

Introduction to the “Richmond Lectures” of 1904

The three “Richmond Lectures” on the philosophy of science delivered at the University of Richmond, Richmond, Virginia, by Josiah Royce, Thursday, November 3 through Saturday, November 5, 1904, were the final lectures in a series that began in February of that year at Columbia University, and continued in October at St. Louis University. The history of this set of manuscripts is not very clear, whereas the content itself is worthy of study in understanding the latter aspects of Royce’s thought.

J. Harry Cotton (1898-1982, while a professor in the Wabash College Department of Philosophy) included in the folio box (specifically, Box 88, located at the Harvard Archives Royce Papers [HARP]) of the Richmond Lectures a 1-page note, dated September 4, 1953, transmitting that the records at the University of Richmond “show that Professor Royce gave three lectures as follows: I. “The Orderly Arrangements of Facts and Ideas: ‘Series’ and ‘Levels;’” II. “Transformations and Their Laws;” and III. “The World and the Will.” There are, however, inconsistencies in the titles and possibly the contents of these Lectures with that of the Cotton note.

Unclear, then, is the state of the extant manuscript and typescript of the Richmond Lectures as included in Box 88 of the HARP. It is highly unlikely that the lectures are complete, at least as reported by Cotton from the records of the University of Richmond. Perhaps part of the papers were lost when Jacob Loewenberg, a former Teaching Assistant to Royce, transferred original Royce texts from Harvard to the University of California at Berkeley.

In any case, Oppenheim & al. in their Comprehensive Index to HARP [found elsewhere on this website] make much of the Richmond Lectures’ probable relationship to Royce’s Columbia Lectures delivered some nine months prior. Indeed, as again asserted in the Oppenheim Index, “that Royce would take sections of his Columbia lectures and use them in his Richmond lectures makes eminent sense given the time frame and flurry of activities Royce was then engaged in.” Oppenheim views the Second Richmond Lecture paralleling the Third Columbia Lecture’s theme of logical scientific concepts, while the Third Richmond Lecture (at least in title, if not knowable content) parallels the Fifth Columbia Lecture, both concerning the Will.

The First Richmond Lecture, written in Royce’s own hand, matches the title given by Cotton. In fact, the expanded title as written by Royce reads:

“Richmond Lectures on ‘Some Fundamental Conceptions of Science.’ Lecture I. The Orderly Arrangements of Facts and Ideas: Series and Levels.” This manuscript is heavily edited and (re)numbered to forty-seven pages.

The second document in this Richmond collection is a typescript and is situated as if it were the Second Richmond Lecture. The title given here does not, however, correspond to Cotton’s note, and the title is in fact not written by Royce. The title, written in the characteristic red pencil of Edgar Franklin Wells (who, as a Ph.D. candidate in 1940, was hired by the Harvard Philosophy Department to help organize the Royce papers), is given as “Lecture II: Instances of Order (Number, Time, Relation).” As Professor Frank M. Oppenheim & al. in the Comprehensive Index of the HARP note, “Wells occasionally makes more interpretive statements as to whether a manuscript is complete, or what the manuscript’s purpose might have been.” Essentially, Oppenheim questions whether this so-called “Second Lecture” is a continuation of the First. Perhaps overlooked in his questioning is that Royce himself began to number this typescripted document starting from page 1, in this case ending with 26. On the other hand, this document’s focus is on “the familiar series of the whole numbers,” and decidedly not on “Transformations and Their Laws” (of which more below).

The same cannot be said for what is identified by Wells (but not by Oppenheim) as the Third Richmond Lecture. This document, too, is a typescript of twenty-three pages, including the pagination (while the second was typed but featured Royce’s hand-written pagination). Wells’ red pencil identifies this document as “Instances of law, series, levels.” Again, this title clearly does not match that of Cotton’s note.

As for the content of the Richmond Lectures, it is prepared and delivered during the period Professor Bruce Kuklick characterizes as when Royce “turns to symbolic logic to effect a reconciliation between the two worlds [that of the absolute and of everyday experience], and mathematical studies dominate his thinking.”¹ Acknowledging to the members of his audience the apparent “dryness” and “remoteness” of mathematics and logic, Royce nonetheless sets out to make them aware of the “the general lessons of science.”

Briefly, the scientific enterprise does not simply report collections of facts but has taught that nature is ruled by order and laws. Laws are complex, but are

¹ Bruce Kuklick, *Josiah Royce: An Intellectual Biography* (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1972), 3.

most fundamentally constituted by ordered series of objects, the most scientifically exact and basic of which are whole numbers. The complexity of laws is attributed to relations between series. There are multiple types of relations: dyadic relations between two individual objects, which may have either a symmetrical (two brothers) or unsymmetrical (a father and son) relation. More importantly, though, are polyadic relations, which may be transitive (sisterhood) or intransitive (motherhood). Series themselves are defined as polyadic such that if two members of the series are selected one is in a transitive unsymmetrical relation to the other. Series are connected to one another by levels, which are established by symmetrical relations between members of different series. Finally, there are transformations, which are “conceivable, definable, analyzable” changes. The knowledge of transformations are fundamental to understanding laws, for despite changes, there is always an element of any series that remains unchanged; and here Royce has interrelated his scientific concepts: without the lawful order of series, chaos.

The extant Richmond Lectures are technical but fairly simple. It is clear the Third Lecture is not included in these documents. In this author’s estimation, at least part of what Cotton claimed to be the Second Lecture is included, for toward the end the concepts of “Transformations and Their Laws” are developed. This is highly unfortunate, for it seems the logical analysis of scientific concepts was not Royce’s ultimate goal: instead, as Professor Jacquelyn Ann Kegley notes, “Most of Royce’s later philosophical concern was with the nature of scientific methodology. Again and again he affirmed the human and social character of science. Science works with certain leading ideas of guiding principles which are molded by but not predetermined in their details by experience.”² Indeed, she goes on to quote from the Richmond Lectures, perhaps the only scholar to have yet done so: “Science does indeed primarily reveal to us not what the universe is apart from man, but *how man interprets his own experience.*”

Patrick Dugan
February 2015

² Jacquelyn Ann Kegley, “Royce and Husserl: Some Parallels and Food for Thought,” *Transactions of the Charles S. Peirce Society*, 14, no. 3 (1978): 195-196.