英国唯心主义

The British Idealists

Edited by

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University of Wales , Swansea

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CAMBRIDGE TEXTS IN THE
HISTORY OF POLITICAL THOUGHT

The British Idealists

剑桥政治思想史原著系列

丛书编辑

Raymond Geuss
剑桥大学社会科学与政治科学高级讲师

Quentin Skinner
剑桥大学近代史讲座教授

在政治理论领域，"剑桥政治思想史原著系列"作为主要的学生教科丛书，如今已牢固确立了其地位。本丛书旨在使学生能够获得从古希腊到 20 世纪初期西方政治思想史方面所有最为重要的原著。它囊括了所有著名的经典原著，但与此同时，它又扩展了传统的评价尺度，以便能够纳入范围广泛、不那么出名的作品。而在此之前，这些作品中有许多从未有过现代英文版本可资利用。只要可能，所选原著都会以完整而不删节的形式出版，其中的译作则是专门为本丛书的目的而安排。每一本书都有一个评论性的导言，加上历史年表、生平梗概、进一步阅读指南，以及必要的词汇表和原文注解。本丛书的最终目的是，为西方政治思想的整个发展脉络提供一个清晰的轮廓。

本丛书已出版著作的书目，请查阅书末。

CAMBRIDGE TEXTS IN THE
HISTORY OF POLITICAL THOUGHT

Series editors

RAYMOND GEUSS

Lecturer in Social and Political Sciences, University of Cambridge

QUENTIN SKINNER

Regius Professor of Modern History in the University of Cambridge

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Acknowledgements

Introduction

The roots of British Idealism were established in Scotland and Oxford during the middle of the nineteenth century and rapidly became the dominant philosophy, through the writings and personal influence of such exponents as Fraser Campbell, Edward Caird, T. H. Green, F. H. Bradley, Bernard Bosanquet, Henry Jones, Andrew Seth, D. G. Ritchie, J. S. Mackenzie, William Wallace, W. R. Sorley, J. M. E. McTaggart and John Watson, until the turn of the century when its fundamental doctrines were challenged by John Cook Wilson, G. E. Moore and Bertrand Russell. From this time the march of Idealism was halted, and by the end of the First World War it was decidedly on the retreat. Through their teaching, personal influence and patronage, the British Idealists managed to permeate the whole English-speaking world with their doctrines. Even after the death of its leading surviving exponents, Bradley, Bosanquet, Jones and McTaggart, in the mid 1920s, it continued to dominate the professoriate and was able to count in its ranks able young converts such as R. G. Collingwood in Oxford, who published *Speculum Mentis* in 1925, and Michael Oakeshott in Cambridge, who published *Experience and its Modes* in 1933.

The social and political philosophy of British Idealism continues to resonate, and is invoked, often without discrimination, for both positive and negative reasons. On the one hand it provides a philosophical basis for opposing the extreme view that society is no more than the sum of its parts, while emphasising the socially constituted character of personality and morality. The state is viewed as the sustainer of a moral world within which rights and obligations

emanate from the community, and individuals are afforded the opportunity to achieve their maximum potential. It is a philosophy that emphasises the spiritual cohesiveness of the social organism. In this it is seen to be a forerunner of the communitarianism of Sandel, MacIntyre, Taylor and Walzer. Most recently David Miller echoes many of the Idealists' themes and conclusions in his defence of the ethics of nationality against ethical universalism. He argues that the obligations generated by communal relations diminish the opposition between self-interest and our obligations to others. Nationality, ideally when coupled with the state as the instrument of self-determination, is the sustainer of a moral life. This is not a position incompatible with universal ethics and human rights, but it does insist that it is through the ethical relations of co-nationals that they are sustained. This, as we will see, is the position of the British Idealists, and it is therefore somewhat ironic that in the area of modern international relations theory their writings should be invoked as the very antithesis of cosmopolitanism and international justice.[1] Their point was simply that it is through the state that ideals of humanitarian justice can be developed, promoted and sustained, not that such ideals could not be attained.

Philosophy, religion and politics

Although critics inveighed against Hegel for the practical implications of his political philosophy, he was clear in his own mind that philosophy had no such contribution to make to practical life. In *The Philosophy of Right* he maintained that philosophy always arrives too late on the scene to offer practical advice, the owl of Minerva taking flight only with the coming of dusk. For the British Idealists, with a few exceptions, notably Bradley and McTaggart, philosophy was integrally related to practical life and needed to be directed to improve the condition of society. They maintained that everything in experience is related to everything else. There could be no isolated individuals or facts. In the theory of knowledge, this led to the coherence theory of truth, and in social philosophy, it

[1] David Miller, *On Nationality* (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1995), 79–80; Chris Brown, *International Relations Theory* (Hemel Hempstead, Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1992); and Janna Thompson, *Justice and World Order* (London, Routledge, 1992).

resulted in a communitarianism which posited the mutual interdependence of society and the individual.

For the most part the British Idealists were social reformers who believed that the work of the philosopher was to raise the consciousness of the working man to the level where he was capable of considering principles. They rejected the individualism of their age, which set man and the state in oppostion, and emphasised instead a relationship of mutual inclusion in which each is a reflection of the other. Society, or the state, was the sustainer of morality, rights and social values and the context in which the individual found expression. Far from the idea that extending the role of the state diminished individual responsibility, they argued that, properly conceived, the state enhanced the capacity of the individual for self-realisation. The enabling state could provide opportunities that were beyond the imagination of unregulated individual enterprise. It was a deeply spiritual philosophy which, in the hands of the likes of Green, Caird and Jones, viewed human progress in terms of the Divine Spirit, the source of all religion and morality, finding expression in human agency. Religion is an inextricable part of the process of self-realisation. For many of the Idealists, God is immanent in the world. The Divine and the human constitute the inseparable spiritual unity of the world. Christ is incarnate in the world reflecting the unity of God and man. God is not merely the Creator, but reveals Himself in man.[2] The test of a morally worthwhile existence is the extent to which the individual attempts to do God's work in the world by achieving his or her own potential and contributing to the common good. Social reform and moral development were closely linked with religious self-realisation in what was essentially a civic religion. The Absolute is realised in finite centres, and all the more so when they are spiritual. Man is what he is by virtue of God's presence in him. The religious convictions of the British Idealists were by no means orthodox, but at a time when religion was under attack from evolutionist scientific orthodoxy and materialist philosophies, Idealism was able to provide a rational basis for belief which, together with its emphasis on the unity and development of human potential, provided a philosophical basis for social legislation.

[2] D. G. Ritchie, *Philosophical Studies* (London, Macmillan, 1905), 241.

The religious backgrounds from which most of the Idealists came predisposed them towards the idea of doing 'good works' in society. Some of them, such as Caird, Green, Muirhead, Jones, Watson and Mackenzie, had aspirations to join the ministry before succumbing to the temptations of philosophy. British Idealists were almost evangelical in their reforming zeal and saw their position as professional philosophers carrying with it a social responsibility to identify and articulate the sources of injustice and depravity, and campaign for reform. To these ends they advocated for legislation, gave evidence to and served on government commissions, sat on school boards, were active in extending university education to women, and enthusiastically participated in university extramural schemes and the Workers' Educational Association. They were at the forefront in establishing and supporting university extension schemes to help the poor in the major cities of Britain. In the field of social work the British Idealists were the dominant group who, in demonstrating the relevance of philosophy to ordinary life, exercised a considerable influence in providing a frame of reference for social policy, public administration and education reform well into the twentieth century.[3]

British Idealism certainly imported the spirit of its philosophy from Germany, and in particular valued Hegel's forthright rejection of all dualisms, including Kant's distinction between things in themselves and things as they are experienced by the knowing mind. In particular they subscribed to his insistence on the unity of experience which raised the question of how this undifferentiated unity becomes differentiated into all its various modes. The British Idealists sought to demonstrate that there could be no absolute divisions, for example, between mind and nature, nature and environment, or the individual and the state. Each includes something of the other and their opposition is overcome in a unity, not one that obliterates differences, but one that is a genuine unity in diversity.[4] This is illustrated in Caird's insistence that true Socialists and true

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[3] M. Richter, *The Politics of Conscience: T. H. Green and His Age* (London, Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1964), 143; Andrew Vincent and Raymond Plant, *Philosophy, Politics and Citizenship* (Oxford, Blackwell, 1984), 116; and Jose Harris, 'Political Thought and the Welfare State 1870–1940', *Past and Present*, 135 (1992), 123.

[4] See Edward Caird, 'The Problem of Philosophy at the Present Time', *Essays on Literature and Philosophy* (Glasgow, Maclehose, 1892), vol. 1, 205–6.

Individualists have to acknowledge what is good in the point of view of the adversary (see p. 179). This emphasis upon the unity of experience as a whole is known as Absolute Idealism.

None of the major British Idealists accepted the stylised, dialectic method which Hegel used to address the process of differentiation. Green, for example, complained that the method actually hindered Hegel in reaching his conclusions, and accused Principal John Caird of too slavishly accepting it. It was the principle rather than the method of dialectic that attracted the British Idealists, a principle that was to be discerned in Plato.[5]

It is a misconception that the British Idealists made reality mind-dependent. They rejected Berkeley's psychological idealism because it made reality dependent upon the perceiving mind, whether the individual's or God's. With Hegel they contend 'that the known world is for us necessarily a world that exists only because we are thinking beings'.[6] This is not to deny the distinction between thought and reality, nor to assert that knowledge of a fact is that fact itself. The world didn't suddenly begin to go around the sun the minute that Copernicus had the idea that it did so. The idea that things exist only in being known is what J. S. Mackenzie calls 'False idealism'.[7] The point is not that every being knows reality, but that reality as the embodiment of thought is intelligible and capable of being known only by a being that thinks. Hastings Rashdall sums up the position when he says that Idealism assumes 'that there is no such thing as matter apart from mind, that what we commonly call *things* are not self-subsistent realities, but are only real when taken in their connection with mind – that they exist for mind, not for themselves'.[8] In other words, there is a unity between mind and matter, nature and spirit. This does not mean that nature is intelligent, merely that it is intelligible.

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[5] T. H. Green, *Works*, ed. R. L. Nettleship (London, Longmans Green, 1888), vol. III, 146; and Andrew Seth, *Scottish Philosophy* (Edinburgh, Blackwood, 1890), 2nd ed., 198.

[6] John Watson, *The Interpretation of Religious Experience*m, the Gifford Lectures 1910–12, part I (Glasgow, Maclehose, 1912), 289.

[7] J. S. Mackenzie, 'Edward Caird as a Philosophical Teacher', *Mind*, n.s., 18 (1909), 519.

[8] Hastings Rashdall, 'Personality: Human and Divine', in ed. Henry Sturt, *Personal Idealism: Philosophical Essays* (London, Macmillan, 1902), 370.

There were internal divisions among the Absolute Idealists. Jones, for example, accused both Bosanquet and Bradley of failing to overcome the dualism between appearance and reality in positing an Absolute that was ultimately beyond experience. Nevertheless, appearance, for Bradley, in some way belongs to, or qualifies, reality. The principle of consistency and non-contradiction, the criterion of the coherence theory of truth, is a matter of degree; there are, therefore, degrees of reality, and not a yawning chasm between appearance and reality. Absolute Idealists, such as Caird and Jones, while agreeing with the monistic unity of the whole, give much more emphasis than Bradley or Bosanquet to the reality of the appearances. For Caird and Jones, the unity embodies the principle of rationality which is expressed in and through all the differentiations of the whole. Jones argued that while Idealism repudiates the psychological method of beginning a philosophical inquiry from the inner life of the subject it does not attempt to do without that inner life altogether.

Subjective, or Personal, Idealists objected to the propensity of Absolute Idealism to undervalue the individual, and of running the risk of allowing the individual to become absorbed into the Absolute.[9] Following Rudolph Eucken, Boyce Gibson contended that the central idea of Absolute Idealism – that the real is rational – is upheld by Personal Idealism, but 'from the point of view of the personal experient'.[10] Absolute and Personal Idealism had a common enemy in naturalism, but Absolute Idealism was deficient in two main respects. First, it criticised human experience, not from the vantage point of human experience itself, 'but from the visionary and impractical standpoint of human nature'.[11] Secondly, it refused to give adequate recognition to volition in human nature. In Seth's view, Absolute Idealism was in danger of consigning the individual to insignificance.[12]

Despite the internal differences of opinion, Idealism was a philosophy responsive to the crucial concerns of Victorian Britain, and

[9] Andrew Seth, *Hegelianism and Personality* (Edinburgh, Blackwood, 1888), 215.
[10] W. R. Boyce Gibson, 'A Peace Policy for Idealists', *The Hibbert Journal*, 5 (1906–7), 409.
[11] Henry Sturt, ed., *Personal Idealism*, x.
[12] A. Seth Pringle-Pattison, *The Idea of God in the Light of Recent Philosophy* (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1920), 266.

opposed to excessive individualism. The extent to which British Idealism rode the wave of enthusiasm for evolution has been little noticed. It was able to adapt evolution to its own ends by eschewing its naturalistic form and emphasising the developing spiritual unity of existence and, for many of them, the centrality of God in this process. In positing the unity of nature and spirit the British Idealists fully capitalised upon their superficial affinity with the immensely popular naturalistic evolutionary theories.

Evolution and ethics

It is difficult to conceive the extent to which the idea of evolution dominated intellectual life during the latter part of the nineteenth century after Charles Darwin's and Alfred Russel Wallace's theories were first revealed in 1858. Wallace's findings, as Darwin saw them in 1858, proved to be the stimulus to the publication of *The Origin of Species* in 1859, a rather hasty and much less detailed account of evolution than Darwin had originally intended. Although the ideas are presented in as mild and unprovocative a manner as he could muster, taking care to avoid directly the subject of Genesis and the origin of humanity, the implications of many statements were easily drawn. He explicitly denied, for example, that each species was 'independently created'. Darwin argued that, on the contrary, each species developed from a common ancestry, many had become extinct, and few would transmit progeny unchanged to a distant future.[13] The implications were immediately recognised. Darwin's theory was a denial of the Creationist theory of the origin of species, as exemplified, for example, in the natural theology of William Paley.[14] A second implication, which caused a tremendous uproar, was the view that man was descended from the apes. This was, in fact, a perversion of Darwin's contention, which was that the apes and man have a common ancestor. This constituted a denial of the absolute distinction between Nature and Spirit, or animal and human nature.

[13] Charles Darwin, *The Origin of Species by Means of Natural Selection: Or the Preservation of Favoured Races in the Struggle for Life*, ed. J. W. Burrow (Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1985; first published by John Murray, 1859), 458-9.
[14] William Paley, *Natural Theology*, vol. IV, *Works* (London, George Cowie, 1837).

Evolutionary theory was much more accessible to the educated public than the physical and mathematical sciences. The unity of Nature and Spirit in the theory of evolution held out the possibility of a common form of explanation in the natural and social sciences. The allure of such an all-encompassing way of understanding the whole of existence was almost irresistible. It found expression not only in biology, geology, palaeontology and anthropology, but also in varying degrees of modification, in history, philosophy, poetry and even religion.

The extent to which Darwin influenced social evolutionists has been greatly exaggerated. Darwin and Spencer were frequently cited not as the originators of evolutionary theory, but as those most responsible for impressing it upon the popular consciousness. Spencer's populist biology, philosophically conceived, inadequately grounded in empirical research, and analogously applied to society, was received with immense enthusiasm by the reading public. Because Idealism in its British form was a practical philosophy aimed at transforming society, its exponents had little respect for Spencer's philosophical acumen, but nevertheless recognised the necessity of discrediting his ideas at the popular and philosophical levels.[15] Bosanquet, for example, accused Spencer of being mainly responsible for the tendency of importing conceptions, or 'new fangled analogies' fashionably drawn from anywhere, except experience of the phenomenon to be explained, resulting in crude distortions of fundamental truths which have been obvious for 2,000 years (see p. 57).

One of the crucial points of contention among evolutionists was the question of heredity. Did Darwinian natural selection eliminate those least adjusted to the environment, leaving those who survive to pass on their qualities through inheritance? Or could the environment modify organisms by Lamarck's idea of use or disuse, the modifications of which were then inheritable? Both forms of explanation are invoked, for example, in the political theories of Walter Bagehot and Herbert Spencer. Even though Spencer coined the term 'survival of the fittest', and Darwin began to favour it in

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[15] Henry Jones, 'The Misuse of Metaphors in the Human Sciences', *Working Faith of the Social Reformer* (London, Macmillan, 1910), 44. Cf. A. S. Pringle-Pattison, 'Life and Philosophy of Herbert Spencer', *The Quarterly Review*, 200 (1904), 241–2.

preference to his own 'struggle for existence', Spencer was far less convinced by the explanatory force of Natural Selection than by Lamarck's theory of Use Inheritance, or inherited character.

August Weissman's Germ Plasm theory revolutionised genetics. By the latter part of the 1890s the overwhelming evidence of experimental cytology, the science of cells, was weighted against the theory of Inherited Characters. The British Idealists tended to reject the Lamarckian principle of inherited characters, or at least gave little significance to it, while at the same time stressing a strong environmental influence upon human personality. Natural Selection, Ritchie argues, is an 'indisputable fact', and in so far as use inheritance, or inherited character, is still in doubt we should not revert to dubious or unknown causes when there are known causes that are sufficient (see p. 73). Natural Selection was deemed to be at work in nature and society. Human beings inherit capacities which are capable of being developed or retarded by the social environment or civilisation which is inherited, but not biologically, by successive generations. Language, Ritchie argues, makes possible the transmission of experience which is not biologically inheritable. The possession of consciousness, the ability to reflect, and the use of language give human beings a tremendous advantage in the struggle for existence.[16]

It is possible to identify three types of evolutionary theory being deployed for political purposes at the end of the nineteenth century, each having different postulates, and each capable of generating a variety of political conclusions. The three types of evolutionary theory can broadly be designated Naturalistic, Ethical and Spiritual.

The first postulates a unity or continuity between Nature and Spirit, suggesting that the latter can be understood and explained with reference to the former. Nature was to be the guide to or standard for ethics. Seth argues, for instance, that the exponents of naturalistic evolution, which he terms ethical evolution, 'naturalise morality, to assimilate ethical experience to nature . . .' (see p. 38). In this respect they explain what comes later in terms of what came before. This is exemplified by Darwin and Spencer. Darwin, for instance, attempted to account for the development of moral and

[16] D. G. Ritchie, *Darwinism and Politics* (London, Swan Sonnenschein, 1901), 100–1. Cf. 131–2.