

**William Mander and Stamatoula Panagakou, eds.** *British Idealism and the Concept of the Self*. Palgrave Macmillan 2016. 335 pp. \$109.99 USD (Hardcover ISBN 9781137466709).

Understanding of the self has long been a central theme in Western philosophy. Despite the multiplicity of Western philosophy, this enduring subject has united philosophers as disparate as Aristotle and Hume in common scholarly endeavour. Building upon this well-established area of philosophical inquiry, *British Idealism and the Concept of the Self* sets out to examine the concept of selfhood through the lens of the British idealist tradition.

*British Idealism and the Concept of the Self* is one of the latest contributions to a growing body of scholarship on British idealism. British idealism is a broad school of philosophical thought that dominated British philosophy in the latter half of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth centuries. The British idealists were not united by a uniform set of beliefs, but rather by a commitment to a number of assumptions and themes regarding the nature of reality and its relation to consciousness. Not least among these assumptions was the centrality of the notion of selfhood to philosophical enquiry. This publication contains fifteen essays on the concept of the self and brings together the work of a variety of esteemed contributors prominent in the field of British idealism studies. As well as extending this specialist field in a fascinating direction, this collection also aims to fill a gap in current readings of the history of Western philosophy which, in the interests of addressing specific questions, ‘passes over in silence large swathes of otherwise interesting philosophical work’ (2).

Although the book is not split into definite sections, most of the essays focus on one British idealist philosopher and they are grouped accordingly. A notable exception to this is the first contribution entitled ‘The Early British Idealists and the Metaphysics of the Self’ by Jenny Keefe. In this essay, Keefe discusses the philosophers Ferrier, Grote, and Stirling as forerunners to the later, more widely-known British idealists. Keefe discusses how these philosophers are noteworthy due to their adherence to an ‘understanding of the self that departed from the Enlightenment picture of a science of man’ (26). Despite the limitations imposed on her by space, Keefe covers a surprising amount of ground in this essay, and provides the reader with something of a historical background for the later essays. Following this initial essay, the book focuses on F. H. Bradley, Edward Caird, T. H. Green, Bernard Bosanquet, R. G. Collingwood, and J. M. E. McTaggart, dedicating varying numbers of essays to each. The final two essays are the exceptional ‘Persons, Categories and the Problems of Meaning and Value’ by the late Leslie Armour, and ‘Idealism and the True Self’ by editor W. J. Mander, each being more general in their scope than the previous essays.

The standard of scholarship in this publication is superb, with each contributor being both informative and engaging in their exploration of complex themes and concepts. Despite the universally high quality of the contributions, two points in the book stood out to me. The first of these were the three essays on Bernard Bosanquet contributed by Stamatoula Panagakou, William Sweet, and Avital Simhony. Panagakou sets out to examine Bosanquet’s theory of the state as an ethical system, showing that the relationships between ethical life, institutions as ethical ideas, the metaphysics of the self, and ethical citizenship build towards a ‘best life or common good’ (154). Although each of these concepts is complex in itself, Panagakou does a brilliant job of expounding each of them with clarity as well as achieving her broader aim of examining the relationships between them. Following Panagakou, Sweet examines Bosanquet’s notion of the self across his social, moral, and political philosophy. Sweet shows that Bosanquet’s understanding of the self provides three solutions to the apparent tension between the metaphysical self and the moral self that is identified within his philosophy. Finally, Simhony sets out to dispel a fundamental misunderstanding of

Bosanquet's concept of the self. Against the popular characterisation of Bosanquet's self as having value only in relation to an Absolute, Simhony proposes Bosanquet's self as a relational self, placing more emphasis on the importance of growing individuality and character. Each of these essays is beautifully written and demonstrates the intimate knowledge each of the authors has of their subject. Although distinct in their aims and focus, each of these essays emphasises the nuance in Bosanquet's philosophy and convincingly defends perhaps the most criticised of the British idealist philosophers.

The second standout moment was Leslie Armour's aforementioned essay entitled 'Persons, Categories and the Problems of Meaning and Value.' Armour's essay sets out the foundation of an idealist understanding of the self, focusing on the difficulties of classifying the human self in terms of narrow categories. Armour presses the reader to ultimately see the self as the interrelation between different types of selves, primarily the psychological and social selves. In the introduction to this publication, it is noted that 'the language of Idealism can all too easily become like a closed circle, where everything connects to everything else but nothing connects to anything familiar' (3); it is testament to Armour's ability as a writer and philosopher that this essay throws the circle open without damaging the scholarly integrity of the piece. Although Armour himself admits that this essay does not '[settle] the case for idealism' (323), it does provide a fascinating foundation for understanding the self in the context of British idealist thought. It is therefore a piece that I would thoroughly recommend to anyone wishing to come to grips with British idealist philosophy.

Notwithstanding the high quality of the scholarly content, I identified two main faults with the book. Firstly, it struck me that the organization of essays by philosopher rather than theme or discipline may be inconvenient for readers approaching this book from a particular field. Many similar publications group essays according to theme or subdiscipline, making it easier for readers to identify areas of particular interest and enabling readers to more readily draw comparisons between different philosophers. Secondly, the philosophy of Michael Oakeshott was notable in its absence from this publication. In similar publications Oakeshott's conservative idealism has added a valuable counterpoint to his more liberal British idealist peers. Despite Oakeshott's absence being regrettable, it is understandable that the limitations of space prevent an entire field of study being explored in all its complexity.

Despite these minor shortcomings, *British Idealism and the Concept of the Self* fulfils its aims admirably. It makes a valuable contribution to British idealism studies by bringing together some truly fascinating explorations of a central subject in idealist philosophy, and provides its readers with a helpful resource for exploring one of the lesser known corners of the history of Western philosophy and the philosophy of the self.

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