

## BOOK REVIEWS

*Idealism: New Essays in Metaphysics*, edited by Tyron Goldschmidt and Kenneth L. Pearce. Oxford University Press, 2018. Pp. xii + 336. \$61.00 (hardcover).

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*Idealism: New Essays in Metaphysics* contains seventeen new essays which explore idealism, a family of views according to which the mental has priority over the material. Given the recent history of philosophy, it is difficult not to see the volume's publication as the harbinger of a turning tide. Despite the prominence of idealist thought in the nineteenth century, relatively few in the twentieth held that the mental has priority over the material in any substantial way. Even fewer defended the radical view, most commonly associated with George Berkeley, that we are fundamentally immaterial substances whose experiences map harmoniously into a divinely coordinated dream-world. Instead, most tried to squeeze the mental into a more or at least equally basic material realm. And the serious difficulties resulting from these efforts led few to question whether idealists such as Berkeley might have been right after all. In fact, theorists have mostly neglected idealism even as a target worthy of careful criticism.

Editors Tyron Goldschmidt and Kenneth Pearce say that the volume "aims to correct the unjustified neglect of idealism" (ix). On this score, the volume certainly succeeds. And, as a result, we all stand to benefit, no matter where we fall on the philosophical spectrum. To examine idealism carefully, one must engage fundamental questions in philosophy which help carve theoretical space into grand metaphysical systems. This is, at least for me, philosophy at its most enjoyable. How we judge idealism's case can also reveal deeper methodological commitments about theory choice and uncover how comfortable we are with explanatory lacunae in *these* places rather than *those*. Every essay in the volume lures the reader into grand systematic theorizing and methodological soul-searching, even those essays whose arguments may be less than compelling.

Overall, the essays are strong. And many of them concern questions typically treated in the philosophy of religion. Daniel Greco's "Explanation,



Idealism, and Design” and Jacob Ross’s “Idealism and Fine-Tuning” focus on connections between design and fine-tuning, on the one hand, and idealism, on the other. I enjoyed Kris McDaniel’s essay, “The Idealism of Mary Whiton Calkins.” Calkins, the first woman president of the American Philosophical Association, developed a version of absolute idealism according to which the Absolute is personal. Without McDaniel’s essay, I would have remained unaware of her contributions.

Two more essays focus on versions of idealism within major religious traditions. Samuel Lebens’s “Hassidic Idealism” concerns the Kabbalistic doctrine of the *sefirot*, which have been described as both divine energies and as hypostasized divine attributes. This beautifully written essay attempts to square the sefirot with monotheism by carefully applying insights from the philosophy of language gained by reflection on fictional discourse. The essay should appeal to many beyond its intended audience, those with interests in either medieval Kabbalah or Trinitarian doctrine. Two groups of scholars come to mind. First, the growing number interested in St. Gregory Palamas and the pantheism which arguably arises from the essence-energies distinction. (Lebens also briefly notes this connection on 175n118.) And, second, those with interests in the early-twentieth-century Russian Orthodox Sophiologists such as Sergei Bulgakov and Pavel Florensky, whose accounts personify divine wisdom without, in their view, expanding the Godhead from three hypostases to four. (See, for example, Sergei Bulgakov, *Sophia, the Wisdom of God: An Outline of Sophiology* [Lindisfarne Press, 1993] and Pavel Florensky, *The Pillar and Ground of the Truth* [Princeton University Press, 1997; originally published in 1914].)

Bronwyn Finnigan’s “Buddhist Idealism” articulates important arguments from Buddhist and Indian philosophy. Though they span as far back as the fourth century, some bear a striking resemblance to arguments found much later in Berkeley and elsewhere. Finnigan has provided a great service to those of us who, like me, were largely unaware of these connections.

A handful of essays discuss aspects of Berkeleyan idealism. The opening essay, “Parrying Parity” by Todd Buras and Trent Dougherty, usefully draws attention to Robert Merrihew Adams’s “Idealism Vindicated” (in Peter van Inwagen and Dean Zimmerman, eds, *Persons: Human and Divine* [Oxford University Press Oxford, 2007], 35–54) and facilitates a deeper understanding of Adams’s arguments. Graham Oppy’s “Against Idealism” argues (unsuccessfully, in my view) that idealism is less preferable to naturalism because it is less theoretically virtuous. And three more essays in some way bear on the truth of Berkeleyan idealism. These arguments appear in the stellar contributions by Robert Smithson, Tyron Goldschmidt and Aaron Segal, and Helen Yetter-Chappell. In what follows, I engage more closely with each of these essays.

Smithson's "A New Epistemic Argument for Idealism" argues for idealism on the basis of linguistic practice. The argument hinges on the following scenario:

Suppose we travel to the all-knowing, perfectly trustworthy Oracle to settle once and for all whether there is an external world of material objects. There, we receive a disheartening report: our experiences are caused not by material objects, but rather by a malicious demon intent on deceiving us. This testimony would surprise and dismay us. We might say things like "Apples and books don't really exist!" and "We don't have bodies after all!" But this immediate shock would pass. And after several minutes, we would go back to saying things like "There is an apple in the kitchen" or "I'm walking to the bus stop" just as we always had. This is because we would have to return to the ordinary concerns of human life: buying groceries, taking the bus to work, and so on. (21)

I find Smithson's treatment of our likely behavior in an Oracle scenario plausible. That behavior includes both an apparent *retraction* of our ordinary object judgments and then an apparent *return* to making those same judgments. Smithson builds his case for idealism on the apparent return to our ordinary judgments.

Suppose we have apple experiences in my kitchen and say "there's an apple in the kitchen" both before and after the Oracle breaks the news that no mind-independent object lies "behind" our apple experiences. Smithson's argument hinges on two claims: (i) that our post-Oracle judgment is true, and (ii) the pre- and post-Oracle judgments have the same content. If the post-Oracle judgment is true, that judgment cannot have the content that a mind-independent apple is in the kitchen. So if the pre- and post-Oracle judgments have the same content, the pre-Oracle judgment cannot have the content that a mind-independent apple is in the kitchen either. Smithson concludes that truths about objects supervene on actual and counterfactual *experiences* and not on whether there are mind-independent objects behind those experiences.

However, I suspect many think of apples and other ordinary objects as being mind-independent not only in some theoretical sense but also within the confines of everyday judgments about those objects. And so I suspect that for many, the pre- and post-Oracle judgments would have slightly different contents even though speakers would continue to use the same English sentences to express those judgments. In other words, I see the apparent retraction in the Oracle scenario as a real retraction. But, out of pragmatic necessity, speakers would continue to utter the same English sentences.

Consider it this way: in the Oracle case, what would have been evidence for the view that the truth of our ordinary judgments supervenes on truths about the mind-*independence* of those objects? On the assumption that our ordinary judgments about apples concerned apples-as-mind-independent-objects, we wouldn't expect post-Oracle that folks would adopt a new terminology to express ordinary object judgments.

Most likely, folks would use the same terms to express slightly different judgments. Since we would expect folks to continue to talk the same way whether or not ordinary judgments previously concerned objects thought to be mind-independent, the continued use of ordinary object expressions wouldn't serve as evidence against the view that ordinary judgments previously concerned objects thought to be mind-independent. Smithson's argument clearly connects with Berkeley's claims that idealism doesn't conflict with common sense. And although I have deep sympathies with both Berkeley and Smithson overall, I demur on this point. Smithson, of course, has much more to say (Robert Smithson, "Edenic Idealism" [unpublished manuscript]).

Goldschmidt and Segal's essay contains a new argument for idealism and then another new argument for the view that idealism is necessarily true if true at all. The new argument for idealism begins with three views: idealism, impurism (under which falls traditional dualism), and materialism. They present the Mary and Zombie arguments against materialism and the causal exclusion argument against impurism (and dualism). Idealism then remains the only view standing. Repurposing these well-known arguments for idealism is clever and interesting. But I worry that the weaknesses of the smaller arguments combine to infect the overall argument.

For example, consider the Zombie argument, which attempts to show that the possibility of a zombie, a non-conscious physical duplicate of a conscious being like you, follows from the conceivability of such a zombie. Before the Zombie argument had been formulated, no physicalist should have posited a *conceptual* connection between the physical stuff that supposedly accounts for consciousness and consciousness itself. By positing a metaphysical but not a conceptual connection between the material and the mental, physicalists should have expected that even a godlike conceiver could have conceived of the physical stuff without the accompanying mental stuff. Consequently, the Zombie argument should have always been deemed unsuccessful. Though I don't have the space here to review the other arguments, I should say that I am slightly less pessimistic about the causal exclusion argument and even occasionally optimistic about the Mary argument. But the cumulative effect of linking these arguments together seems to me to result in an argument considerably weaker than its strongest link.

At any rate, I want to focus on Goldschmidt and Segal's original argument that idealism is, if true, also necessarily true. Here is one version of their argument:

The authors of this essay, despite sharing much in common, are also different in many respects. Thus there is some feature that Aaron has that Ty lacks. Call it Bob. We can give the following argument: if idealism is true . . . then Bob is a mental feature, since Aaron is concrete, and yet he has Bob. But so too is Bob's negation. For Ty is concrete, and yet has Bob's negation. Now, necessarily everything has either Bob or Bob's negation. Since both

are mental features, and hence necessarily are mental features, necessarily everything is a mental thing. So then any feature whatsoever entails being a mental thing, and so any feature whatsoever is a mental feature. If that's true, then necessarily, everything has only mental features. So: if idealism is true, then necessarily, everything is purely mental. (46)

Now suppose that Bob is the feature of being happy. So Ty "has Bob's negation," the property of being non-happy. Is it so clear that being non-happy is a "mental feature"? A negative property such as being non-happy is a determinable, if it exists at all. And the possible ways of being non-happy are its possible determinates. The determinates surely include mental ways of being non-happy, such as being sad or grumpy. But whoever grants that idealism's truth doesn't guarantee its necessity would also say that, possibly, there are non-mental ways of being non-happy, such as being mind-independently spherical, being mind-independently two meters long, or simply being mind-independent. If idealism is true and everything is mental, then something's being non-happy *materially implies* both that whatever is non-happy is a mental thing and that any exemplified determinate of non-happiness is also a mental feature. But if there are possible non-mental determinates of being non-happy, then something's being non-happy *entails* neither that whatever is non-happy is a mental thing nor that any exemplified determinate of non-happiness is a mental feature. The argument seems to assume that all possible properties are actual (or perhaps actually exemplified). But that is precisely the assumption to deny if one thinks that, even if idealism were true, some non-actual (or non-exemplified), non-mental features would be possible. Although the argument's conclusion seems true to me, the argument itself doesn't seem entirely successful.

Helen Yetter-Chappell's thought-provoking essay explores whether a non-theistic version of idealism can match Berkeley's theistic version in explanatory power. In Berkeley's system, God explains both (i) the continued existence of objects unperceived by finite minds and (ii) the regularity of our perceptual lives. Yetter-Chappell sketches a non-theistic sort of Berkeleyan idealism and then examines whether it explains (i) and (ii). Yetter-Chappell's non-theistic idealism identifies reality with a phenomenal unity of consciousness that binds together all possible perceptions from every spatial perspective. She writes:

External reality is a vast unity of consciousness, independent from all finite minds. This unity is vastly more complex than the unities we're directly acquainted with. Consider my cup. The cup exists independently of any (finite) minds insofar as it is a part of this vast phenomenal unity. But what's included in the phenomenal unity isn't merely the sensations *I* have when perceiving the cup from a particular vantage point. The unity must include the experience of the cup from every possible perspective it could be viewed from, binding together the experience of the cup from every possible angle and also from every possible sort of perceiver (humans, bugs, bats, color-inverts, etc.). (68)

This picture of the phenomenal unity, what Yetter-Chappell calls the “phenomenal tapestry,” contains more details than I can cover here. But the general idea is that if external objects are nothing more than bundles of perceptions, and reality consists of nothing more than a vast unity of consciousness which includes every possible perception of every actual thing, we can explain why objects exist even when no actual finite mind perceives them. The objects exist because the perceptions in the tapestry which constitute them exist. Yetter-Chappell then neatly appeals to an idealist interpretation of the laws of physics to explain the tapestry’s particular regularity. If the phenomenal tapestry is not itself a mind, then perhaps idealism doesn’t need Berkeley’s God to undergird the world’s stability and regularity. But if the tapestry is a mind in a robust sense, have we really shown that we can excise a divine mind from Berkeley’s system? The project’s success, then, depends on what minds are and whether the tapestry counts as one.

Yetter-Chappell says she prefers “a Humean bundle conception of the mind.” And “given such a conception, the tapestry is not a mind in any *robust* sense, over and above being a phenomenal unity” (70). Now if the tapestry is a truly Humean bundle of perceptions, no substance underlies the perceptions and no perception in the bundle necessitates any other. What results is a version of atheistic Humeanism, an unstable position, whether it involves idealism or not.

The combination of atheism and Humeanism is quite popular in metaphysical circles. But it offers a terribly unsatisfying explanation for our world’s regularity. On Humean idealism with a Yetter-Chappellian tapestry, modal space would contain, at the very least, possible tapestries consisting of every possible recombination of perceptions. This modal space would obey a modal version of Murphy’s law, with a point in modal space for every possible non-regular and chaotic combination of perceptions. Since, for every way of being regular, there are very many ways of being irregular, the space of regular worlds is something like a bullseye compared to the rest of the space of irregular worlds. Regularity is quite unlikely given atheistic Humeanism. But regularity is quite likely on the disjunction of theism (with Humeanism or not) and some non-Humean view (with theism or not), say Spinozism. The actual world is regular, which is what we’d expect on the disjunction of theism and non-Humeanism but not at all on atheistic Humeanism. So, all else being equal, atheistic Humeanism is significantly less plausible than the disjunction of theism and non-Humeanism. This argument has obvious parallels to the fine-tuning arguments for God’s existence. Call it the *coarse-tuning argument*. The coarse-tuning argument has little to do with the inflexibility of life in the range of possible cosmological constants. Nor does it purport to show that God exists. It simply shows that the world’s regularity makes atheistic Humeanism highly implausible.

Since atheism and idealism are essential to the main contours of Yetter-Chappell’s view, its future development might sit better with one or another



form of non-Humeanism. Perhaps the view could adopt a form of semi-Humeanism according to which the tapestry is not a mind in any robust sense even though perceptions bear robust, necessary connections among themselves. But these necessary connections would be quite difficult to explain given that nothing more fundamental would serve to tie them together. Given the view's idealism, no mind-independent spatial-temporal relations could tie them together. And given the view's semi-Humeanism, no further underlying mental substance could tie them together either. A more promising pairing, in my view, would combine the tapestry with one of the idealistic interpretations of Spinoza's metaphysics or one of the more well-known versions of absolute idealism. On the Spinozistic view, for example, the tapestry's regularity wouldn't be an absurd accident because reality couldn't have been any other way. But reality would also lack an infinite mind with any sort of agency. So if divinity requires agency, Yetter-Chappell would have some reasonable grounds for labeling the resulting view atheistic.

The essays I've highlighted above deserve further attention, of course, and I hope they continue to be read by those with interests in philosophy of religion. But the volume should also attract attention from philosophers with other interests. Readers will find excellent essays touching on topics in contemporary metaphysics, Kant, philosophy of mind, philosophy of language, and the philosophy of science. Overall, the editors deserve praise for cultivating a volume that stands a good chance of leaving a positive and lasting mark on the discipline.

*A Grotesque in the Garden*, by Hud Hudson. Xerxes Press, 2017. Pp. 150. \$9.99 (paperback). (Available only through Amazon.)

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In philosophy the genre of first-person fictional narrative is rarely used. This is likely because the philosophical issues and arguments raised are typically not illuminated by being discussed by a character whose attitudes or personality can distract from rather than enhance the topic of interest. In addition, most philosophers, both presently and historically, are not skilled enough to portray a complex literary character entirely through the character's own voice. Yet Hud Hudson's *A Grotesque in the Garden* accomplishes a rare feat: it presents two main characters whose understanding of theism and its intellectual challenges are inextricable from their personal stories, including their emotional and spiritual shortcomings, and this powerful combination is engaging for both the seasoned philosopher and

