

Tyler

Idealist Political Philosophy

Pluralism and Conflict in the Absolute Idealist Tradition

The central claim of this book is that previous scholars have not appreciated the depths and complexities of the relationships between British idealist radicalism and the earlier idealist tradition of Kant, Fichte, Hegel and Carlyle. Colin Tyler explores two recurring themes: the first is that the foundations of British idealist thought were encapsulated within parts of Hegel's political theory that have been ignored or misunderstood - specifically Hegel's analyses of civic pluralism and international order. Tyler argues that these parts of Hegel's system had highly significant political implications. They showed that reformers must work from within concrete historical traditions; they grounded a critique of abstract rationalism as an alienating and potentially totalitarian method of designing social and economic institutions; they indicated the inevitability of civic and political pluralism and the many opportunities for human improvement which they created; and finally they demonstrated the tragic nature of human progress. The second recurring theme is the concern of many British idealists to articulate the distinction between the virtues of an enriching community and a modern commercial society, a concern that owed much of its force to the earlier idealist tradition. Together, these themes show the inseparability of the British idealists' social and political radicalism from the inherent logic of idealism, a link that has been denied or misconceived by previous scholars, and has never been completely appreciated by anyone before. The book makes extensive use of certain British idealist manuscripts which were not merely unpublished, but were undiscovered until very recently.

Many critics have portrayed absolute idealism as a dangerous, conservative and 'otherworldly' doctrine, an oppressing philosophy based on speculative logic rather than empirical realities. In this book, Colin Tyler argues against each of these preconceptions, taking as his focus the philosophies of G.W.F. Hegel, T.H. Green, Edward Caird and Bernard Bosanquet. Tyler argues that Hegel's analyses of civic pluralism and international order had significant implications for British idealist political philosophy. They led the latter to argue that, rather than spinning a world out of abstract ideas and spurious metaphysical commitments, reformers must work from within concrete historical traditions. Far from sanctifying an abstract logic and metaphysics, these absolute idealists recognised the vital importance of the daily life of politics and political conflict to a degree that escapes most of contemporary liberal political philosophers. Their theory grounded a powerful critique of abstract rationalism as an alienating and potentially totalitarian method of designing social and economic institutions; indicated the inevitability of civic and political pluralism and the many opportunities for human improvement which they created; and finally demonstrated the tragic nature of human progress. Indeed, absolute idealism is shown to offer a powerful alternative to the Dworkin, John Rawls, Will Kymlicka, Bhikhu Parekh, Iris Marion Young and Charles Taylor. The book makes extensive use of certain British idealist manuscripts which were not merely unpublished but undiscovered until very recently. Dr Colin Tyler is Lecturer in Political Theory and the University of Hull.

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