover, we can note that such general entities precisely correspond to the different kinds of concepts expressed by the relevant descriptions in their ordinary use; that is, the use in which we employ them in order to talk about individuals. In other words, an indefinite general entity corresponds to an ordinary, pluri-exemplifiable, concept, whereas a definite general entity corresponds to an individual concept, i.e. a concept that cannot be exemplified by more than an individual at a given time^[24]. But these general entities are also what is referred to by means of the generic uses definite descriptions such as "the cat" or "the king of England" have when occurring in sentences like "the cat is a tame animal" "the king of England is also the head of the English Church". Now, this kind of reference to a general entity is what manifestly takes place also in premise b) as much as in its reformulation b'), which contain a definite description, "the this", used in such a generic sense.

Second, we can say that our replacement of b) with b') allows us to take explicitly into account Bradley's conceptual distinction which we introduced in Section 2 between *thisness*, i.e. particularity, and (let us now call it) *this-ity*, i.e. immediate presentness to an utterer of "this". (We have already done it implicitly in premise a'), by making "immediately attended to the present utterer of 'this'" the predicative nucleus of the indexical "this".) We may indeed reformulate this conceptual distinction as a difference between a pluri-exemplifiable concept and an individual concept. As we have just remarked that premises of the b)-kind concern general entities and moreover that an individual concept corresponds to a definite general entity, we may say that what premise b') is talking about is the entity the individual concept of *this-ity* corresponds to, namely THE THIS. We may thus remark that Bradley's distinction plus the ontological mapping between general entities and concepts allows us to see what the Hegelian premise b), once reformulated as b'), is true of: to repeat, the definite general entity THE THIS.

This said, it is easy to imagine how we have also to amend Hegel's conclusion c) accordingly; that is, by replacing it with:

c') by uttering "this" we fail to single out any individual thing, i.e. to designate it; in actual fact, we rather mean an individual concept (i.e., that of *this-ity*).

As we have just seen, this individual concept is precisely what corresponds to the definite general entity THE THIS premise b') is concerned with. (To be perfectionists, we might write:

(Correspondence Thesis (CT)): there is a one-one correspondence between individual concepts and general definite objects

as a further premise which allows us to derive c') from a') and b').) Now, as we have remarked in passing, no contemporary theorist of reference would be worried if he were told that such a concept is what the (let us call it) indexical definite description "the this" expresses when it is ordinarily used to purportedly talk about an individual. But the point of the Hegelian argument is meant to be worrisome for contemporary theorists; that is, it is that of showing that by means of such a description ordinarily used there is no possible singling out of an individual thing, but there only is the expression of the individual concept of *this-ity*. If moreover a Hegelian maintained the stronger thesis of the *identity*, not of the mere correspondence, between individual concepts and definite general entities^[25], he might say that the individual concept of *this-ity* is not only expressed, but also *denoted*, by the description "the this". By so doing, he would actually sustain that ordinary uses of that description collapses on to its generic uses, in which, as we have just seen, the general entity THE THIS works as the description's **denotatum**^[26].

But now the question is whether c') is really proven once a'-b') are given. To resume the respective contributions a') and b') give to the Hegelian argument, we may say, first, that an indexical such as "this" has a certain predicative use and, second, that when it figures in a definite description such as "the this", it refers to a certain definite entity in the generic use of that description. Moreover, such an entity corresponds to the individual concept of *this-ity*, which is what that description expresses in its ordinary use. But even with this additional remark, from the two above results it does not yet follow that individual things cannot be referred indexically (hence, for the Bradleyan remarks recalled in the previous paragraph, that they cannot be referred **tout court**). Indeed, c') follows from a') and b') only if another premise is added, notably:

e) reference to individual objects by means of singular terms, if there is any, can be obtained only by singling these objects out

where by "singling objects out" one means that an object can be the referent of a singular term, indexicals included, only if it can be discriminated as the (only) satisfier of the (conceptual or other) requisites that are allegedly associated to that term. This was precisely the premise which, in spite of his distinction between descriptive and direct reference, Russell endorsed too due to his adherence to the Principle of Acquaintance (so that he probably failed to give up the Bradleyan argument).

Now we can finally reconstruct the whole line of the Hegelian argument as follows. Everything is a *this* insofar as it is immediately attended to by the present utterer of "this" and *the this* itself is no individual thing, but a definite generic entity,

THE THIS, corresponding to the individual concept of *this-ity*. Moreover, if there were reference to individual objects it would work by singling out the (only) individual which satisfies the conceptual requisite of having *this-ity* expressed by the singular term at issue, the indexical "this", we purportedly use to refer to such a thing. However, precisely because *everything*, not one thing only, is a this insofar as it satisfies these conceptual requisites expressed by "the this", then by uttering "this" we fail to single out any individual thing. Rather, we cannot but mean the individual concept of *this-ity* corresponding to (identical with?) THE THIS.

However, premise e) is, **pace** Hegel, not an unquestionable datum, but a piece of a semantical theory - or, to say better, of a class of such theories[27]. As we have seen, Bradley used this premise in a **reductio** argument. If there were indexical reference to a discrete object, this could but be obtained **via** the unique satisfaction on the object's part of some conceptual requisite that enabled to discriminate it from all other objects; but there is no such reference, since there is no such unique satisfaction. In such an argument, e) works as a thesis belonging to a *denotational* theory of reference: a singular term such an indexical refers to an object insofar as it singles this object out as what uniquely satisfies the conceptual requisite embedded in that term itself[28].

As such, however, e) is not only a theoretical thesis, but also a very problematic one. Indeed, the denotational theory of reference has been notoriously criticized in its indiscriminate extension to all singular terms, in that it does not seem to work insofar as proper names and indexicals are concerned[29]. If an indexical in particular - which is what primarily concerns us here - behaved as is predicted by the denotational theory, it would be synonymous with a descriptive term. A descriptive term is indeed precisely what denotes an object insofar as this object uniquely satisfies the conceptual requisite embedded in that term itself. But then utterances containing indexical tokens would behave unlike what they actually do when evaluated as to their truth with respect to possible worlds different from the actual one. If "this is three-storey high", said of the Coliseum, meant "the thing currently presented to me when I utter this token of 'this' is three-storey high", such an utterance would be true, instead of false as it actually is, with respect to a world in which I still confronted a three-storey building but the Coliseum had been elevated of another floor[30].

Such an equivalence between an indexical and a descriptive term conforms to the denotational theory endorsed by Bradley in order precisely to accommodate the thesis in which premise e) consists. A descriptive term is indeed an expression which explicitly indicates how to single its denotation out. Insofar as the denotational theory is wrong in its indiscriminate extension to all singular terms, however, we may conclude against e) that not only if a singular term is a proper name, but also if it is an indexical, it may well be the case that by uttering it we fail to *individuate* a particular thing, but this does not prevent us from *referring* to that thing by means of that utterance. Since e) is necessary to pass from a') to c'), the whole Hegelian argument is therefore not sound.

Insofar as, moreover, the corollary d) follows from the conclusion c) in the Hegelian argument, we can dismiss it as well. According to d), indexical reference is the alleged device by means of which individual things become available to us and

therefore their existence is made manifest to us. But we have just denied that indexical reference plays such a role; its role is only the semantic one of referring to individuals, not the epistemic one of singling them out. Its failure to singling them out, therefore, cannot be used to prove that there are no such individuals, that is, to dismiss the (absolute value of the) metaphysical thesis concerning the existence of discrete individuals^[31].

It is now time to introduce D. Kaplan's theses in this discussion. According to Kaplan, an indexical expression has two semantic components, i.e. that responsible for the logical truth of the sentences in which the expression occurs and that responsible for the modal value, the contingency or the necessity, of the propositions expressed by uttering those sentences^[32]. The former component, *character*, is indeed what an indexical taken as a linguistic item expresses, that is, what would figure as the entry in a dictionary **qua** the linguistic meaning of the indexical, whereas the latter, *content*, is the semantic value the indexical has when occurring in a particular context and which allows the utterance in which the indexical figures to express a certain singular proposition rather than another^[33].

We call into issue the framework provided by Kaplan because it can precisely account for the distinction between (successfully) designating an individual and (unsuccessfully) singling out it by means of an indexical. On the one hand, an indexical does have for Kaplan a referent when uttered in a given context. As a direct reference theorist, Kaplan equates the content of a given token of an indexical with its contextual referent^[34]. On the other hand, according to Kaplan character is also endowed with a cognitive role; it represents the linguistic way an utterer of an indexical thinks of its referent^[35]. But, as Kaplan himself acknowledges, character is by itself unable to make the uttered indexical select that referent, i.e. to discriminate it among all other things. Thus, as far as indexicals are concerned, Kaplan shares the thesis which is the opposite of premise e) (against which he also argues independently, as outlined five paragraphs above).

To be sure, Kaplan holds this conclusion in a weakened form. The two components of the meaning of an indexical, character and content, are not indifferent to each other. Rather, the former contributes to determine the latter. In fact, the former works as a linguistic rule which serves to fix the latter, i.e. to individuate the referent the indexical has in a particular context: for instance, the rule that "I" always refers to the speaker or writer. However, it must be stressed that the character of an indexical is context-sensitive, so that it is able to individuate or fix the referent the indexical has only given a certain context^[36].

If we thus go back to the (revised) Hegelian premise a'), we can discern in it the expression of a rule by means of which distinct referents of different occurrences of "this" can be *merely contextually* selected: "this" refers to the only item *currently* (hence contextually) immediately attended to the present utterer of a token of "this" itself^[37]. We may therefore call such a rule the linguistic meaning, i.e. the character, which "this" possesses. As is shown by the fact that the expression "contextually" is placed in the description of this linguistic meaning, such a rule is however unable by itself to single out any particular referent for such an indexical, unless a determinate context is

provided. But the fact that the character does not by itself provide a referent for "this" does not prevent it from successfully referring in any context of its use, namely from having a different referent for any such context.

One might reply that such a solution of the Hegelian worry against indexical reference could not have been taken by Hegel himself into consideration, in that it draws an intellectual distinction between the semantic factors of character and content which would have appeared to Hegel as irredeemably theory-laden. Insofar as it is such, it cannot figure at the starting point of the philosophical reflection, where the spirit begins its self-development, that is, its progressive **aufheben** of its own unveridical presupposals^[38]. Maybe this is true; certainly, we do not want to contest it from an exegetical point of view. Still, it must be stressed that Hegel's position fares no better. As we outlined before, Hegel's equation between singular reference to and identification of individual objects within a given domain is theory-laden as well, and one perhaps more problematic than the Russellian-Kaplanian distinction here endorsed.

Perhaps, however, the sense of the Hegelian reply might be clarified as follows. Hegel's tacit assumption of premise e) is only provisional, since it rests on the fact that the distinction, which is admittedly theoretical, between singling an individual out of a domain and referring to it cannot be yielded when an indexical is used, so to say, at the beginning of the spirit's self-development. But even this move seems to fail. What Kaplan underlies by stressing the context-sensitive nature of an indexical's character is that, although we cannot discriminate objects by merely saying "this", we do it conditionally, that is, once a given context, with appropriate indexes (i.e., its agent plus its spatio-temporal determinations) is provided. Such a discrimination is thus something even a spirit in its auroral stage might be able to do.

Now, Hegel might still retort that no similar context can be presupposed, in its ontological reality, at such an early spiritual stage. But if he argued for such a denial of the context by saying that there are no contextual determinations since if there were they should be given *indexically*, such an argument would turn out to be desperately circular. The negation of the reality of contextual determinations was the point of conclusion d) in Hegel's original argument. Now Hegel would like to restore that argument by a supplementary argument which presupposes the validity of that conclusion.

Perhaps the lesson to be drawn is that, insofar as there are no neutral philosophical descriptions of the matter at issue, is better to confront the developed theories as to their respective pros and cons. While drawing such a comparison, moreover, it will be useful not to forget that Hegel's theory moves (intentionally) against common sense, which assumes that indexicals have a singular reference, whereas Kaplan's theory both encourages and accounts for such an intuition. This prompts one to remark that, as far the two competing theories are concerned, the burden of the proof that a theory born on a commonsensical intuition is wrong (or better, is to be **aufgehoben**) is on Hegel's part. In other words, it is up to Hegelians to show that Kaplan's theory hides something like a conceptual fallacy. If we are right, nothing of this kind has hitherto been provided within a Hegelian framework.

This is not to say, however, that the Hegelo-Bradleyan standpoint cannot be, albeit partially, vindicated. We have already said that premises a') and b') discover important data respectively concerning the predicative use of indexicals and the generic use of indexical descriptions such as "the this". Now, we can remark that, insofar as some at least of the Hegelian statements can be partially reinterpreted as concerning character rather than content, they do not lose their validity at all. First, as to the second conjunct of c'), it is indeed true that whenever one utters "this" (as well as any other indexical), one also means an universal, insofar as one grasps its linguistic meaning. Second, the very same predicative use of an indexical which is pointed out by premise a') resorts, as a criterion for the correct application of that predicate, to the conceptual requisite which that indexical's character consists in. In fact, what is *designated* by the indexical in its predicative use - namely, a certain concept - precisely is what is *expressed* by that indexical in any occasion of its use in subject position - i.e., the conceptual feature which characterizes its linguistic meaning. To stay with the Hegelian example, something is a this insofar as it currently is immediately attended to by the present utterer of "this". Now, this condition precisely expresses the character of "this" which allows that something to be legitimately designated (in the appropriate context) by the mentioned utterance of "this". Third, from what we have just said it follows that the correspondence we postulated between the (definite) general entity referred to e.g. by the generic use of the indexical description "the this" in b') and the (individual) concept expressed by that description in its ordinary use can be mapped onto a correspondence between the same general entity and the character of the indexical "this" that description amounts to being when its definite article is dropped.

5. (Happy?) Ending

On behalf of the Hegelians, we may say that Russell was wrong in the identification of the totality of the meaning of an indexical such as "this" with the presented object. Hegelians, however, fail to show that the conceptual component of meaning may so to speak annihilate the job performed by its referential component. They do not locate the former component at its proper level, that of character, which may also account for the data they discovered concerning the predicative use of an indexical and the generic use of an indexical description. Moreover, in order to avoid a conceptual medium as the vehicle of reference (which would have introduced a Bradley-like "indeterminacy of reference"), Russell had to postulate an epistemic link between the speaker and the presented object which had both a direct nature and a discriminating feature. This ultimately forced him to conflate semantics and epistemology, referring to and singling out an object, so that he did not totally free himself from the Bradleyan (and Hegelian) referential assumptions. But, thanks to Kaplan's theory, one may accept Russell's semantic intuitions as far as indexicals are concerned without buying Russell's theory of acquaintance, in that we can sever epistemic and semantic links. To refer indexically to an object is one thing; another one is that, in order to refer to it, we have to be acquainted to it in a discriminative manner *by means of* the right contextual relation (which moreover need not to be a perceptual one).

If so, then though in his usual fuzzy way, Bertie was after all (almost) right^[39].

Notes

¹ "When I say 'this Here', 'this Now' or 'a single item' I am saying all Thises, Heres, Nows, all single items" (Hegel (1977:62)); "if we describe it [a certain thing] more exactly as 'this bit of paper', then each and every bit of paper is 'this bit of paper'" (Hegel (1977:66)).

² "'Here' is, e.g., the tree. If I turn round, this truth has vanished and converted into its opposite: 'No tree is here, but a house instead'. 'Here' itself does not vanish; on the contrary, it abides constant in the vanishing of the house, the tree, etc., and is indifferently house or tree" (Hegel (1977:60-1)).

³ Cf. Hegel (1977:60-1). As regards "here" and "now", Hegel puts forward an additional thesis according to which nothing is a here or a now because of the punctuality of the here and the instantaneity of the now. We may stress this alleged difference between "this" on the one hand and "here" and "now" on the other as follows: although there is a (lapse of) time in which a certain thing is a this, there is no (lapse of time) in which a certain portion of time is a now, nor a (lapse of space) in which a certain portion of space is a here. Cf. Hegel (1977:63-4).

⁴ "Similarly when I say 'I', this singular 'I', I say in general all 'Is'; everyone is what I say, everyone is 'I', this singular 'I'" (Hegel (1977:62)).

⁵ Cf. Hegel (1977:60-2, 64-6).

⁶ This Section and the following have benefited of many conversations had on the topics dealt with here with Michele Di Francesco. I just quote once for all the main works in which Di Francesco compares Bradley's and Russell's approaches on the topic of singular reference: cfr. his (1990) (1991).

⁷ "The event you describe is a single occurrence, but what you say will do just as well for any number of events, imaginary or real" (Bradley (1883:62-3)). In a Russellian contemporary terminology, one might gloss this by saying that most descriptions are incomplete, in that they fail to specify a property which is uniquely possessed by something. Cfr. on this Bach (1981), Wettstein (1983:189).

⁸ "In attempting to become concrete and special, you only succeed in becoming more abstract and wholly indefinite. 'This' 'now' 'mine' are all universals." (Bradley (1883:63))

¹⁰ *ib.*

¹¹ "We find uniqueness in our contact with the real ... This singularity which comes with presentation and is what we call 'this', is not a *quality* of that which is given. But thisness on the other hand does belong to content, and is the *general* character of every appearance in space and time. Thisness, if we like, we may call particularity. ... But such particularity in space and time ... is only a general character. ... In using 'this' we do *use* an idea, and that idea is and must be universal; but what we *mean*, and fail to express, is our reference to the object which is given and unique." (Bradley (1883:64-6)).

¹² "Beside the idea of exclusion in a series, which is mere thisness, we have also the idea of my immediate sensible relation to reality, and so we have 'this'. We are able to abstract an idea of presence from direct presentation which is never absent; and presence, though it does not fall within the content, is separable from it, and makes a difference to it. Thus ideally fixed 'this' becomes an universal among other universals." (Bradley (1883:66)).

¹³ Cf. Bradley (1883:67).

¹⁴ "The other fact cannot be presented without *ipso facto* altering the given. It degrades our given to one element within a larger presentation, or else it wholly removes it from existence. The given disappears and with itself carries our idea away. We are now unable to predicate the idea, since we no longer possess it, or if we still have it, then what supports it excludes that other fact to which we wish to refer it. ... For the idea to be true of something else, that something else must be present and unique. We have then either two unique presentations, or one must disappear. If the first one goes the idea goes with it. If the last one goes there is now no fact for the idea to be referred to. In either case there can be no judgement. Such a use [of 'this'] affirms of the subject a predicate without which the subject disappears." (Bradley (1883:67-8)).

¹⁵ Bradley reminds us of the Hegelian character of his attack by adding the following footnote: "'This' is not the only idea which can never be true as a symbol. I will not ask to what extent 'this' means 'for me' but what has been said of 'this' will hold in the main of 'I' 'me and 'mine'." (1883:69).

¹⁶ It is not accidental at all that such a distinction has been put forward within the Kaplanian semantics delivered in Kaplan (1989). By means of Kaplan's conceptual devices we will indeed see in the next Section that the Hegelo-Bradley argument can be dismissed as a whole.

¹⁷ On this, cf. e.g. di Francesco (1991).

¹⁸ As Russell held from (1903) onwards (his only relevant shift being precisely that of reducing the scope of the expressions which directly refer).

¹⁹ Cf. Russell (1956:201).

²⁰ Cf. Russell (1905), (1912).

²¹ Maybe such an atoll is a *that*, since in order for something to be a *that* its sensorial presence (be it current or not) to an utterer of "that" does not seem to be required. Rather, what is needed is only its generic availability to such an utterer. Cf. on this Wettstein (1984:78). Such a difference between "this" and "that" is almost envisaged by Castañeda (1990:53), and it is explicitly stated by Corazza-Dokic (1993:41-3). One may moreover claim that it is acknowledged by Kaplan himself, insofar as he says that an indexical has no synonym, another indexical either (cf. Kaplan (1989a:521)).

²² On the predicative use of indexicals, cf. Cohen (1980).

²³ For this distinction between general entities and the relative terminology, cf. Santambrogio (1990).

²⁴ For such a notion, see Chisholm (1976:28). As far as this correspondence between general entities and concept is concerned, we wish to remain neutral on whether such a correspondence amounts to an identity (as presumably the early Russell (1903) would have said) or not (as in the Fregean paradigm, for which see Cocchiarella (1989)).

²⁵ See previous footnote.

²⁶ As Marconi (1980:85-90) has shown, in the *Science of Logic* Hegel uses singular terms to denote intensional entities like concepts, though in a way which must not be taken as contrastive with an use in which such terms denote particulars. Seen under the present perspective, the *Phenomenology of Spirit* would show that the latter use is always, so to say, wishful thinking. This might explain why Hegel does not care to distinguish between referential and generic use where he would be allowed to do so syntactically, notably with indexicals (e.g. in premise b), where one would expect "this" to be replaced by "the this"). As Marconi again remarks (1980:72), it is typical of Hegel not to distinguish among uses of singular terms in case such a distinction were to suggest that it is matched by an *ontological* distinction on the referents' side.

²⁷ Since it is endorsed both within a non-descriptive theory of indexical reference à la Russell and within a denotational theory of indexical reference à la Bradley: see immediately below.

²⁸ For the possibility of assimilating Bradley's ideas on reference to Frege's theory of reference (which is, sometimes confusedly, assumed as the starting point of denotational theories of reference), cf. e.g. Di Francesco (1991:56).

²⁹ Cf. the well-known papers of Donnellan (1970), Kaplan (1989a), Kripke (1980), Perry (1977).

³⁰ For a similar argument in Kaplan, cf. e.g. (1989a:516-20).

³¹ Note that even taking indexical reference aside d) can hardly work, insofar as it attempts to prove a *metaphysical* conclusion by means of an *epistemic* result. It may well turn out, that is, that even if we were utterly unable to select epistemically individual items, still things metaphysically subsist as discrete individuals. It must be conceded to the Hegelians, however, that one of Hegel's main polemical aims precisely is that of questioning the distinction between an epistemic and a metaphysical standpoint. To argue against such a questioning would probably take a whole book. Let us limit ourselves to remark that, even sharing an Hegelian stance, d) would not be utterly proven unless it were independently argued that we cannot have any other means of telling one individual from another but *to refer to such an individual indexically*.

³² Cf. Kaplan (1989a:539)

³³ Cf. Kaplan (1989a:500-1, 505, 520-1)

³⁴ Cf. Kaplan (1989a:501,507).

³⁵ Cf. Kaplan (1989a:530).

³⁶ Kaplan (1989a:506,518,520,523)

³⁷ Kaplan seems to admit the token-reflexivity of an indexical such as "I" in its character-displaying rule (D2); cf. (1989a:519-20). Recanati (1993:141) maintains that this holds true of ordinary indexicals in general, insofar as they are "token-reflexive" words; Kaplan, however, provides for "this" a different treatment from that suggested in the text. He indeed considers it as a true demonstrative rather than a

pure indexical (cf. 1989a:524). In its opinion, a true demonstrative differs from a pure indexical in that a demonstrative is incomplete without an associated demonstration, where "to be incomplete" means that the linguistic rule which governs the use of a true demonstrative is insufficient to determine the referent it has notwithstanding that a certain context is given (cf. (1989a:490-1)). For him, a demonstration is a conceptual characterization having a perspectual feature and satisfiable by an individual only given a certain context (for instance, "the brightest heavenly body now visible from here"). The manner of presentation the demonstration expresses can thus be considered as the demonstration's specific character. Now, such a character can be added to the linguistic rule associated to the true demonstrative so as to provide the whole character of the complete demonstrative, that is, of a demonstrative which has been completed by a certain demonstration (cf. (1989a:526-7)). Demonstrations, thus, seem to be needed in order to account for the fact that, unlike pure indexicals, true demonstratives are uttered in a context in which more than one individual satisfies the linguistic meaning associated with them. Subsequently, however, Kaplan has realized that the above fact can be accounted for in a different way, namely by supplying an occurrence of a demonstrative with a directing perceptual intention. Unlike demonstrations, directing intentions do not belong to character (cf. Kaplan (1989b:582-8)). Kaplan probably considers the replacement of demonstrations with directing intentions a refinement of the theory because it leaves untouched the fact that two distinct occurrences of one and the same true demonstrative have the same meaning (under the point of view of character). Be that as it may with the right analysis of true demonstratives, however, it may be noted that the Hegelo-Bradleyan reflection on the features of "this" provides a hint in order to interpret it as a pure indexical rather than as a true demonstrative. In fact, as Bradley pointed out when stressing the difference between *thisness* and *this-ity*, one individual only may be a this in a given context (as much as when a pure indexical is concerned), insofar as one may be introduced to an individual only while uttering "this", that is, one can focus one's attention on one individual only at a time. Thus, one can take the character of "this" as context-sensitive precisely as we do in the text.

³⁸ I owe this objection to Diego Marconi.

³⁹ I thank F. Orilia for his comments to a previous draft of this paper.

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