



## Tyron Goldschmidt and Kenneth L. Pearce (eds.): *Idealism: New Essays in Metaphysics*

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This bundle of ideas, published by Oxford University Press, results from the activity of nineteen different minds. It is conveniently available in both hardcover and ebook form, the former including and the latter excluding tactile impressions of hardness and weight. In either form, readers will find that the visual impressions of words in the bundle produce significant philosophical stimulation.

The introduction defines as *idealist* views that endorse the *priority of the mental* in some way. While idealist views were historically popular, today they are rarely given the same attention as materialist and dualist alternatives. This volume aims to remedy that neglect. After the introduction, it contains seventeen chapters. Most argue for some form of idealism. Others are more exploratory, explicating historical views or mapping out conceptual space. Two argue against idealism.

The idealisms explored in the volume are quite diverse. Chapters 1–5 (Todd Buras and Trent Dougherty, Robert Smithson, Aaron Segal and Tyron Goldschmidt, Graham Oppy, Helen Yetter-Chappell) explore broadly Berkeleyan forms of idealism, on which minds enjoy *ontological* priority—anything (concrete) that is not a mind exists because of minds. Chapters 6–8 (Nicholas Stang, Arif Ahmed, Thomas Hofweber) explore broadly Kantian forms of idealism, on which minds enjoy *conceptual* priority—we cannot understand the physical world without first understanding the mental world. The remaining chapters focus on less familiar forms of idealism, although comparisons with Berkeley and Kant remain instructive. Chapter 9 (Kris McDaniel) explicates the “absolute idealism” of early twentieth-century philosopher Mary Whitons Calkins. Chapters 10–11 (Samuel Lebens, Bronwyn Finnigan) explicate Hassidic and Buddhist forms of idealism, while chapters 12–13 (Kenneth Pearce, Sara Bernstein) offer defenses of idealist theses in more local metaphysical domains, namely mereology and causality. Chapter 16 (Marc Lange) critiques Kuhnian ideal-

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ism, according to which the truth is partly constituted by the dominant scientific paradigm at a time—“Kant on wheels,” as Peter Lipton put it. Chapters 14–15 (Daniel Greco, Jacob Ross) explore the relation between idealism and the fine-tuning argument for theism. Chapter 17 (Susan Schneider) argues for a non-physicalist monism on which the fundamental concrete entities are protomental physical objects—a view close to but distinct from ontological idealism.

Idealism and theism are often associated, and chapters 1, 3–6, 8–10, and 14–15 all include some philosophical discussion of God. I will discuss three of these chapters in more depth: Yetter-Chappell’s “Idealism Without God,” McDaniel’s “The Idealism of Mary Whiton Calkins,” and Greco’s “Explanation, Idealism, and Design.”

Yetter-Chappell develops her idealism with Berkeley as a foil. Berkeley’s idealism, she writes, uses God to (i) make it true that objects exist when we don’t perceive them and (ii) explain regularities in our experience. But, Yetter-Chappell argues, a personal God is not necessary to play these roles. Yetter-Chappell proposes a version of ontological idealism on which the God-role is instead played by a “phenomenal tapestry”—a unity of consciousness that binds together every possible experience from every possible perspective. This tapestry may be a mind, but it is not an agent. The tapestry exists independently of the activity of (other) minds, but when I perceive an object, my mind overlaps with the tapestry. This gives us a version of direct realism about perception—I apprehend the cup in front of me in the same way I apprehend my own experiences.

Of all the versions of ontological idealism explored in this book, Yetter-Chappell’s is the one I most see the appeal of. Materialism (or dualism) makes the objects of our perception wholly external—rendering mysterious the connection between our mind and the world. Berkeleyan idealism makes the objects of our perception wholly internal (although caused by God)—rendering mysterious why it seems to us that we perceive external reality (and perhaps making God a deceiver). (Berkeleyans, of course, are typically unfazed by this objection—see Sect. 3 of Buras and Dougherty’s essay and Sect. 3.3 of Smithson’s essay.) Yetter-Chappell’s view makes the objects of our perception both internal *and* external, holding out the tantalizing possibility of a direct realism that respects our ordinary intuitions about our experience.

Yetter-Chappell titles her chapter “Idealism Without God.” But while her view does not require theism, it is consistent with it: the phenomenal tapestry is not God, but it could have been created by God. And I wonder whether, if there is no God, Yetter-Chappell’s tapestry really can include all of concrete reality. On her view, the tapestry “binds together the sensory impressions of every point-from-a-perspective” (80). This includes not only the experiences other minds actually have, but any experiences other minds could have. In a slogan: to be is to be possibly perceived. But it is plausible that there are parts of the universe that are not only unperceived, but are impossible for any embodied creature to perceive—such as the insides of black holes. The insides of black holes then only exist if there are possible non-embodied experiences of them—like God’s.

McDaniel’s essay explores the idealism of Mary Whiton Calkins. Where Yetter-Chappell’s theory replaces God with the phenomenal tapestry, Calkins’s replaces God with “the Absolute.” McDaniel identifies four features of the “absolute idealism” endorsed by Calkins and other late nineteenth/early twentieth-century philoso-

phers: (i) there is a unique entity, the Absolute, that is metaphysically prior to all other entities; (ii) the Absolute is fundamentally mental; (iii) everything is fundamentally mental; and (iv) nothing is distinct from the Absolute. (i) and (ii) are also accepted by classical theists, and (iii) by idealist theists like Berkeley; but (iv) is unique to absolute idealism. The further nature of the Absolute is a matter of disagreement among absolute idealists. On Calkins's view, the Absolute is a person; and we are finite persons that are among the Absolute's parts. But the concept of the Absolute is not the same as the concept of God: for example, unlike God, the Absolute need not be the object of religious emotion; and unlike the Absolute, God can be thought of as distinct from everything else. As McDaniel notes, though, this doesn't settle whether the Absolute *is* God: it could be that nothing is distinct from God, and that the Absolute is a proper object of worship, even if these things aren't true of conceptual necessity.

While Calkins's idealism may be unfamiliar today, there are interesting connections between her view and contemporary philosophy. McDaniel uses the concept of grounding to explicate the sense in which finite persons are, on Calkins's view, derivative: we are grounded in the Absolute Person. Since Calkins also thinks that we are parts of the Absolute, this commits her to priority monism: the view that the whole is prior to the parts. Nevertheless, Calkins also seems committed to libertarian free will, holding that while "the Absolute wills that I am, some of what I do is not willed to be done by the Absolute, but rather is merely permitted by the Absolute" (152). Similar debates about God intending vs. permitting, and the compatibility of this distinction with divine providence, will be familiar to contemporary philosophers of religion.

Calkins's main arguments for her idealism turn on the metaphysics of relations. The second argument McDaniel discusses goes like this:

- (1) A relation between two objects implies a whole of which these objects are parts that can serve as the "intermediary" of this relation.
- (2) Only a person can serve as such an intermediary: that is, "relations require a relater."

Therefore,

- (3) The whole of reality is a person.

An example of (1) is spatial relations, which require an external space that serves as an intermediary for them. (2), in turn, is supported by the only relations that we can know with certainty—namely, those that hold between our own experiences—requiring a conscious intermediary.

This argument faces some of the same issues as cosmological arguments for theism. For example, if a whole is always related to its parts, then as stated (1) leads to a regress: if we must posit C as an intermediary between A and B, then we must posit D as an intermediary between A and C, etc. So the class of relations requiring an intermediary must be somehow restricted, just as first-cause arguments restrict the class of objects requiring a cause. In addition, as stated the argument is not valid: (3) only follows from (1) and (2) if we add a premise that there is no part of reality that is unrelated to everything else. If this is false, then we cannot conclude that there is

a single fundamental person that contains everything else: perhaps there are multiple fundamental persons, and they each contain parts of reality that are not related to each other in any way. There is an analogy here with the question of whether cosmological arguments can establish monotheism over polytheism.

Greco's essay applies debates in the philosophy of mind to the fine-tuning argument. His central insight is that many objections to idealism are equally applicable to theism. Greco begins by arguing that if theism is true, idealism is true, in that all non-mental facts are grounded in mental facts (namely, mental facts about God). But this framing for the essay is a bit misleading, since (as Greco goes on to acknowledge) the essay's insight that many objections to idealism apply to theism does not require that if theism is true, all non-mental facts are grounded in mental facts about God. It only requires the much less controversial thesis that if theism is true, mental facts about God are not grounded in anything else.

The connection is this. Many non-idealist views of the mental imply that it is a priori impossible for there to be ungrounded mental facts of the kind God would have. For example, some behaviorists hold that "it is a priori that mental facts must be grounded in facts about how physical bodies are disposed to behave" (236). Such a form of behaviorism thus implies that it is a priori impossible for mental facts about God to be ungrounded.

Greco applies this insight to the fine-tuning argument, arguing that an anti-idealist of the above sort faced with the fine-tuning argument might conclude that something like a simulation hypothesis is true, but should not conclude that ungrounded mental facts about a god explain everything. While someone who endorses physicalism (understood as the thesis that all ultimate contingent facts are physical) because of empirical evidence should respond to the fine-tuning argument by weighing the fine-tuning evidence against this empirical evidence, and endorsing whatever theory makes for the best overall view of the world, someone who endorses physicalism for a priori reasons can have their belief undermined only by a refutation of those a priori reasons or by higher-order evidence that their a priori reasoning is unreliable.

It is plausible that much resistance to the fine-tuning argument from naturalists does come from the conviction that a non-physical mind is a priori impossible, and Greco does philosophers of religion a service by bringing this into clearer focus than other discussions. But I think Greco is wrong to suggest that this completely undermines the fine-tuning argument's force. Contra Greco, it's not necessary for the theist to make arguments that directly target the physicalist's view of the mind to rationally challenge that view. All that is necessary is for the physicalist to have a little epistemic humility. Even if there are plausible a priori arguments for physicalism, physicalists should not be 100% certain that they are sound. And so physicalists should assign *some* non-zero prior probability to hypotheses inconsistent with physicalism, including the hypothesis that there is a metaphysically ultimate mind. And this is all that is necessary for physicalism to be disconfirmed by empirical evidence in the standard Bayesian way: if a life-permitting universe is more probable if physicalism is false than if physicalism is true, then it lowers the probability of physicalism. Whether a life-permitting universe really does disconfirm physicalism, and if so by how much, depends on a number of factors—including the plausibility of an atheistic simulation hypothesis and how well it predicts the fine-tuning evidence. But there is no in prin-

ciple barrier to the probabilities working out so that the fine-tuning evidence makes physicalism highly improbable, even if it was a priori plausible.

This volume has three chief virtues: ambition, breadth, and rigor. The first virtue is evident in the systematic metaphysical theories built in the contributions to this volume. While I found many of these theories implausible, I found few of them uninteresting. A case in point is Lebens's delightful chapter on Hassidic idealism, which argues that we are all characters in a story God is telling in his mind. Lebens acknowledges that this theory will strike many as bizarre. But it can be instructive to see what problems bizarre theories can solve.

As my discussion of McDaniel's chapter illustrates, in building these systematic metaphysical theories, the contributions to this volume engage issues important to or familiar from debates in many areas of philosophy. There are also several chapters that, like Greco's, aim primarily to explore connections between idealism and other philosophical debates. Philosophers of religion, historians of philosophy, epistemologists, philosophers of language, and philosophers of science will all find material of interest in this book.

As for the third virtue, I was especially impressed with the rigor of the historical chapters, which give clear expositions of historical ideas and arguments in a contemporary analytic idiom. Sometimes the historical thinkers discussed are famous but obscure (like Kant), so that analytic exposition is welcome; sometimes they are important but neglected (like Calkins, or the Buddhist idealists), so that reintroducing them to the literature is welcome. McDaniel's chapter on Calkins is a case study for what analytic-style argumentation can look like in a context in which different premises are taken as obvious, and different puzzles (external relations) seen as mysterious and needing solution. Too many contemporary analytic philosophers do not distinguish our tradition's focus on rigor from the premises it takes as obvious and the puzzles it obsesses over (or ignores). Engaging with careful philosophical work done in a different historical context is a good corrective to this conflation.

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