

***Introduction to  
Philosophy IX  
1897-1898***

*Historical Context*

Josiah Royce (1855-1916) joined the faculty of philosophy as an instructor at Harvard in 1882.<sup>1</sup> Previously, Royce worked as a professor in English literature at the University of California. While at the University of California, Royce sought to systematically elaborate the post-Kantian theory of knowledge contained in his dissertation, *Of the Interdependence of the Principles of Knowledge*, submitted for his doctorate in philosophy from John Hopkins University in 1878.<sup>2</sup> Such an elaboration led Royce to develop an increasingly pragmatic epistemology, a nascent phenomenology of consciousness, and arguably the beginnings of a semiotic analysis of representation.<sup>3</sup> These strains of thought first began to appear in the dissertation, and would afterward coalesce in a number of manuscripts<sup>4</sup> and essays<sup>5</sup> written while Royce was still at the University of California, which point toward a growing vision of a systematic philosophy.<sup>6</sup> Upon his arrival to Harvard, Royce began work on a series of lectures that represent some of the conclusions to which these developing strains led; culminating in the 1885 publication of that lecture-series as *The Religious Aspect of Philosophy*, where all the different strains came together in a systematic philosophy of absolute idealism. Thus, the years between 1878 and 1885 represent a transitional period in the evolution of Royce's philosophy from a post-Kantian epistemology to an emerging metaphysics of absolute idealism that begins to situate the strains of Royce's earlier thought into a philosophical system.

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<sup>1</sup> For an overview of Royce's life from his years at the University of California to the publication of the *The Religious Aspect of Philosophy*, see Clendenning, John. *The Life and Thought of Josiah Royce*. Nashville & London, Vanderbilt University Press 1999: 74-130.

<sup>2</sup> A version of his doctoral dissertation is available online at <http://royce-edition.iupui.edu/online-royce-volumes/>.

<sup>3</sup> For an overview of this elaboration, see Dillabough, Joseph. 'Introduction to The Possibility of Experience,' 'Introduction to Interpretation of Consciousness,' and 'Introduction to Sketch of the Infinitesimal Calculus' in *The Writings of Josiah Royce: A Critical Edition*. February and March 2019. All available online at <http://royce-edition.iupui.edu/transcribed-manuscripts/>.

<sup>4</sup> Royce, Josiah. c. 1880: 'The Possibility of Experience,' 'Interpretation of Consciousness,' and 'Sketch of the Infinitesimal Calculus' in *The Writings of Josiah Royce: A Critical Edition*, all available online at <http://royce-edition.iupui.edu/transcribed-manuscripts/>. See also a letter to William James dated 19 September 1880, in Royce, Josiah. *The Letters of Josiah Royce*, vol. 1, ed. John Clendenning. Chicago & London, University of Chicago Press 1991: 86-91. The letter is worth reading in its entirety.

<sup>5</sup> Royce, Josiah. 'Before and After Kant' in *The Berkeley Quarterly*, vol. 2, no. 2, April 1881: 134-150. 'Doubting and Working' in *The California*, vol. 3, no. 3, March 1881: 229-237. 'Kant's Relation to Modern Philosophic Progress' in *The Journal of Speculative Philosophy*, vol. 15, no. 4, October 1881. Penn State University Press: 360-381. 'Mind and Reality' in *Mind*, vol. 7, no. 25, January 1882. Oxford University Press: 30-54. 'How Beliefs are Made' in *The Californian*, vol. 5, no. 3, February 1881: 122-129. All available online at <http://royce-edition.iupui.edu/online-royce-articles/>.

<sup>6</sup> For an overview of Royce's growing vision of a systematic philosophy around the 1880s, see Dillabough, Joseph. 'Introduction to Selections from Royce's Thought-Diary' in *The Writings of Josiah Royce: A Critical Edition*. March 2019. Available online at <http://royce-edition.iupui.edu/transcribed-manuscripts/>.

While there was always an interest in metaphysics for Royce,<sup>7</sup> there is a decidedly emphatic shift in attention from epistemology to metaphysics during Royce's time at the University of California and after his arrival to Harvard in 1882; a shift in concern from the question of knowledge to the question of reality or the logical relation between the two in reference to the mind. This shift in attention manifests itself in the 1882-83 version of *The Religious Aspect of Philosophy*, a series of four lectures that divide into two parts, the first on ethics and the second on the philosophy of nature. While the ethical part coheres with Royce's earlier moral philosophy, the metaphysical part revives the argument from the possibility of error found in the dissertation but with a metaphysical instead of an epistemological conclusion. Whereas before the argument was intended to prove the pragmatic value of judgments in terms of whether their consequences satisfy our purposes, now Royce argues that the logical possibility of error supposes an infinite intelligence of which every finite intelligence is a mere element. Except, at this time, Royce felt the argument only permits us to infer an infinite intelligence as a hypothesis or postulate that explains the logical possibility of error. Once revisions for publication were made to the lectures, the infinite intelligence ceases to serve as a mere hypothesis or postulate and becomes a logically necessary conclusion about the metaphysical nature of reality.

The favorable reception of the lectures, together with his performance as an instructor, led to a renewal of Royce's position at Harvard for the academic year of 1883-1884. After the publication of *The Religious Aspect of Philosophy*, Royce became an assistant professor and later began to teach a newly available graduate course on metaphysics in 1886-1887. Presumably, the graduate course in metaphysics is the philosophy course number nine to which the title of the present manuscript refers, and the course on metaphysics Royce would teach for the remainder of his life. At this time, Royce was probably trying to tie together the pragmatic epistemology and nascent phenomenology of his earlier philosophy with the newly adopted system of absolute idealism.<sup>8</sup> Given the centrality of the mind in these disparate but related philosophical inquiries, Royce presumably saw the psychological as the proper empirical starting-point to tie everything together, which might explain the return to the study of psychology in the years between 1885 and 1889. Royce's psychological studies inevitably led to metaphysical problems concerning the nature of consciousness, self-consciousness, and the relation between them and nature,<sup>9</sup> culminating in the

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<sup>7</sup> One of the earliest texts in philosophy Royce read was an introduction to ontology, see an autobiographical manuscript written by Royce in 1886 available online at <http://royce-edition.iupui.edu/royce-autobiographical/>. While at Leipzig and Göttingen, Royce also studied Kant and the German Idealists with Rudolf Hermann Lotze and Karl von Hartmann, and in addition, studied the philosophy of Spinoza and Schopenhauer at John Hopkins.

<sup>8</sup> Dillabough, Joseph. 'Introduction to Speculations as to the Nature of Mind' in *The Writings of Josiah Royce: A Critical Edition*. March 2019. Available online at <http://royce-edition.iupui.edu/transcribed-manuscripts/>.

<sup>9</sup> For an overview of Royce's psychological studies and their metaphysical implications, see Dillabough, Joseph. 'Introduction to The Psychology of the Intellect' in in *The Writings of Josiah Royce: A Critical Edition*. December 2018. Available online at <http://royce-edition.iupui.edu/transcribed-manuscripts/>.

New Orleans Lectures, *The Psychology of the Intellect*, of 1897 and eventually the publication of *Outlines of Psychology* in 1903. Prior to that eventuality, in the years between 1895 and 1901, Royce would publish *The Conception of God* and the first and second series of *The World and the Individual*. Given the manuscript's composition occurs after the publication of *The Conception of God* in 1895 but before the publication of the first series of *The World and the Individual* in 1898, the manuscript serves as a sign of how Royce's metaphysics was continuing to evolve between two of the most important philosophical works of his lifetime, and what Royce's views were concerning the nature and purpose of metaphysics at this time.

### *Philosophy IX*

The manuscript is a forty-one page handwritten document.<sup>10</sup> The document is the first of two in Harvard Archives Royce Papers (HARP) Box 71 of lectures from 1897 to 1898. The topic is an introduction to a course on metaphysics. Hence, the document is an introduction to the philosophy course number nine on metaphysics for the academic year of 1897-1898. Royce classifies metaphysics as a branch of philosophy, and defines philosophy as an effort to arrive at a reasoned solution to the problems of human life. After a survey of several types of problems in human life, Royce arrives at the type of problem that qualifies as ultimate. As an example of an ultimate problem of human life, Royce appeals to the problem of how human life can evolutionarily emerge from lifeless matter. To qualify as ultimate, a problem must not presuppose any underlying problem, must tend to newer and more general problems as science grows, and must not reduce to the special problems of the hard sciences but still remain significant. The problem of how human life emerges from lifeless matter qualifies as ultimate because any attempt to solve the problem in the hard sciences will presuppose the very terms, such as 'human,' 'life,' and 'matter,' in need of explanation; which entails there is no underlying problem presupposed. Furthermore, once a solution is found, as science grows there would tend to grow newer and more general problems, such as: How does animal life emerge from lifeless matter? Or even more generally: How does life itself emerge from lifeless matter? Therefore, the problem qualifies as ultimate because the problem satisfies Royce's criteria.

The problem of how human life evolutionarily evolves from lifeless matter is an ultimate problem. Such a problem is not reducible to the special problems of the hard sciences because the hard sciences presuppose the very terms in need of explanation. How, in other words, could we arrive at an inductive generalization about the emergence of human life from lifeless matter if the definitions for what counts as 'human life' and 'lifeless matter' are necessary prior to that induction? More generally, we must have some idea about what counts as a *real* living being, and therefore, how to differentiate between *real* and *unreal*

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<sup>10</sup> All information on the manuscript is found in Oppenheim's Comprehensive Index, see entry 198 of Part II. Available online at <http://royce-edition.iupui.edu/docu/index.pdf>.

living beings, before an inductive generalization could derive a conclusion about how the characteristics of living beings would emerge from a lifeless world of matter. Another, but a negative example, Royce appeals to is the law of gravity. Certainly, the law of gravity was and is not an ultimate problem because the law presupposes underlying problems, such as the semantics of the constituent terms that law presupposes — for example, what is meant by space and time, matter and motion, and quantity in general. What different *realities*, in other words, do these terms signify? Yet, in order to answer this question, not only must we know how all these different objects relate to one another, and therefore, some general idea about the nature of the *real* world, but we must antecedently understand what the very term *reality* signifies. Such ultimate problems are, according to Royce, the proper province of metaphysics. Therefore, the philosophical science of metaphysics attempts to address what the term *reality* signifies, what counts as *real* and *unreal*, and what is the general nature of the *real* world as well as the *real* beings within this world that science attempts to explain.

There are often certain conceptions in our scientific explanations signifying objects that are neither *real* or *unreal* but rather *ideal*. Consider mathematics: Does the concept of a circle signify a real object in the universe? Clearly not: There is no thing existing in the real world that exactly conforms to our conception of a circle. Does this entail that the concept of a circle signifies an unreal object? No: The concept of a circle is a constituent term of many true propositions, these propositions are parts of many valid mathematical demonstrations, and such propositions and arguments serve a practical utility despite signifying neither a real or unreal object. The concept of a circle, and mathematical concepts in general, rather signify an *ideal* object. Given all the different examples to which Royce appeals, an *ideal* is whatever *ought* to be the case under certain conditions. For example, if certain conditions are met, a circle's radius and circumference *ought* to be proportional, and that proportionality *ought* to be defined by  $\pi$  and  $2\pi$ , and so on, even if there is no existing thing in the real world that instantiates those properties. We often also speak of the *ideals* of morality and justice: Namely, even if the real world is evil and corrupt, we *ought* to strive to conform to goodness and fairness. The *ideal* entails, in other words, there is some other world beyond reality — a “city out of sight,” Royce says — that may or may not govern the real world, or our thoughts about reality, toward some final end. Whether that governance is real, unreal, or ideal is an ultimate problem of the philosophical science of metaphysics. Therefore, metaphysics studies these and related terms of such fundamental importance.

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