

The Idealism of the British Idealists
(W. J. Mander, Oxford University)

Abstract:

In philosophical terms, Britain is usually regarded as the home of empiricism, common sense and ordinary language, but from the 1860s through to the 1930s there flourished in Britain a creative school of idealism which, until the turn of the century, dominated philosophical debate and which, even afterwards, remained very influential. That idealist tradition has now been almost entirely forgotten and this paper aims to reintroduce readers to it. After an introductory section setting out the general character of the movement and the reasons for its success, closer attention is focused on one specific issue – the metaphysical idealism of these idealists. This it turns out is a far from simple or homogenous quality, and briefly discussing the four most famous figures of the school – T. H. Green, Edward Caird, F. H. Bradley and J. M. E. McTaggart – the paper shows how each of them argued by a significantly different route for what were significantly different kinds of idealism.