

Introduction to **The Teachings of Friedrich Nietzsche**

The manuscript is an incomplete nineteen-page handwritten document. The document is the first of twenty-one in Folio Volume Box 97 of miscellaneous materials.¹ The intended topic was neither a critique nor a defense, but a clarification of Nietzsche's philosophical *Weltanschauung* in outline. Yet, Royce offers only a brief biographical sketch and a few tentative remarks before the manuscript terminates. The first reference to Nietzsche in Royce's writings occurs in *The Spirit of Modern Philosophy*, a series of lectures delivered between 1889 and 1892, and eventually published in book-form.² Royce therein mentions Nietzsche by name but postpones an evaluation of his philosophy until a later date. The next reference occurs in the second series of *The World and the Individual*, the second part of the Gifford Lectures delivered in 1898 and published in 1901 after the 1899 publication of the first series. Royce, in the first footnote of the seventh lecture, which concerns the realist conception of the self, mentions Nietzsche by name — along with his notorious predecessor Max Stirner — but again postpones an analysis because of the idealistic element in Nietzsche's conception of the self.³ Hence, Royce was at least aware of Nietzsche as early as 1889 and presumably had some knowledge of his philosophy by 1901. Royce would finally fulfill his promise to address Nietzsche's philosophy — in what will be his most mature statement on philosophical pessimism — in a 1917 posthumous publication.⁴ Given that Royce cites Nietzsche's mental collapse in 1899 without any reference to his death in 1900, the composition of the present manuscript must have been sometime in the early 1900s prior to Royce's learning of the philosopher's untimely demise and death.

The manuscript is an illustration of one of Royce's earliest philosophical endeavors: To sympathetically interpret philosophers' ideas in order to understand their psychological temperament and personal character.⁵ What follows in the manuscript is a brief biographical sketch: Nietzsche was born in 1844, suffered visual and digestive disorders throughout his life, went to a respectable boarding school, derived a passion for music and theatre from his sister, sustained a bodily injury in war during the winter of 1868-69, studied philology under Friedrich Wilhelm Ritschl at Bonn and Leipzig, was awarded a professorship as a classicist and philologist in 1869 that ended with an early retirement in 1879 because of bad health, and was diagnosed incurably insane in 1889. Despite physical and mental suffering, Nietzsche's

¹ All information on the manuscript is found in Oppenheim's Comprehensive Index, Box 97 of the Folio Volumes. An online version is available at <http://royce-edition.iupui.edu/docu/index.pdf>.

² Oppenheim's Comprehensive Index, entry 4 in Part I. For the reference to Nietzsche in the second series of *The World and the Individual*, see entry 8 of Part I.

³ Royce, Josiah. *The World and the Individual, Second Series: Nature, Man, and the Moral Order*. London: Macmillan & Co., Ltd. 1904: 283n1. Available online at <http://royce-edition.iupui.edu/online-royce-volumes/>.

⁴ Royce, Josiah. 'Nietzsche' in *The Atlantic Monthly*, vol. 119, no. 3. March 1917, 321-331. An online version is available at <http://royce-edition.iupui.edu/online-royce-articles/>.

⁵ See the autobiographical remarks in Royce's 1886 address before the Harvard philosophy committee, an online version is available at <http://royce-edition.iupui.edu/royce-autobiographical/>.

post-academic life in Italy and the Alps was his most creative and productive period as well as a time of self-chosen exile and reclusion. Royce believes this is partly explainable in reference to his social sensitivity: Nietzsche appears to have had an intuitive power to infer a person's most intimate sentiments, and this led to ambivalent feelings about humanity; a scientific fascination as well as an aristocratic contempt for human nature. This ambivalence led to a reclusive life, where Nietzsche built his own aesthetic world to inhabit and became a critical, but often impatient, analyst of human nature. Nietzsche's impatience principally came from a propensity to rely upon his own aesthetic insights in the absence of scientific data, and consequently, a willingness to contradict himself with a series of extravagant claims about the human condition. The result is a type of Socratic irony without logical consistency: Nietzsche's dialectic is one of tragedy and scorn, a passionate movement that dissolves the vanity of the ironist's sufferings, and ends with the joyous affirmation of the inevitable recurrence of those very same sufferings but without the attendant vanity.

Royce resumes and develops these themes in the 1917 posthumous publication. With a citation of Walt Whitman, Royce characterizes Nietzsche as someone who 'contains multitudes,' and is willing to freely follow his own internal dialectic without worry of contradiction. Despite the multiplicity of seemingly contradictory ideas and sentiments, vaguely communicated through aphorism and parable, Royce believes that Nietzsche's internal dialectic is bound to a definite ideal of ethical Titanism: The willful revolt of free individuality against the enslaving world of ossified convention to attain creative self-perfection. Admittedly, Nietzsche believes the majority of humanity is incapable of such Titanism, and thus, the right to creative self-perfection is the reward only for those heroic individuals daring enough to discover and define themselves through their will to power. Such a will to power manifests itself in the destruction of any barrier between free individuals and their Titanic selves. Hence, Nietzsche is contemptuous of traditional morality because its demands reinforce barriers, and attempts to drag superior individuals down to the base level of common humanity. Nietzsche's ethical Titanism thus prescribes a different type of moral imperative: Sacrifice everything but your ideal and superior self; be and become a Titanic individuality. Zoroaster, in *Thus Spake Zarathustra*, is the very embodiment of this Titanic ideal; who comes to spread the good news that God is dead and now the time is ripe for the arrival of the *Übermensch*: Namely, the Titanic individuality that freely and creatively discovers and defines itself without external reference or constraint, who has the inner courage to endure the eternal recurrence of every event, and yet still choose the ideal and superior self every time.

Exactly what the aim of the *Übermensch* will be in life is indeterminate, but to seek the *Übermensch* is already to begin to will that aim: To answer the question as to what the *Übermensch* would do is to raise the problem of the purpose and meaning of individual existence. Given that purpose and meaning is not predetermined, Nietzsche's ethical Titanism is a type of idealism. Personal salvation is sought nowhere else

but in the self-chosen ideal to become a unique and complete individual. The trouble with this ethical idealism, according to Royce, is the lack of appreciation for the organic nature of life: We are not isolated individuals, but members of a community, and the realization of our personal salvation through self-chosen ideals is dependent upon our need to cooperate with other individuals in pursuit of their own salvation. Despite this weakness, Royce cultivates a sense of appreciation for the strengths of Nietzsche's ethical Titanism: Life is a willful struggle that requires courage on behalf of the individual to take delight in the endless process of discovering and defining one's ideal self; a delight that undercuts the propensity toward skepticism and self-criticism, and joyfully affirms the meaning in the struggle itself. Yet, even for Nietzsche, the struggle is not infinitely endless, but must end only in the rest of eternity, where the series of events constitute a single course of life and a significant whole that assigns meaning to each event in the series presently in the making. Such is the value of the eternal recurrence for Nietzsche's Godless world. Therefore, Royce interprets Nietzsche's Titanism as a type of ethical idealism, and within that idealism perceives an embryonic absolutism, where the ideal and superior individual assumes the place of the risen and ascended God in eternity.

Written by Joseph Dillabough
April 2019