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AUTHOR MEETS CRITICS

British Idealism and Kant

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Abstract

Although we value Guyer's particular reading of British Idealist works, we nonetheless consider that his largely textualist-focused approach narrows both the scope and ultimate comprehension of Idealist ethics, particularly in relation to Kant. We consider that Guyer's analysis misses the depth of their moral understanding. Such Idealist argumentation embodies a rich blending of historical, sociological, political, and evolutionary theory, which was employed consistently in their ethical reflections. To miss this contextual point can make many of their writings almost unintelligible. Thus, we consider it of central importance to understand British Idealist moral philosophy *within* this much broader philosophical frame.

Keywords: British Idealism; ethics; epistemology; Kant; metaphysics

1. Introduction

A very simplified version of Guyer's discussion on Kant and the British Idealists would be that F. H. Bradley's 'duty for duty's sake' (one essay within his *Ethical Studies*) is largely a recapitulation of the 'empty formalism' argument. In fact, the basic outline structure of Bradley's whole text is, in the final analysis, not that different from Kant's 'Empire of Ends' argument. T. H. Green is envisaged as a moral perfectionist who fleshes out (quite productively) Kant's own perfectionist position. In Edward Caird, although the Hegelian influence is more marked, Guyer argues that Kant was 'in the process of replacing his initial conception of the highest good as something to be achieved in the afterlife of individual agents with something to be realized in the eventual history of the human species' (404).[1] He contends that this later position in Kant is very close to Caird's own view. In the case of Josiah Royce, Guyer reviews the latter's *Philosophy of Loyalty*, seeing the notion of loyalty as 'a successor to Kantian morality or a more generous interpretation of it in which the idea of the empire of ends is its centre piece' (406). Finally, H. J. Paton's *The Good Will* is seen to develop an argument that morality cannot be realised by the isolated individual, but rather in 'an all-inclusive society of

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. . . reasonable beings' (418). To have a good will is, in effect, to 'will coherently with other people of good will' (421). Overall, British Idealist ethical reflections are seen to 'culminate in interpretations of Kant's conception of the empire of ends', which Kant himself regarded as the 'culminating formulation of the categorical imperative' (423).

Although we highly value Guyer's particular reading of certain British Idealist works, we nonetheless consider that his largely textualist-focused approach narrows both the scope and ultimate comprehension of Idealist ethics, particularly in relation to Kant. In essence, we consider that Guyer's analysis misses the intricate subtlety, range, and depth of the arguments that actually underpin British Idealist moral understanding. Such Idealist argumentation embodies a rich blending of historical, sociological, political, and evolutionary theory, which was employed consistently in their ethical reflections. To miss this contextual point can make many of their writings almost unintelligible. Thus, in responding to Guyer's arguments, we consider it of central importance to understand British Idealist moral philosophy *within* this much broader philosophical frame. The first background point to note concerns the actual philosophical diversity of the Idealist movement, which is not mentioned in Guyer's account. This is important for grasping some of the subtle differences of perspective. Second, there is the ambiguous status of epistemology within important sections of the Idealists. This latter argument has a profound bearing on their relation to both Kant and Hegel and indeed subsequent moral reflections. Third, there is the place of history within certain key areas of philosophical idealism which, in turn, raises a range of issues for moral thought. Fourthly, the role of evolution in moral philosophy is of great significance. Some in the Idealist movement clearly evinced a deep interest in evolutionary ideas which they believed to be a development of Hegel's notion of emanation. Finally, it is worth remarking on the social dimension of Idealist arguments. As Guyer notes, such Idealists exhibited a profound sensitivity to the social context in which ethical arguments were framed.

2. Diversity

The British Idealists were a much more diverse group of thinkers than is often appreciated, united more by what they opposed than in the overall consistency of conclusions. Probably, the most basic division was between the Absolute and Personal Idealists. There were also divisions among the Absolute Idealists themselves. Henry Jones, for example, had criticised both Bernard Bosanquet and F. H. Bradley for failing to overcome the dualism between appearance and reality and in positing an absolute that was ultimately *beyond* experience. For Bradley, beginning from the general principle of unity and implicitly denying Kantian dualism, our experience of the Absolute is seen as most complete at the sentient level where it presents itself as an undifferentiated whole. Thought thus mutilates the unity of experience. He therefore argued that, speaking properly, there is nothing which is perfect except the Absolute itself. Bradley did not, however, completely sever appearance from reality. He maintained their relation by means of two fundamental principles: first, the principle of non-contradiction. All reality must be consistent. If it is contradictory, it must be an appearance. Appearance, nevertheless, in some way belongs to, or qualifies, reality. Second, consistency and non-contradiction is a matter of degree; therefore, there are degrees of reality and not a yawning chasm between appearance and reality (Bradley

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1897: 217). R. G. Collingwood, for example, takes Bradley's crucial argument here as a denial of the whole subjectivist or phenomenalist tradition associated with Locke, Hamilton, Mansel, and Spencer (see Collingwood 2008).

Absolute Idealists, such as Edward Caird and Henry Jones, while agreeing with the monistic unity of the whole, gave much more emphasis than Bradley or Bosanquet to the reality of appearances. For Caird and Jones, the unity embodies the principle of rationality which is expressed in and through all the differentiations of the whole. Thus, Jones argues that whilst Idealism repudiates the psychological introspective method of beginning a philosophical inquiry from the inner life of the subject, it does not attempt to do without that inner life altogether. Activity, emotions, and purposes are all incorporated, but what is denied is *any* fundamental distinction between subject and object. These are distinctions made within an ontological unity. This ontological unity, Jones argues, is not incompatible with 'their equally real difference' (see Jones 1905: 20–1; Boucher and Vincent 1993: ch. 2).

The contemporaneous Personal Idealist movement objected to the propensity of Absolute Idealism to undervalue the individual moral agent and to run the risk of allowing the individual to become absorbed into the Absolute. This latter argument had ramifications for their view of morality. There were also further complex subdivisions amongst the Personal Idealists themselves; nonetheless, they all largely acknowledged that some exponents of monism were closer to Personal Idealism than others.[2] Henry Sturt, for example, did not think that either Henry Jones or Josiah Royce was as philosophically suspect as other Absolutists. Equally, Sturt believed that the movement to which he belonged was a development of, rather than a departure from, the Idealism of Green, Bosanquet, and Bradley. Following Rudolph Eucken, another Personal Idealist, W. R. Boyce Gibson, contended that the central idea of Absolute Idealism – that the real is rational – was also upheld by Personal Idealism, but 'from the point of view of the personal experient' (Boyce Gibson 1906–1907: 409). Absolute and Personal Idealism had a common philosophical enemy in naturalism, but Absolute Idealism was still regarded by the Personalists as largely deficient in two important 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' (Sturt 1902: x). Second, it refused to give adequate recognition to volition in human nature. In Seth's view, for example, Absolute Idealism was always in imminent danger of consigning the moral agent to insignificance (Seth Pringle-Pattison 1920: 266). Yet, despite criticism, Absolute Idealism largely remained the more dominant element within the Idealist movement as a whole up to the 1930s, even for the later representatives of the new generation, R. G. Collingwood and Michael Oakeshott.

3. Epistemology

Epistemology was chiefly thought to be dealing with the complex relation between mind and its objects. For many British Idealists, much of Kant's philosophical project, despite its core importance, tended to be associated with epistemology. Essentially, epistemology was taken as a philosophical enterprise associated with the need to deal with both the *known object* and the *process of knowing*. It purportedly provided insights into the transition between knowing and the object. Yet the core question, for many Idealists, was where does epistemology gain its foothold: is it in the 'object known' or

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in the 'cognitive process of knowing'? Epistemology, *per se*, cannot simply presuppose the object before dealing with the cognitive grasp of it (this would be assuming what we are trying to prove). Further, is epistemology focused on the 'actual cognitive event' or 'the reflective knowing of the event'? If focused on the actual event, this provides no insight into the object; it is merely a psychological occurrence. However, 'reflection on the cognitive event' itself remains just that, a reflection, at one remove from the event or object. If, on the other hand, one begins with the empirical object itself, then, in turn, this tells us nothing about the cognitive knowing of the object.

The Absolute Idealist response to the epistemology issue is therefore to differentiate themselves from both Descartes and Kant. This is neatly summarised by Henry Jones: 'Modern metaphysics ... starts from the view of reality as a whole, and not from a fragment; and its task is to expound the inner articulation, the internal harmony of the whole' (Jones 1893: 469). Hence, with Hegel, Oakeshott, Collingwood, and Jones, amongst others, there is a rejection of Kantian epistemology and, indeed, a rejection of epistemology as a philosophical subject. In turn, they embraced a different mode of argument which prioritised neither the object nor the subject. The emphasis falls on the Absolute whole. Philosophical enquiry thus begins with the principle of the unity of experience and the rejection of any dualism.

The root of the Idealist view is well expressed by Seth, who argued that thinking always involves a relation between the thinker and an objective world, but that it is a fallacy to begin by assuming that only one side of the dualism exists (the objective world or thought) independently of the other (Seth 1890: 11). It was largely from Hegel that the British Idealists imported this idea of the complex unity of experience. From this starting point, the question of how the unity is differentiated into all its various modes becomes the central philosophical issue. This also remained a central theme within the later Idealism of Collingwood and Oakeshott. Ideas essentially unite the mind and its objects in mutual inclusion rather than in antagonism. This is not to deny the distinction between thought and reality. As Henry Jones suggests, no Idealist denies this distinction. None assert that knowledge of a fact *is* that fact (see Jones 1895: 273; Mackenzie 1909: 519). 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' (Rashdall 1902: 370).

Taking the isolated human subject as the starting point in philosophy inevitably leads to a dilemma, since, in order to pronounce on the different forms of experience and their relation to reality, a criterion of genuine knowledge has to be presupposed in advance of undertaking the investigation designed to establish it (Norman 1976: ch.1). When thinking is taken to be the process by which Spirit realises itself, the subjective and objective are not separated by ideas but instead are the differentiations of the one comprehensive unity (Caird 1903: 55). Hegel's importance for the British Idealists here, then, is that he dispenses with the problem of epistemology and provides a metaphysics, which is also a logic of the process and development of mind (Jones 1893; Boucher 1990: 429–32). Edward Caird sums up Hegel's position thus: the highest aim of philosophy 'is to reinterpret experience, in the light of a unity which is presupposed in it, but which cannot be made conscious or explicit until the relation of experience to the thinking self is seen – the unity of all things with each other and with the mind that

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knows them' (Caird 1892: 442). For Green, Hegel's importance was that he showed that the world is essentially an interrelated whole in which all that is real is the expression and activity of 'one spiritual self-conscious being'. We are related to this self-conscious being, not as parts to a whole, 'but as partakers in some inchoate measure of the self-consciousness through which it at once constitutes and distinguishes itself from the world; [and] that this participation is the source of morality and religion; this we take to be the vital truth which Hegel had to teach' (Green 1883–1886: 146).[3]

In summary, Idealists were dissatisfied with all dualisms and sought to demonstrate that there could be no absolute ontological divisions, for example, between mind and nature, nature and environment, subject and object, or indeed individualism and collectivism. Each element includes something of the other. Their apparent opposition is overcome in a unity, not one which obliterates differences but rests upon a genuine 'unity in diversity'.

4. History

The importance of the British Idealists was that they elevated history to the level of autonomous knowledge independently of the natural sciences. Within British Idealism, history is important for appraising their moral theories. Their understanding of history is a distinguishing feature which was refined further by the later generation including Collingwood and Oakeshott. It also marks, to a degree, another internal difference between, for example, more classical Kantianism and Hegelianism. Thus, the idealism of Collingwood, Oakeshott, and Greenleaf and that of, say, Bosanquet or even Green diverge, to a degree, on their attitudes to history. Aside from Bradley's *The Presuppositions of Critical History* (1874) (and the work of Robert Flint), there was little in the earlier British Idealist movement equivalent to, say, Hegel's *Philosophy of History*. However, the manner of their philosophical analysis was historical, taking philosophical problems to exemplify Hegel's idea of emanation. Arriving at resolutions to philosophical problems necessarily entailed tracing their gradual development. Green, for example, had taken on board certain Hegelian assumptions about freedom and history in his *Four Lectures on the English Commonwealth*, but there was virtually nothing that overtly theorised historical method.

It was at the point of the slow decline of idealism in the 1920s and 1930s that we see history making a more decisive appearance within British Idealist thought, in the sense of systematic analyses of the postulates or Absolute Presuppositions of history as modes or forms of experience. The most significant figures here are Collingwood and Oakeshott.[4] The philosophical focus on historical method became central to the idealist enterprise. In some ways, this was, in small part, a reprise of Hegel's own philosophy of history.

In considering the influence of Kant on British Idealist moral philosophy, Collingwood is a worthy candidate for consideration.[5] Guyer mentions him as a latter-day exponent of Idealism – although oddly linking him with the realist H. W. P. Joseph, of whom Collingwood was a severe critic. As an undergraduate, Collingwood engaged in a thorough study of Kant and later, as a university lecturer, translated the 1781 and 1787 prefaces to the *Critique of Pure Reason,* to which he added his own commentary (van der Dussen 1981: 452). His moral philosophy lectures from 1921 to 1940 were

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developed by using Kant as the exemplar of (what he called) *regularian ethics*, which conflated right and duty. Isaiah Berlin attended Collingwood's lectures on the philosophy of history in 1931, and one of Collingwood's translations of Kant became one of Berlin's favourite quotations: 'Out of the Crooked timber of humanity no straight thing was ever made' (Skagestad 2005: 99). The culmination of Collingwood's dialogue with Kant is manifest in *The New Leviathan* (1942), but his detailed thinking was worked out in the lectures on moral philosophy, especially in 'Goodness, Rightness and Utility' (1940) (see Collingwood 1992).

In Collingwood, we find an emphasis on the importance of history for morality. Moral conduct for Collingwood is the epitome of practical reason, and history is its counterpart as the highest form of theoretical reason. Duty and history are correlative; the former is individuated by the latter and eliminates, to a greater degree, the caprice of utilitarian and Kantian regularian ethics. It has to be emphasised that Collingwood was consolidating his views on morality during the Second World War, and his theory of mind, linking duty and history, was nascent. History was yet to emerge as fully autonomous in the development of consciousness, but glimpses of the higher form of morality, in the form of duty, were evident throughout the continent. Germany, Collingwood believed, had not yet reached this level, and although Kant tried to distinguish a rule-based morality from duty in *The Metaphysics of Morals,* he ultimately failed. Collingwood, an archaeologist and anthropologist as well as a moral philosopher, deviated from the usual stadial scale of savagery, barbarism, and civilisation. Instead, he saw the 'social contract' in terms of the conversion from the non-social into the social, from savagery to civilisation. Barbarism, for Collingwood, is a revolt against civilisation. Germany, then, was far from exemplifying a historical consciousness and a sense of duty; it was the manifestation of a new barbarism.

The historical consciousness, in its relation to duty, enables the individual to avoid the problems of acting solely according to rules. The historical consciousness indicates what it is my duty to do, being the sort of person I am, with the experience I have accumulated. The limitations on ethical conduct are built into his theory of the development of mind as the gradual elimination of caprice and the revelation of freedom in the civilising process. The development of morality and civility is the gradual elimination of violence from our relations with each other, between bodies politic, and in our relationship with the environment. Morality is thus developmental. As consciousness develops with the gradual elimination of violence from our relations, what it is my duty to do varies. For example, in relation to punishment, the death penalty may be appropriate to keep society in check at a particular historical period, whereas with the development of civility it becomes unnecessary, even barbaric.

Collingwood does clearly differentiate himself from Kant. Goodness, for him, is a matter of choice, and the reasons we give for the choices are that they are *useful*, they are *right*, or they are my *duty*. Right action is simply action according to or in conformity with a rule. Nevertheless, duty is not synonymous with what it is right for me to do. 'It is right for me to do this' and 'It is right for me to do that' are compatible, while to say that it is right for me to do this is incompatible with saying that it is my duty to do that, 'where 'this' and 'that' refer to alternative actions which are not compossible' (Collingwood 1992: 444). A rule, for Collingwood, is a practical universal

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which is 'a universal apprehended by the practical consciousness as a rule and realised practically in the various actions which are instances of obedience to the rule' (446) A rule is never merely a fact referring to the behaviour of people. Even at its most rudimentary, it involves will, which is both individual and universal. The individual will refers to a choice to do this action, whereas the universal will is the will to act on all occasions of a certain kind in a certain definite way (453).

In Collingwood's view, Kantian moral philosophy is of an entirely different character in that it resolves all moral problems 'into problems concerning rules and their application' (Collingwood 1992: 462). The problem is that Kant reduces the idea of duty to the idea of rightness, and duty therefore is obedience to rules. Collingwood insists, however, that Kant nonetheless intimates that right and duty may be separated. The categorical imperative, Collingwood argues, is a contradiction because *no* rule can determine an individual action. There are always a variety of actions by which a rule may be followed. Returning a book may be accomplished by handing it over in person or sending it by courier or by post. The rule is a disjunctive imperative, entailing a decision about which rule applies and a decision about which action by which to conform with it. Kant is thus telling us never to do an act of a certain kind. However, this particular act, the act which it is a man's duty to do, entails an implicit acknowledgement that the right thing to do is not necessarily correlative with what it is my duty to do. Duty, unlike right, is completely individuated. In addition, a second well-known phrase of Kant's turns out to be a contradiction if right and duty are to be correlative. The idea that ought implies can is evidently untrue if ought, in this sense, refers to right. In the regularian account, it may be my duty to obey a rule which is impossible for me to do. Collingwood argues that it may be a captain's duty, in this sense of the word, to save his ship when conditions are such that it is impossible. Two incompatible actions, Collingwood contends, may both be right, and on the regularian account, they would both be my duty: 'not doing a thing that is my duty is always a dereliction of duty. Unless this were true, it would not be true that ought implies can' (Collingwood 1992: 466). Whichever of the two non-compossible rules I choose to follow means that I would be in dereliction of my duty in not conforming to the other (pp. 462–6). Collingwood maintains that 'The phrases "categorical imperative" and "ought implies can" are thus fragments or germs of a non-regularian theory of duty embedded in a hostile context' (467). In other words, Kant is almost persuaded to be a Collingwoodian. It is important to emphasise that duty, as Collingwood describes it, was emerging as the historical consciousness emerged and was not, in his view, yet fully developed.

5. Evolution

It has been little noticed the extent to which British Idealism, at its peak, rode the wave of enthusiasm for evolution which swept through European thought. Essentially, it adapted evolution to its own ends by eschewing its naturalistic form and emphasising the developing 'mindful' unity of existence. Absolute Idealists, committed to the principle of monism, and Personal Idealists, who differentiated themselves by putting the individual experient self at the centre of experience, embraced the concept of evolution by criticising the naturalistic arguments of Darwin and Spencer, while at the same time denying the dualism created by such

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evolutionists as Charles Lyell, T. H. Huxley, and Alfred Russel Wallace. The tactic of the British Idealists was to argue that Hegel was a far better evolutionary theorist than Darwin, Spencer, or Huxley. Evolution was seen as completely compatible with idealism because idealism was itself an evolutionary philosophy. W. R. Sorley believed that it was a theory consistent with his own idealism because it asserted the unity of life and the continuity between man's mind and animal perception, confirming that there is no dichotomy between moral activity and the non-moral impulse (Sorley 1904: 34). British Idealists applied their familiar hypothesis of unity, and the spiritual nature of reality, to the problem of evolution. 'Evolution', Jones argued, 'implies not only an unbroken identity, but also change, newness, acquisition'. Evolution involves continuity and has convinced people 'that the natural and social orders are in some way or other continuous and constitute one cosmos' (Jones 1910: 231).

The social organism, then, is neither a mechanical nor biological entity whose components collide but is rather a self-conscious unity in which the components realise themselves as ethical beings and society realises itself in them. In Jones's view, therefore, the welfare of the individual and of society are inseparable. The aims and purposes of the individual are inseparable from social purposes. Thus, the criterion of moral rights, for example, is the extent to which the possession of them contributes to the common good of society.

6. Sociality and ethics

One of the dimensions which interests Guyer in the British Idealists relates to his argument that much critical commentary on Kant's moral philosophy seems to be overly reliant on the *Groundwork* and second *Critique,* at the expense of the *Metaphysics of Morals.* What this latter work reminds us, for Guyer, is that in Kantian morality, 'the form is *a priori* but the matter is empirical'; thus, Kant 'never harboured the idea that there is nothing contingent in the derivation of particular duties' (282). This argument is deployed, in large part, as a counter to the 'empty formalism' charge often directed at Kant's moral philosophy. Guyer's point in countering empty formalism is to suggest that Kant was, in fact, beginning to address the more empirical/social context of moral argumentation. In fact, he suggests at one point that Kant was moving, in his mature works, in an 'Hegelian direction' (290). In consequence, he sees something valuable in British (and American) Idealism in so far as it fleshes out 'Kant's perfectionism' and 'Empire of Ends'. As such, British idealism developed 'a conception of morality as the coherent and harmonious expression of the social nature of human beings' (372).

Despite some subtle internal differences of opinion, British Idealism clearly was a philosophy that was deeply and overtly responsive to social issues. In this respect, with some exceptions, it was an immensely practically orientated and morally focused philosophy. The bulk of British idealistic ethical reflections were premised on the idea of human sociality, although it was a nuanced understanding of this idea. We would be hesitant to call this social component of Idealist thought on ethics Kantian, although Kantianism is by no means absent from the overall account. If anything, the sociality or social ethics aspect evinces a creative blending of both Kant and Hegel. Further, what we find in many of the British Idealists, which we do not really find so overtly in Kant, is a developed political philosophy. There is unquestionably an

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immensely sophisticated moral and legal philosophy in Kant, but whether this constitutes a political philosophy remains debatable. This particular issue does not arise in the British Idealist movement. If there has been one productive legacy from British Idealism, it has been the long-term effects of their richly articulated political philosophy, particularly within the British state and social welfare traditions.

The idea of an Idealist social ethics is also premised on an ontology of social individualism, something that we do not find so clearly articulated in Kant. The person is thus real only because she is social, and she can realise herself only because it is as a social being that she realises herself. As Bradley commented, 'what we call an individual man is what he is because of and by virtue of community, and ... communities are thus not mere names but something real, and can be regarded (if we mean to keep to facts) only as the one in the many' (Bradley 1962: 166). For most British idealists, individuals are also more than social (most Idealist thinkers going back to Hegel recognised the problematic contingencies that could be integral to the practice of the state). However, the bulk of the discussion of morality invokes the setting of sociality and freedom. Sociality implies that ethics is a body of directives, to which one is obligated, which are required both by other persons and oneself, within a form of associated life. We might call this a *communal directive* account of ethics. The fundamental aim of this theory was to bring together, on the one hand, the individual's own will and judgement, with, on the other hand, the laws and institutions of an organised civil life. As a result, in Hegel's terminology, the individual can be seen to be part of an 'ethical substance' that consists of 'laws and powers', where 'these substantial determinations are *duties* which are binding on the will of the individual' (Hegel 1976: §146 and §148). The relation of the individual to the communal directives was complex. It was not a relativist argument, such that any kind of communal directive was permissible. Civil disobedience or even, in rare cases, revolution was seen as permissible. Communal directives essentially referred to the necessary conditions for creating a moral obligation and are premised on undergirding the freedom and self-realisation of all their citizens. Moral obligations are seen to occur from *within* the associated norms of a rational civil community of which they are an element. There are clearly Kantian themes on morality and freedom present in this form of argument, but they are blended with other components.

7. Conclusion

In summary, we have argued that in considering the moral philosophy of British Idealism, it is important to note the complexity of the movement. There were a number of strands which needed to be disaggregated in order to gain a more complete understanding. One of the more dominant of strands was Absolute Idealism – although here again there were internal differences. However, one common facet of Absolute Idealism was a critical response to all forms of philosophical dualism, a dualism which they associated with Kant's work. Their critical response also related to their more specific dissatisfaction with epistemology as a philosophical discipline – a discipline they saw exemplified by Kant's philosophy. History and historical method were another significant issue within the Idealist movement, which raised new questions about morality. Further, although often forgotten, the effect of

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evolutionary theory on philosophical movements at the close of the nineteenth century was profound. The British Idealists had their unique take on this with regard to moral thought. Finally, something that Guyer notes positively is the emphasis on sociality with regard to morality. They agreed, as Guyer puts it, that 'any self is what it is only as part of the larger society extending to all humanity', although he adds that Kant did not work this idea out in any detail (401). The British Idealists, in point, did work this issue out in detail. However, the extension to humanity was not, for the British Idealists, a straightforward process. For example, even their late reflections in the 1920s on the embryonic League of Nations evinced a much more cautious and nuanced appraisal of the issue of international politics and law. Nonetheless, as early as Green, we find an emphasis on the gradual extension of the moral community, that is, the recognition of more and more of humanity as my neighbour. Thus idealists, in their different ways, were beginning to explore the processes by which the expansion of the moral community could be, and had gradually been, achieved.

Notes

1 References to Guyer (2024) will be throughout simply by page number. The present contribution was part of an engagement with the book at an Author Meets Critics event on 28 April 2025 at Cardiff University.

2 Among the more distinguished exponents of Personal or Subjective Idealism were Andrew Seth Pringle-Pattison, Hastings Rashdall, Henry Sturt, W. R. Boyce Gibson, the American Brand Blanshard, and the idiosyncratic James McTaggart Ellis McTaggart.

3 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 consequently accused Principal John Caird of too slavishly following Hegel's method (Green 1883–1886: 146). Rather than the 'invariable self-repeating formula', it was the principle, rather than the method of dialectic, that attracted the Idealists, a principle that was to be discerned in Plato (Seth 1890: 198).

4 Collingwood's reaction to previous Idealism was premised on the point that it had not yet become historically aware enough (see Collingwood's letter on this to Ruggiero, quoted in Boucher 1989: 12).

5 Collingwood was thoroughly immersed in Kantian philosophy from an early age, see Collingwood (2013: 3–4).

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