

*Anglo-American Idealism: Thinkers and Ideas*. Edited by James Connelly and Stamatoula Panagakou. Oxford & Bern: Peter Lang, 2010. pp. xii, 389. £53.00.

Around 1915, the founder-to-be of ISKCON attended Scottish Church College in what the British called Calcutta. Sympathising with Gandhi's protests against British rule, in 1922 he told his future guru during their first meeting that unless India became independent the world would not respectfully hear the theology of Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu. His guru disagreed, and instructed him to disseminate Caitanya's teachings and practices in major cities of the West, which he did, beginning in New York City in 1965.

The school of Caitanya, as a result of encountering colonialism and modernity, was already in the process of being transformed for this purpose. Key reorganisers were Kedarnatha Dutta Bhaktivinoda and his son, Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī, the guru of ISKCON's founder-*ācārya*, A. C. Bhaktivedānta Swami Prabhupāda. All three lived in an intellectual atmosphere influenced by the philosophical concerns of the British, and they might have read some works of the British Idealists. O.B.L. Kapoor, a disciple of Bhaktisiddhānta, discusses one idea of Andrew Seth Pringle-Pattison, a British Idealist, in his book *The Philosophy and Religion of Śrī Caitanya* (Munshiram Manoharlal, 1977, p. 82).

During the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries, idealism was the dominant philosophy in Britain and the entire English-speaking world. Thus intersections of Caitanya Vaishnavism and British Idealism are worth investigating. The book *Anglo-American Idealism* provides an opportunity to do so.

Tamal Krishna Goswami took a step in this direction in *A Living Theology of Krishna Bhakti* (Oxford University Press, 2012). He investigates for eleven pages the influence on Swami Prabhupāda of the Reverend William Urquhart (1877–1964), a sixth-generation clergyman and professor of philosophy at Scottish Church College.

When we consider that in addition to the Bible class (a half-hour daily for four years), Urquhart also instructed Prabhupāda in both Indian and Western philosophy for two years [...] I am led to hypothesize that beyond its Christian advocacy, the theology of the philosophically rigorous, morally upright reverend was essentially compatible with his student's Vaishnava

upbringing and later became the template against which his student-turned-missionary framed the Gauḍīya theology of his guru, Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī. (p. 94)

Urquhart was for Prabhupāda simultaneously a firsthand example of a zealous overseas missionary and later, in commentaries, an invisible *pūrvapakṣin* (philosophical adversary) with whom to argue. (p. 102)

The Introduction to *Anglo-American Idealism* summarises the British Idealist tradition. The British Idealists ‘showed the strengths of idealism through their critical assessments of the principles of other philosophical traditions, such as utilitarianism, empiricism, realism, and pragmatism’ (p. 4). They ‘drew constructively upon Plato, Aristotle, Kant, and Hegel in order to address’ (p. 4) social, religious, and political issues. ‘Faced with the effects of industrialisation and urbanisation in Victorian Britain, the British Idealists developed an ethical alternative to the dehumanizing and unsettling conditions generated by the extreme individualism and unfettered *laissez-faire* capitalism of the era.’ (pp. 4–5) ‘They focused on the logical interdependence between socio-political organization and the development of human capacities: self-realisation was seen as a social, moral, and spiritual endeavor.’ (p. 5) ‘The state thus sustains the consciousness of a common good that should permeate the spiritual fellowship of human beings in a society’ (p. 6).

Bertrand Russell and others thinkers attacked the doctrines of idealism at the turn of the century, ‘and by the end of the First World War, the idealist hold on the philosophical scene was weakening’ (p. 6). Recently, though, there has been a revived interest in Anglo-American Idealism and a resurgence of research and scholarly activities. Many essays in this book emerged from the International Conference on Anglo-American Idealism at Pyrgos, Greece, in 2003.

One contributor I highly recommend is Jan Olof Bengtsson, known for his book *The Worldview of Personalism: Origins and Early Development* (Oxford University Press, 2006). I reviewed his book in the first volume of the *ISKCON Studies Journal* (ISJ), and he has contributed a paper about ISKCON and the Western Cultural Identity to this second volume of ISJ. In *Anglo-American Idealism*, he writes about Personal Idealism, which (the editors say) ‘rejected what it saw as the unpalatable implications of Absolute Idealism,’ such as pantheism, nihilism, and monistic impersonalism and

‘stressed the substantive nature of individuality’ (p. 9). Bengtsson raises issues that, he says, ‘seem to have been largely ignored in the revival of British and American idealism studies,’ issues that follow from seeing that idealism ‘is part of a deeper cultural dynamic of Western modernity’ (p. 109). He argues that ‘some of the continued problems of modernity are related to the mere failure or unwillingness to understand their causes in terms of a pantheistic distortion of the true import of central themes of Christianity. [...] Personal Idealism at its best contains at least some of the badly needed philosophical resources of what could be called an “alternative modernity”.’ (p. 129)

Although some of the book’s articles will challenge nonspecialists in British Idealism, this book is valuable for comparison’s sake. Most of the contributors write about the value and importance of the great idealists of the past and the continuing relevance of idealist thought to current issues and contemporary philosophical concerns. They introduce the subjects of idealism and its different forms, which hold relevance for ISKCON and Vaiṣṇava thought.

TATTVAVIT DASA