

Examining the relationship of culture and political independence, Mitchison argues that few countries have shown a “simple relationship between independence and creativity” (p. 426). Indeed, in the 1980s and 1990s in the aftermath of the political defeat, there has been a great flowering of Scottish culture, music, art, and writing, both historical and literary. It will be interesting to see what the future, with its promise of greater political autonomy, will bring.

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Sandra Den Otter — *British Idealism and Social Explanation: A Study in Late Victorian Thought*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996. Pp. x, 250.

This book quite usefully explores the intersection between late nineteenth-century British idealism and late nineteenth-century social explanation. Building on recent scholarship which has identified British idealism as an important part of late Victorian political culture, Den Otter successfully analyzes the complex relationship between idealism and movements of thought often seen as more influential throughout the nineteenth century, such as utilitarianism, empiricism, and evolutionism. Den Otter has immersed herself in the intricate and sometimes convoluted ideas of British idealists, and she has given her readers a detailed picture of their metaphysical and social thought. At times, however, the author’s fascination with her figures has led her to overemphasize their impact on the Victorian mind.

Den Otter begins in her introduction with an overview of the British idealist tradition in the nineteenth century. Though not a school with a uniform body of doctrine, the idealists were united in seeking alternatives to the atomism of contemporary British philosophy. They agreed on general philosophical principles, on the nature of perception, and on the unity underlying the seemingly discrete parts of human experience. They also shared similar thoughts on social and political notions concerning the primacy of community, the moral qualities of the state, and various concepts of self-development with affinities to liberal ideals. Den Otter discusses the first architects of idealism, T. H. Green, F. H. Bradley, and Edward Caird, and then introduces the younger or second generation of idealists, including Henry Jones, John Watson, William Wallace, J. S. Mackenzie, David George Ritchie, and Bernard Bosanquet. Throughout the book the author spends the most time on Ritchie and Bosanquet.

The first chapter, “Plotting the Idealist Inheritance”, is devoted to an examination of the relationship between German and British idealism. Den Otter’s main aim here is to place British idealism solidly in its native environment. Though the British idealists found in Kant and Hegel a compelling alternative to atomism, they tried to distance themselves from German philosophy since their countrymen often viewed it as incoherent, absurd, and at times dangerous. Even at Oxford, the reputed centre of British idealism, German metaphysics was “filtered through the prisms of classical and British empirical traditions” (p. 44). Den Otter’s point is that

British idealism was really a spicy stew, concocted out of ingredients taken from German idealists, Plato, Aristotle, Rousseau, Hume, and Mill. “Their metaphysical orientation”, she asserts, “was firmly situated within an indigenous intellectual climate in which Locke, Hume, and Mill remained pivotal figures” (p. 51).

In chapters 2 and 3, Den Otter pushes this point further, adding evolutionary theory to the stew and focusing on the social thought of the idealists. Rather than expounding a metaphysical understanding of society in isolation from the empiricist social sciences, the idealists attempted to integrate such positivist categories as causation in their social studies. Perhaps more striking is her investigation of the attempt of idealists to place evolutionary theory at the centre of their construction of a social philosophy by the mid-1880s (p. 91). The idealists were able to reinterpret evolution by perceiving it as an immanent or internal movement which contained some ethical dimension. Bosanquet believed that evolution was a moral process and that good character and social consensus were formed by natural selection. Ritchie attacked the radical individualism and sanction for *laissez-faire* which Herbert Spencer drew from evolutionary theory. For Ritchie, evolutionary theory revealed the existence of a social organism in which the individual had no meaning apart from a larger collective. It was the state’s duty to control and curb the struggle for existence between individuals.

Den Otter attempts in chapters 4 and 5 to outline the important contributions of idealists to crucial issues in sociology and social theory. In the fourth chapter Den Otter tackles the issue of the relationship between idealist social philosophy and late Victorian and Edwardian sociology. She affirms that the idealists occupied a central place in the endeavour to fashion a sociological inquiry which avoided crude materialism by seeking to define the role of social institutions and human agency in evolutionary accounts (p. 148). The fifth chapter centres on the idealist enterprise to construct a notion of community within the framework of Victorian liberalism. According to Den Otter, late nineteenth-century social theorists were absorbed by the problem of restoring a communal identity for individuals. The idealist contribution to this debate was the notion of society as necessary for the birth of the moral self (p. 157). The book concludes with an epilogue which tries to account for idealism’s popularity in the late Victorian and Edwardian periods and for its decline after World War I.

The greatest strength of this study is the author’s success in placing idealism into the broader cultural context. She is able to detect subtle shifts in the idealists’ thought by stressing their dialogue with evolutionists and positivists. I was convinced by her rejection of the accepted historiographical line that late nineteenth-century idealism should be regarded as “alien”, “foreign”, or a “passing aberration” in British thought (p. 2). The result is a richer, fuller picture of late Victorian idealism and the wider cultural context. Unfortunately, Den Otter’s emphasis on the way in which idealists incorporated elements of evolutionary theory and positivist social theory to appeal more to the British mentality leads her to put forward some rather dubious claims about the influence of idealism on British culture in general.

A case can be made that “by the mid-1880s, idealism had gained ascendancy at Oxford” (p. 43). Den Otter’s book and other recent scholarship have even demon-

strated that idealism was much more pervasive in Britain than is often acknowledged, particularly in the area of Victorian political culture (p. 6). But a recognition that idealism played a larger role in late nineteenth-century Britain does not necessarily lead to her conclusion that by the mid-1880s idealism “became the primary school of thought in Britain” (p. 1). Den Otter herself offers little support for this statement since the bulk of the book centres on the social thought of the British idealists, not on their impact. Surely the hold of scientific naturalism, of the Huxleys and Tyndalls, the heirs to the utilitarian and native empiricist tradition, was not dislodged merely by the idealists, as Den Otter seems to imply. We must take into account the role of other intellectual groups who were equally dissatisfied with the reign of scientific naturalism, such as members of the Tory-Anglican elite like Arthur Balfour or thinkers like James Ward and A. R. Wallace, who have been dealt with by Frank Turner in his *Between Science and Religion*. Den Otter has made an important contribution to the field, however, by helping scholars to see why British idealism was so pervasive at the end of the nineteenth century, and she has provided us with a better understanding of why the authority of scientific naturalism was not as solid as has often been believed.

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Roy Douglas — *The Great War, 1914–1918: The Cartoonists’ Vision*. London: Routledge, 1995. Pp. vii, 157.

In a single image, newspaper cartoonists can capture, sometimes more effectively than academic treatises, the factors that defined issues and events of the day. Certainly this is a point appreciated by Roy Douglas, who has now written his fourth book relying upon the work of illustrators to describe political and social currents between the mid-nineteenth and mid-twentieth centuries. In this volume, Douglas fills in a short but crucial gap in that time frame, for clearly the Great War represented a cataclysmic event in world history. Douglas has gathered newspaper illustrations from practically every belligerent nation spanning from the outbreak of hostilities until the formation of the League of Nations, providing English translations where necessary. The selections demonstrate not only the role played by newspaper cartoonists as unofficial propagandists in reflecting and reinforcing jingoism and naiveté about battle, but also, on occasion, their foreshadowing of the disillusionment that multitudes, particularly soldiers, carried out of this conflict.

This is an important subject, and cartoons certainly represent an under-utilized historical source. But this book attempts to accomplish its goal — a general history of World War I through newspaper illustrations — in too few pages. The disappointing pattern is established at the outset with a four-page general introduction that would have served far better as a short history of wartime cartooning rather than as a thumbnail sketch of the factors that led to the outbreak of war. Most of the individual chapters are comprised of a one- to two-page preface followed by