Idea and Absolute in the Philosophy of Josiah Royce

William Joseph Zanardi

Loyola University Chicago

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IDEA AND ABSOLUTE IN THE
PHILOSOPHY OF JOSIAH ROYCE

by

William J. Zanardi

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Attempts to controvert an author's interpretation of his own work have been frequent and often successful. The critic may prove to be a better judge of an author's meaning and thereby exemplify Schliermacher's paradox, namely, that the skilled interpreter understands an author better than the latter understands himself. But this thesis asserts that one attempt to reverse an author's explicit understanding of his own work has not been successful. Specifically, the interpretation of Peter Fuss in regard to the later work of Josiah Royce is not an instance of Schliermacher's paradox. Rather Royce's understanding of the unbroken continuity of his own absolute idealism is to be preferred to any denial of absolutistic aspects in his later works.

The thesis will be divided into six sections. The first offers a brief restatement of Fuss' hypothesis that Royce abandoned his absolutism late in his philosophical career. Next to be considered is the correspondence of Royce, particularly those letters affirming the continuity in his philosophy. The third section begins the research into Royce's Absolute by means of his view of what an idea is. In addition to Royce's explicit statements asserting the consistency of his thought, this thesis offers an argument for such consistency based on the function of the idea in Royce's epistemology. The varied uses of an idea are detailed in three major works spanning Royce's professional life. Thus the third, fourth, and fifth sections analyze the idea in The Religious Aspect of

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Philosophy,\textsuperscript{2} The World and the Individual,\textsuperscript{3} and The Problem of Christianity\textsuperscript{4} respectively. The final section summarizes the preceding arguments and concludes that Royce did not abandon his absolutism with the writing of The Problem of Christianity.

A cautionary note should be added. This thesis has a modest aim, namely, to prove that Royce means what he says when he insists that his philosophy of interpretation is consistent with his earlier, more traditional form of absolute idealism. There is no attempt to provide a detailed exposition of Royce's metaphysics. Rather the modest aim of the thesis is pursued with the emphasis placed on epistemological arguments. As a result, this is not an introduction to nor a defense of the philosophy of Josiah Royce. Only insofar as the thesis justifies Royce's understanding of his own work is it a defense of his philosophy as an honest and integral achievement.

A work entitled *The Moral Philosophy of Josiah Royce* renewed something of a controversy when it appeared in 1965. Its author, Peter Fuss, suggested that, in replacing his concept of Absolute Mind or Absolute Will with the notion of a Community of Interpretation, Royce was in effect abandoning the absolutistic aspects of his philosophical idealism. The latter notion surfaced in Royce's public thought a short two years before his death. Ostensibly it had little reference to his earlier metaphysics of Absolute Idealism. Fuss' arguments for a radical break in Royce's thought appear in an appendix to his work. He offers them in summary form with the promise of a yet to be published work more carefully detailing his hypothesis. The summary appears in three sections labelled "Metaphysics," "Epistemology," and "Doctrine of Man."

According to Fuss, the year 1913 divides Royce's earlier metaphysical views from his later doctrine of the Community of Interpretation. Prior to that date, the real is taken to be the object of an Absolute Mind. The latter is described as "passionless eternal thought" in Royce's first major work. Subsequently, in *The World and the Individual*, the Absolute is defined in more voluntaristic terms as the "eternal fulfillment of finite purposes." Both works share the position that the reality of time is dependent on a finite viewpoint. In reference to the Absolute, all reality is eternally what it is. The existence of such an Absolute perspective is logically demonstrated through an argument of presupposition by denial.

With the writing of *The Problem of Christianity*, these philosophical positions are alleged to be radically altered. The real is then taken to be the object of a Community of Interpretation. The latter is described as a "social organism made up of an unlimited number of finite human beings." Its existence is not logically demonstrable, and its origin and activity require a real order

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of time. In Fuss' words, the temporal order "is apparently, the only real order." There is thus a need for history and social process.6

The second part of the schematic outline summarizes Royce's epistemological views. In his early works, human knowing is comprised of single percepts and concepts whose real objects are the contents of an Absolute Mind. The truth of a knower's ideas consists in their correspondence to the contents of Absolute Thought, but this agreement is known only to the latter. After 1913, human knowing is described generally as "social processes of interpretation whose problematic objects are progressively determined by an unlimited Community of human investigators." Truth is found in the coherence of a particular interpretation with the whole of a man's experience. The latter consists of a "universe of signs" requiring interpretation. But this coherence is complete only in the ideal final interpretation of an infinite Community.7

Royce's early philosophy of man views finite individuals in relation to an all-embracing Self. They are fragments of an Absolute Self and give unique expression to its Purpose. A man necessarily is included in the Absolute Self, and what evil he does is eternally rectified in this necessary inclusion. But the later work of Royce emphasizes that the relation of the finite individual to a Community of Interpretation results from a free decision. There are morally autonomous members of the Community who together seek the fulfillment of shared purposes. The uniqueness of the individual arises out of a "complex process of social imitation and contrast." He adopts a unique life plan which may benefit or harm the Community, but this very indeterminacy underlines the individual member's moral freedom.8

The contrasts made by Fuss are well-founded on Roycean texts. This thesis, therefore, does not charge him with a selective use of Royce's words. Nor, for

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6Ibid., pp. 259-60.
7Ibid., pp. 260-61.
8Ibid., pp. 261-62.
that matter, does it dispute his listing of significant changes after 1913. Where a difference arises is in Fuss' interpretation of the changes in Royce's epistemology. He proposes a radical break between the earlier and later views of human knowing. As stated above, this thesis bypasses many of the metaphysical issues in Royce's philosophy. It should also be noted that the particular ethical questions upon which Fuss concentrates are not the main interest here. What is of concern is the consistency of Royce's use of an Absolute in *The Problem of Christianity*. Though the word "Absolute" occurs but three times in the latter work, it is interchangeable with the concept of the "Universal Community of Interpretation." The validity of such a substitution will be shown by a comparison of the two terms' epistemological functions in works spanning Royce's philosophical career. The first argument against Fuss' hypothesis and for a consistent epistemology in Royce lies in the correspondence of Royce himself.
In a footnote to his schematic outline, Fuss lists some of Royce's comments that reflect both novelty and consistency in his last major work, *The Problem of Christianity*. The quotations are taken from the latter volume and by themselves are ambiguous. They neither wholly support nor entirely deny Fuss' hypothesis. He concludes that "Royce's own remarks merely add to the riddle." But in the same footnote he quotes in part a letter from Royce to Mary Whiton Calkins that, had it been given in its entirety, may have resolved the earlier ambiguity of Royce's remarks. My guess is that Fuss did not have access to the entire letter. He wrote prior to the publication of the collected correspondence of Royce and perhaps only knew of the letter as quoted in part. The availability of most of Royce's private correspondence, particularly those letters between 1900 and 1916, may dispel the riddle accepted by Fuss.

With all of Royce's important letters available to him, John Clendenning concludes that Royce explicitly maintained the consistency of his philosophy of interpretation with his earlier doctrine of absolute idealism. He recognizes the importance of the Calkins letter to his conclusion. The context of the letter is Royce expressing his appreciation of and general agreement with a paper by Mary Whiton Calkins. He stresses the emergence in his own thought of the two ideas of Community and Spirit. "They certainly have assumed, in my own mind, a new vitality, and a very much deeper significance than, for me, they ever had before I wrote my *Problem of Christianity*." Royce is quick to add that this

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9Ibid., p. 259.
11"At issue is whether the 'Community of Interpretation' in the later work is inconsistent with the 'Absolute Thought' of the earlier work; in other words did Royce finally abandon his absolutism in favor of a merely social idealism? In his own responses to the question, Royce repeatedly and firmly maintained that his various constructions were different paths to the same doctrine, that his latest work revealed additions and reinterpretations, but not inconsistencies." Ibid., p. 24.
new emphasis on the Community does not reverse anything in his former position. "The reflections in question constitute, for me, not something inconsistent with my former position, but a distinct addition to my former position, a new attainment,--I believe a new growth." He goes on to state, "I do not believe that you change, in a way involving inconsistency, when you re-interpret former ideas, . . . ." The question of what exactly this reinterpretation consists in will await the comparison of Royce's three major works. At this point, note should be taken of the genetic metaphor used to explain his new idea. There is neither a sudden appearance nor a reversal entailed in the notion of the Community of Interpretation. As the Calkins letter continues:

Now this view is at present an essential part of my idealism. In essential meaning I suppose that it always was such an essential part. But I do not believe that I ever told my tale as fully, or with the same approach to the far off goal of saying sometime something that might prove helpful to students of idealism, as in the Problem of Christianity.14

The absence of the above parts of the Calkins letter from Fuss' list of relevant texts is, in my opinion, fatal to one aspect of his argument. That is, the ambiguity of Royce's own remarks on the relation of his later and earlier works cannot stand. Instead, Royce is explicit in regard to the continuity of his thought--a new "approach," a reinterpretation does not constitute a radical departure from absolute idealism. Another letter gives more details of what Royce based his view of continuity on. Subsequent to the writing of The Problem of Christianity, he wrote to Reginald Chauncey Robbins.

I hardly hope to get together any comprehensive summary and survey of my philosophical contributions before my little span of working day ends; but, as a fact, my philosophical contributions, both "pure" and "applied," hang pretty closely together. . . . --Most of course I prize at present my latest theory, that of the Peircean "interpretation," with its peculiar "triads." But in germ I had it (not yet on any Peircean, nor yet on any Hegelian basis), in my Chapter on "The Possibility of Error" in the Religious Aspect. Here, in its latest form (as in my book on War and

13Ibid.
14Ibid., p. 647.
Insurance) is a theory that allows for endless variety of individual
"interpretation," and for endless change, growth and fluency, while
"absoluteness" is nevertheless "chrono-synoptic" and universal, above
all and in all the flow and the tragedy of this world whose unity
means that it "contains its own interpreter." 15

Again Royce employs a genetic metaphor to describe the relation of his
philosophy of interpretation to his earlier work. Stress is placed on the unity
of his philosophical enterprise of some thirty years. Perhaps more important for
this study, Royce affirms that endless interpretation is consistent with a type
of absolutism. And as will become apparent later, this affirmation of two poles,
the one of finite being and the other, the Absolute Consciousness, is repeated
in the three works to be considered.

Mention can be made of one other letter. This correspondence was to F.S.C.
Schiller, and, coming well after the outbreak of World War I, it expressed Royce's
deepening grief over the conflict. He saw the destruction spread over Europe and
felt helpless to reverse the slaughter. It is after comments expressing such a
helplessness that Royce adds: "Meanwhile, I do what I can with my not wholly
inhuman form of Absolutism." 16 While too brief a comment to be of much importance
alongside the Calkins and Robbins letters, it at least indicates Royce continued
to declare himself an absolutist in front of his philosophical opponents.

The editor of Royce's correspondence concludes that the genetic metaphors
used by Royce to explain his development have some basis in the texts. He suggests
we can find the "germ" from which "grew" the philosophy of interpretation and idea
of the Community. What Clendenning proposes is that Royce's attention to the
triadic structure of knowledge in Chapter XI of The Religious Aspect of Philosophy
is the first hint of his later philosophy. He already is dissatisfied with knowl-
dge as a dyadic relation and demands a third party to contain the truth of what
is known. Thus Clendenning suggests a rough equivalence between the Universal

15 Josiah Royce in a letter to Reginald Chauncey Robbins (November 8, 1914),
ibid., pp. 618-19.
16 Josiah Royce in a letter to Ferdinand Canning Scott Schiller (August 24,
1915), ibid., p. 635.
Thought of the Religious Aspect of Philosophy and the interpreter of the world in the Problem of Christianity. He continues:

The differences are not merely linguistic: in the earlier work, Royce has no clear ideas of time or of individuality, and his conception of the triadic structure of knowledge remains too loosely metaphorical. But he was undoubtedly right in describing his philosophical development as a "growth;" it was mainly a growth toward clarity.17

This growth toward clarity is evidenced in Royce's letter to Robbins cited above. His acquaintance with Peircean interpretation gave a new form to what he had long had in mind. Both the three letters cited and Clendenning's remarks are sufficient proof that Royce consistently affirmed the continuity between his major works. New ideas appeared and genuine development occurred late in his career, but no radical break was evident to Royce. His private correspondence does not support, therefore, the "riddle" suggested by Peter Fuss. But that is not the whole of the latter's hypothesis. It is one thing to prove that an author's understanding of his work is unambiguous; it is another to prove the validity of that understanding. The letters considered so far and Clendenning's remarks have established the former point. The next three sections will attempt to establish the latter point. Clendenning's suggestion of an equivalence between two of Royce's works is summarily given. He makes no mention of an intervening work, The World and the Individual. What follows then is an account of a specific development spanning three works of Royce. Tracing the epistemological function of an idea through these works will detail more completely the continuity of Royce's absolutism.

17 Ibid., introduction by Clendenning, pp. 24-25.
In *The Religious Aspect of Philosophy* (1885), ideas are taken to be representations of real objects. As images of what is perceived or thought, a man's ideas are all that is present to his mind. These ideas are the only content of his thought, and the objects represented remain outside his thought. To this extent the position of subjective idealism is correct, i.e. "my mind can be concerned only with its own ideas." But an immediate problem for a subjective idealist is to account for the difference between truth and error. If all I think about will be my ideas, and what they represent are but other ideas of mine, then to assert anything about them must be correct. In that case, sincerity and truth are identical, for when I assert anything there is no reference to anything outside of my own thought. As long as I honestly consult my own ideas, I cannot be in error.

The truth of my ideas, however, is commonly taken to be their correspondence to the objects they represent. There is a "commonplace assumption" that error is possible, that an assertion can fail to agree with a real object outside of thought. But how is one to judge if this particular assertion is true or false? To answer that Royce considers what role the judgment plays in human cognition. It is not an act distinct from that of understanding. That is, the judgment by itself has no intelligible object other than the ideas present to all thought. Royce concludes that the judgment synthesizes my ideas—a position he explicitly avows to be neo-Kantian. But if the judgment reaches no object beyond ideas, the common-sense belief in error must be either abandoned or supplemented.

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19 Ibid.
20 "A judgment cannot have an object and fail to agree therewith, unless this judgment is part of an organism of thought. Alone, as a separate fact, a judgment has no intelligible object beyond itself. And therefore the presuppositions of common sense must be supplemented or else abandoned. Either then there is no error, or else judgments are true or false only in reference to a higher inclusive thought, which they presuppose, and which must, in the last analysis, be assumed as Infinite and all-inclusive." Ibid., p. 393.
The former course is impossible, for in choosing it one would be admitting that common-sense knowledge had been in error. To state "error is impossible" as a remedy for a mistaken assumption is clearly contradictory. So the latter course alone proves viable. Since no single judgment can be an error (for it reaches no object beyond itself), there must be a higher thought that includes both the judgment and its real object. By comparing the two, this higher thought determines whether the first thought was true or false. Left to itself the latter remains a fragment "neither true nor false, objectless, no complete act of thought at all." This is a very brief sketch of Royce's method of presupposition by denial. He begins with the fact of error in the world and concludes to an Absolute Thought. What follows is a summarized version of Royce's more lengthy argument.

The fact of error is undeniable; to deny this is to contradict oneself, for how else can this fact be refuted if not by proving it erroneous? Each error implies a judgment whose intended object is other than my ideas and so lies beyond my judgment. Such an object will also be an object of a corresponding true judgment. Since the existence of error implies a higher thought, it will be this thought that contains the object of both the true and false judgments. Since the possibilities of error are infinite, the inclusive thought must be infinite. And since error is possible not only as regards objects but also as regards relations, all possible relations in the world must be present to this infinite thought. Finally, to know all relations at once is to know them in absolute rational unity, i.e. as one single thought.

This line of argumentation presupposes, among other positions, a correspondence theory of truth and the basic premise of subjective idealism. Given these positions, Royce proceeds to analyze human knowing, in particular, human error. "The conditions that determine the logical possibility of error must themselves be absolute

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21Ibid., p.431.
22Ibid., pp.424-25.
truth, ...” Even if one were to find fault with his argument, the error charged to Royce's position is alleged to prove the existence of Absolute Thought. It alone knows the real and can compare a judgment with its intended object.

Royce offers other arguments for the existence of an Absolute Thought. The problem of knowing other minds is an instance employing the already cited view of human understanding. My idea of another person can only be true or false if there is a third party to compare my idea with the real person. There is also a problem of relating a past idea to a present thought. The past idea was unique in its separate existence and in its view of the future. To determine the identity between its conception of the future and the present thought's conception of what now has become reality requires an inclusive thought which compares them. How else could my past thought have made any assertion about a future moment? Royce refutes a response that rests on verifying a prediction only upon its fulfillment or failure to occur. My memory of an original thought differs from it and so is still in need of a comparison with that original thought. Again Royce appeals to a higher thought to make a synthesis of what to the human knower are disparate ideas. Both of the above problems—knowledge of other minds and verification of future events—will reappear in Royce's later works. The fact that he continued to grapple with them indicates his dissatisfaction with the theory of idealism as it stands in The Religious Aspect of Philosophy.

It is important to note that Royce characterizes his higher thought by means

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23 Ibid., P. 385.
24 Ibid., pp. 409-10.
25 I postulate also that an error in prediction can be discovered when the time comes by the failure of the prediction to verify itself. I postulate then that I can look back and say: Thus and thus I predicted about this moment, and thus and thus it has come to pass, and this event contradicts that expectation. But can I in fact ever accomplish this comparison at all? And is the comparison very easily intelligible? For when the event comes to pass, the expectation no longer exists. The two thoughts, namely, expectation and actual experience, are separate thoughts, far apart in time. How can I bring them together to compare them, so as to see if they have the same object? It will not do to appeal to memory for the purpose; for the same question would recur about the memory in its relation to the original thought.” Ibid., pp. 418-19.
of an analysis of human thought. He makes use of analogy to characterize the unity of the former thought. "As my thought at any time, and however engaged, combines several fragmentary thoughts into the unity of one conscious moment, so, we affirm, does the Universal Thought combine the thoughts of all of us into an absolute unity of thought, together with all the objects and all the thoughts about these objects that are, or have been, or ever will be, or can be, in the Universe."26

The discontinuity of this comparison is immediately twofold. The Absolute alone knows the real objects of thought, and the unity of its thoughts is eternally whole. There is also a third aspect of discontinuity, for the Absolute is identified with God. This involves speaking of a consciousness that immediately knows all of reality. Such a complete knowledge is beyond the ability of any finite individual. Its existence is known only as the necessary condition for the existence of any truth whatever. These levels of discontinuity between human thought and the final truth of the whole will reappear in the following works of Royce. A decisive question will be whether the ideal final interpretation of the Universal Community is continuous with either the knowledge of an individual or the mind of any community.

Some conclusions can be drawn from what has been said already about human ideas. Royce's absolute idealism produces no a priori account of what ideas a man will have. It does claim to be the one rational explanation of the truth and falsity of ideas.27 The fragmentary and imperfect thoughts of men are contained within the Absolute, and it would seem that progress in knowledge (e.g. the accumulation of new techniques, the development of new sciences) is only appearance. Royce indicates that viewed abstractly, in his separateness from God, a man does make progress in understanding. The individual's rationality is a temporal fact that seeks full expression in time and in the individual. But

26Ibid., pp. 475-76.
27Ibid., p. 380.
in God there is no striving, no progress. Human ideas, therefore, are the forms assumed by Infinite Thought, and despite all the many conflicts of ideas, a final reconciliation of them is eternally present. As a result, any teleology of human thought will be abstract, i.e. the incompleteness of our ideas depends on a finite perspective. The problems this conclusion raises in both ethics and science are only briefly treated in The Religious Aspect of Philosophy. Royce was to devote more attention to them in his next major work. In it there was to be a new emphasis on the teleology of ideas and on the limitations of a representational theory of ideas.

Nine years after publishing his first work, Royce offered an appraisal of it. His remarks are important in that they come prior to the appearance of his next major work, The World and the Individual. He notes in a letter to George Holmes Howison that some changes are needed in the book. But the alterations are said to be in "secondary" matters.

The kernel of the book would remain unchanged as to its essence. But it is above all the method of the book that I should never repeat—a method that has led and will lead to many unnecessary misunderstandings. The metaphysical theory, and the critical argument, of Chap. XI, still remain to me the real insight of the whole thing. By "method" Royce does not mean his use of presupposition by denial, for that technique will recur in his later works. Instead, I think, he is referring to the presentation of his ethical philosophy which occupied the first seven chapters of the book. A significant change which Royce introduces in The World and the Individual is indicated in the Howison letter. He plans to place more emphasis on the voluntaristic aspects of knowledge. As a result, his theory of the

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28 "But, meanwhile, our moral progress and our rational progress, mere minor facts happening at a moment of time, are but insignificant elements in the infinite life in which, as a whole, there is and can be no progress, but only an infinite variety of the forms of the good will and of the higher knowledge." Ibid., p. 467.
29 Josiah Royce in a letter to George Holmes Howison (September 23, 1894), Royce, Letters, pp. 325-26.
Absolute will be more obviously teleological. And, as noted above, this will entail a more explicit statement of the teleological function of ideas. It is important to note that Royce still favors his argument from error to the existence of an Absolute. The comparison of ideas and objects which comprised that argument will still be a function of the Absolute in the following work.

30 "The Thought-category would be still emphasized; but I should also lay stress on another element of reality, viz. the element that Fichte called Leben. The 'world of the powers' I should indeed respect no more than of old; but the interpretation of the Absolute would be more obviously teleological than, to many readers, it seemed then." Ibid., p. 326.
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Fourteen years separate Royce's first book from the two volumes entitled The World and the Individual. Originally delivered as the Gifford Lectures, this work marks the most systematic presentation of his philosophy of absolute idealism. It contains a repetition of themes already treated in his first work, but often there is a new approach—indicating that Royce followed through with the plans expressed in the Howison letter. The influence of William James is said to be behind many of the modifications in Royce's ethical positions. Conversations and friendly arguments between James and Royce were often the catalyst for some new insight in the latter. The new approach Royce takes toward future experience is one such example. Another, though not entirely attributable to James' influence, is the increased emphasis Royce places on purpose or will in his epistemology. Similar emphasis is evident in the works of Spinoza and Leibniz, and more importantly in the works of Schopenhauer, with which Royce was familiar.

A noticeable addition to Royce's epistemology is the characterizing of an idea as purposeful. It is not only a representation but also a plan, a scheme for some activity. Actually, Royce gradually moves away from his former representational theory of ideas, so that eventually an idea is defined solely in terms of purpose. But Royce does not find this to be anything inconsistent with or even absent from his earlier work. The Thought-category previously used to define the Absolute is said to have included both will and experience though these aspects were not so apparent as they are in the present work. His argument for the consistency of this definition of an idea is based on the reference of an idea to the final unity of the Absolute. As an idea formerly was

31 John Passmore, A Hundred Years of Philosophy (Baltimore: Penquin, 1968), pp. 92-93.
32 "In my first book the conception of the Absolute was defined in such wise as led me then to prefer, quite deliberately, the use of the term Thought as the best name for the final unity of the Absolute. While this term was there so defined as to make Thought inclusive of Will and of Experience, these latter terms were not emphasized prominently enough. . . ." Royce, The World and the Individual, I, ix.
described as a fragment of Universal Thought so now it is a fragment of Absolute Purpose or Experience. The latter category is defined as "an experience which finds fulfilled all that the completest thought can rationally conceive as genuinely possible." The concept of fulfillment will increasingly play an important part in Royce's epistemology. But again, the relation between a finite idea and its ultimate completion has not been altered in the years since The Religious Aspect. Royce explicitly states that there has been no significant change, and what follows details the continuity of the meaning of an idea in relation to its terminus.

An idea in The Religious Aspect of Philosophy was taken generally to be a representation of a real object. The truth of the idea was known only to the comparing, higher thought. It took an image or concept and related it to the reality perceived or conceived. In The World and the Individual, Royce moves beyond this representational theory. He stresses the unity of conscious acts, i.e. the reception of sense impressions is always accompanied by a selective awareness of what to be interested in and how to act toward things known.

"There is no purely intellectual life, just as there is no purely voluntary life." And Royce adds, "your intelligent ideas of things never consist of mere images of the things, but always involve a consciousness of how you propose to act towards the things of which you have ideas." What Royce opens up with this theory of the idea as purposeful is the whole question of knowledge as contextual. An idea is not merely an image but a plan that requires a prior understanding of how one is to deal with something. Complexity is added to a representational theory, for ideas do not emerge solely as responses to sense stimuli. There is also a context of interests that constitute a forehaving of perception. The selectivity or purpose of an idea Royce will call its internal meaning.

33 Introduction by John Clendenning to Royce, Letters, p. 33.
35 Ibid., p. 22.
The internal meaning is the conscious content of an idea that expresses some purpose. Put another way, it is the idea as directed to some specific end which it partially fulfills. The concept of fulfillment is central to this theory, for both the success of an idea and its ultimate truth will be judged in terms of accomplishing some purpose. As will be seen below, the ultimate truth of any single idea will not be the fulfillment of its conscious purpose. As a tool for accomplishing some specific end, however, an idea will be termed successful or true if it completes its purpose. This latter aspect of an idea is more closely allied to the earlier representational theory. A specific purpose is related to end beyond itself, i.e. it means or refers to a fact that is other than it. Royce first affirms the primacy of internal meaning over an idea's external reference and then proceeds to account for the absorption of this external meaning into the internal meaning. The primacy of the latter is based on an analysis of everyday experiences. The presence of volition in counting objects or singing tunes is evidence that thought as activity proceeds from a context of interests and purposes. Before there is a reference to some object, there must be an interest in it and a desire to act toward it. For Royce this analysis reveals that the internal meaning of an idea is the necessary condition for all external meaning and truth.

These characterizations of human knowing are part of Royce's metaphysics termed Voluntoristic Idealism. The epistemology of this position entails a view of reality that is known as the embodiment of will. Presupposed is that an idea seeks to find in its object nothing but its own purpose expressed in a way that the idea at the moment does not possess. In Royce's words, "When I have an idea of the world, my idea is a will, and the world of my idea is simply my own will.

36"Now this purpose, just in so far as it gets a present conscious embodiment in the contents and in the form of the complex state called the idea, constitutes what I shall hereafter call the Internal Meaning of the Idea. Or, to repeat, the state or complex of states called the idea, presents to consciousness the expressed although in general the incomplete fulfilment of a purpose." Ibid., p. 25.

37Ibid., 311.
Itself determinately embodied." This is not to say that objects, other minds, space and time are the ideal products of will. But this position does hold that ideas of these objects are present to the knower only as his own conscious act. In other words, his own interest in them and attentiveness to them is constructive of their meaning. But if this is true, then the external reference of an idea is not to something wholly other than it. Royce arrives at this conclusion by estimating the constructive aspect of purpose as determinate of all meaning. He thus modifies his earlier definition of an idea.

Our first definition of the idea seems to make, yes, in its abstract statement deliberately tries to make, as you see, the external meaning something sharply contrasted with the internal meaning. Our final result will simply reabsorb the secondary aspect, the external meaning, into the completed primary aspect,—the completely embodied internal meaning of the idea.

This is not to say that an idea no longer has an external reference. Indeed its ultimate truth depends on a meaning other than that consciously embodied in a specific purpose. The idea refers to a wider purpose than any it can itself achieve. Fulfillment is now spoken of not as the pragmatic activity of a "tool" of thought but as the broader plan in which an idea shares. Such a plan is the universal meaning, the unity of all ideas in an Absolute Purpose.

As noted above, Royce intended to emphasize the teleological function of ideas more than he had previously. Meaning is the reference of an idea to a purpose—this is basic to his voluntaristic position. Already recounted is his view that taken separately, reference by an idea to an object is abstract. Ignored is the primary reference of an idea to a purpose consciously embodied in itself. But there is also the wider purpose to which every internal meaning.

38 Ibid., p. 327.
39 Space, time, past, future, things, minds, laws,—all these constituents of the world, our supposed passive spectator of [the] universe indeed recognizes as objects other than the ideal products of his will; but his ideas of these objects come to him precisely as constructive processes, present to his consciousness as his own act, and understood by him so far as they are his own meaning.” Ibid., p. 326.
40 Ibid., p. 34.
refers. This end is the whole of Being as known and willed. The thesis of his idealism is that reality is not independent being (realism), nor being in its immediacy to an intuiting mind (mysticism), nor being as that validated by the judgment (Critical Rationalism). The real and the true is that which an idea takes as its end and wills to correspond to.  

On the level of everyday activity, where common-sense knowledge flourishes and metaphysical doctrines have not been developed, the criterion of truth will be quite pragmatic. An idea, like any took, is as good as its usefulness in accomplishing some task. It will have to be judged by its purpose and its suitability for carrying out that aim.

The fulfillment of purpose is the standard of truth for both everyday thought and metaphysical theory. Royce is consistent with the epistemology of The Religious Aspect in not accepting the judgment as a separate act of intelligence that verifies the correspondence of an idea to its end. Rather, he says that understanding what thought seeks is a process of determining the validity of meaning. In other words, the ideas themselves are the only content of the thinking process. Through experience the external reference of an idea will be adjusted to fit, will become, an internal meaning. Being is what I will, and through combinations and changes among my ideas, this being will eventually be what I intend in truth. Put another way, my purpose will be found in determinate being as both something corresponded to and something internally possessed. Instead of an act of judgment to the effect that the conditions for the fulfillment of a purpose are indeed satisfied,
the explicit account of validity is here one of gradually modifying my ideas in their external reference to conform to an internal purpose. As will be seen below, this conclusion only escapes the difficulties of subjective idealism by an appeal to a higher Purpose. A similar appeal in The Religious Aspect, you will recall, extricated the thinker who recognized the fact of error from his own closed world of ideas.

Brief note was made above of Royce's rejection of reality as defined by the realist, the mystic, and the tradition generally labelled "critical rationalism." His arguments against these positions cannot be reproduced here. He offers in place of them and indeed as their only rational and complete explanation a fourth concept of Being. Being is not independent of mind (realism), nor is it in a state of immediacy to mind (mysticism), nor is it that which is grasped by a specific act of mind, namely, the judgment (critical rationalism). Rather--

What is, or what is real, is as such the complete embodiment, in individual form and in final fulfilment, of the internal meaning of finite ideas.44

Recall that the absorption of an idea's external meaning by its internal meaning is preliminary to this conception of Being. One reason for this conflation was Royce's handling of the problem of future events—a problem also treated in The Religious Aspect. In The World and the Individual, the third concept of Being as the verified is shown to be inadequate for explaining the truth of a future event. That which is yet outstanding in experience, that which has not yet occurred, is not nothing, for a person does act toward the future in very concrete ways. The concept of fulfillment is needed to replace that of validity.

The fourth concept of Being is noticeably teleological. Being is other than a single idea, not because it is independent of ideas, but because it completely expresses what an idea only partially expresses. Here we are not speaking of

44Ibid., p. 339.
an idea as a "tool" for a specific end. Rather, an idea is seen as intending Being, i.e. willing its inclusion in a purpose that expresses all aims fully and systematically. Such a purpose, Royce contends, holds in unity all the internal meanings of what otherwise appear as separate ideas. But each idea, when not viewed abstractly, is said to imply this systematic inclusion of meaning in one purpose.

If this systematic totality were known immediately in any single idea, i.e. if it were a part of human experience, then the second concept of being, that of the mystic, would be correct. In Royce's words, the knower would then experience "finality, i.e. full expression of what our finite ideas both mean and seek." But this experience is not to be had by a finite individual. There is a precontainment of the universal meaning in human ideas, but this is not known directly. The teleological function of ideas is covered over by attention to limited ends and by ignorance of the totality actually sought. This state of affairs Royce labels "finite vagueness of meaning." For what is truly meant is the Absolute even though this is not known to consciousness. The teleological function of ideas, therefore, is known by implication and not by empirical analysis. In other words, an idea's ultimate reference is not conscious meaning for the individual. This is consistent with the position taken in The Religious Aspect of Philosophy, namely, the true object is known only to a higher consciousness. Truth in both cases is not the possession of finite intelligence.

What proof is there that ideas express even incompletely such finality? It

46 To be means simply to express, to embody the complete internal meaning of a certain absolute system of ideas, --a system, moreover, which is genuinely implied in the true internal meaning or purpose of every finite idea, however fragmentary." Ibid., p. 36.
47 Ibid., p. 347.
48 "Our theory, as you already see, will identify finite ignorance of Reality with finite vagueness of meaning, will assert that the very Absolute, in all its fulness of life, is even now the object that you really mean by your fragmentary passing ideas, and that the defect of your present human form of momentary consciousness lies in the fact that you just now do not know precisely what you mean." Ibid., p. 30.
certainly is nothing that would occur to ordinary everyday thought. For what this finality is as complete meaning is knowledge of the Absolute or God. The proof has been sketched above in various points. First, the criterion of truth is said to be in terms of fulfillment. Validation through experience proves to be an insufficient explanation for the truth of future events, so the act of verification is ultimately found in the Absolute which satisfies all purposes in an eternal present. The individual idea is said to have an external reference, yet its "other" which it seeks is only meaningful as willed or selected for consciousness. In everyday experience, the object of a mind's attention can be more fully determined than it originally was. Learning and revision are real events for the finite thinker. But this object is not the complete end which thought seeks. As a "proximate finite object" it can increasingly fulfill the conditions for the truth of what a man knows and wills. For example, the chemist waiting for the results of an experiment and a stock-investor watching price fluctuations are attentive to proximate ends. But the final end of their purpose is being, not as an independent other, but as the complete expression of what is sought.

The final form of any idea is threefold: 1) as the complete expression of the finite idea's internal meaning, 2) as a total fulfillment of the purpose partially embodied in the idea, 3) as an individual life which is interchangeable with no other life. This characterization of the real object of any finite idea is obviously not the result of any empirical observation. Such an object as known is fully present to the knower, i.e. there is no abstraction involved in the knowledge of it. And, in addition, this object as known is unique and unable to be interchanged with any other object. The constant revision that characterizes

49 Ibid., pp. 39-40.
50 Ibid., pp. 340-41.
human expression is in that case not a possibility for such knowledge. Having all the conditions for its truth being fulfilled and in need of no revision, this object is said to be the world of Being present as one whole embracing all finite facts. 51

The metaphysical problem of the One and Many is ever present in Royce's work, but the epistemological interests of this thesis limit our consideration of that problem. At this point of his philosophical career, it is Absolute Experience verifying all past, present, and future finite experiences that is the pole of unity over against a mere multiplicity of facts. The proof for this fourth concept of Being thus lies in its account of the truth of events not yet experienced on a finite level. Again, this is a position consistent with that taken in The Religious Aspect of Philosophy. Truth and error are ultimately arrived at in terms of fulfilling a final absolute purpose, i.e. ideas are verified as parts of Absolute Experience.

In the fifth section of this paper, the above characterization of the Absolute will be compared to the ideal final interpretation of the Universal Community. Preliminary to that comparison, there is a need for more details of the Absolute as defined in The World and the Individual. Royce writes of the "divine life" as a "single consciousness" accomplishing its purpose through all the manifold ideas and lives of finite individuals. The partial views and aims of men are not "illusory," but by that Royce means they are not separate or lost to a universal meaning. In other words, they all are included in a rational system of ideas that is divine knowledge. A final absurdity, an act that would be

51 "It is an individual life, present as a whole, totum simul, as the scholastics would have said. This life is at once a system of facts, and the fulfilment of whatever purpose any finite idea, in so far as it is true to its own meaning, already fragmentarily embodies. This life is the completed will, as well as the completed experience, corresponding to the will and experience of any one finite idea. In its wholeness the world of Being is the world of individually expressed meanings,—an individual life, consisting of the individual embodiments of the wills represented by all finite ideas." Ibid., p. 341.
irrevocably senseless, is not possible in this universe.52 Only the vagueness and ignorance of finite thought could suppose some part of the world was irreconcilable to the whole. From the side of the Absolute, all thoughts and acts are eternally known in their harmony. The problems of temporality this view raises cannot be considered here. Suffice it to say that Royce struggled to prove the reality of time just as he felt pressed to argue for the reality of human acts. His critics have not been unanimous on the success of his attempts. Absolute consciousness is said to hold all time and all acts in one final eternally present insight.53 But this cannot mean that there is nothing finite for the Absolute, for that was precisely the disappointing outcome of the mystic's view of reality. The mystical experience of God as the All wherein finitude was only illusion revealed a barren Absolute.

Royce emphasizes the reality of individual lives and experiences as a way to counter the nothingness of the mystic's Absolute.54 Whether he actually makes a case for the reality of finite beings is not of concern here. Rather it is his description of the finite pole of reality that interests us. It later will be compared to his description of the Universal Community of Interpretation to see whether the two systems of meaning are identical.

The world of human persons as known to the Absolute is defined as "an

52Ibid., pp. 426-27.
53"This complete insight is indeed not merely one, but is observant of all the real finite varieties, of experience, of meaning, and of life. Nor is the external insight merely timeless; but it is possessed of an inclusive view of the whole of time, and of whatever, when taken in its wholeness, this our time-process means. This final view, for which the realm of Being possesses the unity of a single conscious whole, indeed ignores no fragment of finite consciousness; but it sees all at once, as the realm of truth in its entirety." Ibid., pp. 397-398.
54"One is the Absolute, because in mere multiplicity there would be no finality of insight. Many is the Absolute, because in the interrelationships of contrasted expressions of a single Will lies the only opportunity for the embodiment of wholeness of life, and for the possession of Self-consciousness by the Absolute. For the mystic long ago showed us that simple Oneness meant Nothingness." Royce, The World and the Individual, II, 336.
individual system of rationally linked and determinate; but for that very reason not externally determined, ethically free individuals, who are nevertheless One in God.55

The systematic and rational wholeness of the human world is known only to the Absolute. But the individuality and moral indeterminacy of finite beings is known to both Absolute consciousness and human minds. For the former, individuality must be real given the outcome of the second concept of Being. For the latter, individuality is real in human experience. There is desire and effort, striving and imperfection, in the world of finite beings. In Royce's words:

As a fact, however, it is not only the goal, but the whole series of stages on the way to this goal that is the Reality. It is the sum, then, or some other function of the terms of the series, that has Being. And, as a fact, Being must be attributed to both the principal members of the relation of contrast, both to the seeking and to the attainment. Else is the attainment the fulfilment of nothing. The finite then also is, even if imperfect. Its imperfection is not the same as any mere failure to be real in any degree. It is real in its own way, if the Absolute is real. And unless the imperfect has Reality, the Absolute has none.56

From the above one can legitimately conclude that finality, i.e. full determination of the meaning of ideas, is a denial of mere multiplicity. The latter is to be understood as the possibility of ideas falling outside a system of universal meaning. But finality cannot deny multiplicity, for without the contrast between full and partial meaning, the ultimate goal of thought is mystical oblivion. The finality of ideas, therefore, affirms both a single Will and countless purposes that express that Will. The question now, as it was in The Religious Aspect, is whether there is a radical discontinuity between the Absolute Will and its infinitude of conscious expressions. In the fifth section to follow below this same question will be put to the social interpretation of any community and the final meaning attained in the Universal Community.

Noted above was that the ultimate end of any finite purpose need not be the

55Royce, The World and the Individual, I, 42.
56Ibid., pp. 193-94.
conscious meaning had by an individual as to what he was after. There is thus a non-identity between my specific end or object and the real end or object. The teleological function of an idea is not an experiential datum but a metaphysical theory. Common enough to experience is the effort expended to fit our ideas to recalcitrant facts. Experimentation or just plain guess-work are familiar examples. But Royce suggests that this ongoing struggle between thought and being cannot be explained in terms of curiosity. Instead he posits an Absolute Thought that as the terminus of all finite intentionality provokes the continued effort to interpret facts. "Thought it is which goes on when, our present ideas failing to light up sufficiently the chaos of immediacy, we look for other ideas, in terms of which to interpret our problems." The language of this statement is similar to phrases used in The Problem of Christianity. Royce comes close to defining Thought as a project of interpreting the problems given in experience. Indeed that is one aspect of the Absolute that will be evident in the third major work to be considered. Then too we can ask what is the source of the effort to interpret facts, to seek new ideas more adequate to present problems.

Thought is what overcomes the "vagueness" of meaning apparent to the finite knower and drives him on to recognize Being as the final end of his own thought. Yet, again in opposition to the mystic's intuition of Being, Royce asserts that no finite consciousness can reach this end. There is a radical discontinuity between the Absolute consciousness and every human consciousness. For to know all of reality is to be eternally one with it, i.e. to be God. The totality of Being is therefore only shared in by rational beings but never encompassed by their thought.

This discontinuity would seem to make speech about the whole quite difficult. As in the former work, Royce proceeds to draw analogies from human experience.

57 Ibid., p. 58.
58 Ibid., fn. 1, 192.
He is insistent that the comparisons made fall far short of Absolute Consciousness. Yet one glimpses something of the divine oneness when one reflects on the systematic wholeness of mathematical procedure or experiences the exclusivity of some particular moral interest. In a letter written several years after *The World and the Individual*, Royce speaks of "looking Godwards" as a possibility for understanding something of the Absolute. He apparently means that, if one adopts as his moral ideal whatever he takes to be the divine purpose for him, he will be capable of experiencing, however incompletely, the unity of the divine life. A final and more significant analogy is made by Royce in regard to social relations.

It is not until man views himself as a member of an universal society, whose temporal estrangements are merely incidental to their final unity of meaning, that man rationally appreciates the actual sense of the conscious ideas that express his longing for oneness with an absolute life. We are related to God through our consciousness of our fellows. And our fellows, in the end, prove to be far more various than the mere men. It is one office of philosophy to cultivate this deeper sense of companionship with the world.

In these three sentences is much of what Royce was to develop at great length in *The Problem of Christianity*. The bonds of a universal community are stronger than all the factionalism and conflict among temporal societies. Yet these bonds are not more than ideal from a human perspective, just as "oneness with an absolute life" is still outstanding to human experience. The universal community itself is to be viewed as more than an aggregate of men—a view to be repeated in Royce's next major work. Finally, acceptance of one's inclusion in such an ideal community is an act concomitant with the acknowledgement that one's ideas mean more than they appear to mean. In other words, the true internal meaning of one's ideas is revealed in the desire to be reconciled with one's fellow men. Universality of meaning, therefore, can be approximated in

59Ibid., pp. 418-19.
60Josiah Royce in a letter to Agnes Boyle O'Reilly Hocking (December 2, 1909), Royce, Letters, pp. 536-37.
the imagination by a moral commitment to a world-community. "It is one office of philosophy to cultivate this deeper sense of companionship with the world."

The following work is Royce's finest expression of that particular office.
The Problem of Christianity continues to treat the question of the One and Many, particularly the ethical problems that Royce's earlier works had first encountered. There is a continuity in the absolutistic solution offered to a world of disparate facts. The Absolute, or final interpretation of the world, is still a synoptic view of all reality. But there is an added stress now on the finite expression of purpose. Royce is directly concerned with a theological model involv...
and registers their similarity and difference. This is not to say that Royce aban-
dons subjective idealism as a preliminary position, i.e. the first, second, and
third ideas are not the real. The comparison is not to achieve an identity with
the real object of thought but is to resolve the conflict between a fact of
immediacy (perception) and an idea (concept). Left to themselves, the two remain
separate.63

What is interpretation for Royce? It is first a theory or doctrine of signs
which he learned from Charles Sanders Peirce. Briefly put, the doctrine pro-
poses a third type of knowledge added to the perception of particulars and the
conceptualizing of universals. It involves a triadic relationship between an
interpreter, a sign or symbol which is interpreted, and another thinking being
for whom the sign is interpreted. Peirce held that an object of thought is dis-
tinct from an immediate object of perception or intuition by reason of its problem-
atic nature, i.e. it is sign that to be understood must be compared with other
signs. This process of comparison is considered by both Royce and Peirce to be
the ultimate form of human knowledge, for it marks a synthesis of both sense
knowledge and conceptual knowledge.64 The proof for this synthesis lies in the
solution it offers to the problems listed above.

Other minds cannot be known as perceived particulars nor as conceptualized
universals.65 Rather they are known through the interpretation of behavioral
signs. Royce's long-standing problem of temporality and human identity is like-
wise offered a solution by this third type of knowledge. Self-identity rests
on one's separateness from the "inner lives of other selves" and on one's
interpretation of his extended past and projected future.66 The formerly

64Daniel Sommer Robinson, Royce and Hocking: American Idealists (Boston:
66Ibid., p. 42.
atomistic percepts that comprised memory are now capable of forming some coherent whole other than a system of concepts. Interpretative knowledge is thus a solution to the problem noted in The Religious Aspect, namely, how a past idea can be identified with one presently known. Finally, the problem of the existence of the real world receives an adequate response in terms of interpretation. Since Royce's idealism excludes the possibility of an act of judgment affirming the real, the alternative to interpretative knowledge is a single concept or percept for all reality. Both these alternatives cannot resolve the conflicts among facts and ideas; there is a need for a comparison of them. Royce concludes that belief in the existence of the real world is just such an experience of conflicts among our thoughts. It is a situation calling for an interpretation that is not yet known to us. And consequently what will be termed the "real world" is simply the true interpretation of this problematic situation.67

Much of the background to this new development in Royce's epistemology must remain unexplored here. One controversy of interest, however, is the debate between the pragmatists and Royce. An idea for the former group is said to be a tool for characterizing the data of perception or for predicting future perceptions.68 Royce charges that the pragmatists accept a dualism in cognitive processes such that perception and conception are mutually opposed. Two consequences of this view are the theses that truth is mutable and that "the sole criterion of the present state of the truth is to be found in the contents of particular perceptions."69 But this dualism is responsible for the impasse of the problems listed above. It cannot explain how we know other minds or even ourselves. So Royce's suggestion of a third type of knowledge is both a response to these problems and a criticism of the epistemology advocated by pragmatists.

Another argument for the genuine distinctness of interpretative knowledge is

67 Ibid., pp. 263-64.
68 Ibid., p. 181.
69 Ibid., pp. 153-54.
based on the world of "common objects." Those shared items which everyday thought takes for granted cannot be explained by reference to any single perception. No one man ever experiences a common object as such; so the assertion that there are such objects cannot be verified in terms of the individual's perceptions. Rather knowledge of common objects is arrived at by comparison, i.e. judging that this idea of yours is similar to one of my own and both are fittingly applied to the same item. But the world of common objects is also a social world—a world in which a community of interpretation possesses common meanings. This discovery launches Royce's discussion of the community and the primacy of social meaning.

As an instance of what he means by a social world, Royce refers to scientific discoveries. The individual scientist may verify to his own satisfaction some results of an experiment, but his results cannot be properly termed a scientific fact until, through further confirmation, they become the accepted possession of a scientific community. Again, common or public objects presuppose a community which experiences them precisely as such. Otherwise, scientific facts would be in need of endless verification by every individual who sought to employ them. But the limitations of private experience are surpassed by cooperative enterprises of a community sharing a common purpose. Indeed the vast majority of problems encountered in life will be interpreted according to the meaning already had by an individual's social life. The primacy of society over the individual is basic in Royce's philosophy. He terms a fiction any philosophy of man based on the theory of a fundamentally asocial individual. Man begins in submission to society and only later asserts his independence.

The individual's self-awareness is thus formed within a complex social environment

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72 Ibid., p. 99.
and only later is strong enough to rebel against his native community. So both self-knowledge and the awareness of other minds, as well as knowledge of common objects, presuppose a community of interpretation.

Royce offers a series of definitions of what he means by "community." The most basic one requires that the members share a common past and accept as part of their lives an anticipated future. The former aspect is termed a "community of memory," the latter is either a "community of expectation" or a "community of hope." The emphasis of this definition is practical, i.e. deeds already done or ends yet to be won. The individual has his own unique personality but at the same time shares in a life common to all the members. And by so sharing, two ends are achieved. The community is a value for the individual and through imitation and criticism leads him to self-realization. Equally of value to other persons, the community unites them through a common past and future and thus introduces harmony into social relations. These two ends are not reached if human relations are solely on the level of a collectivity. Royce rejects Bentham's utilitarianism because it purports to base moral activity on mere aggregates of men, i.e. groups having no common memory and hope. Which leads to the next definition of a community. The bond of a community is expressed in social products such as language, art, and customs. These indicate that a true community has a mind (Geist) over and above that of the individual or of the sum total of individuals. It, therefore, surrounds the individual member with pre-established meaning and instructs him in the ways of moral behavior.

But this guiding and restraining character of any community leads to individual rebellions. Repeatedly conflicts break out between the individual's will and the social will. The origins are multiple but inevitable for any highly cultivated...
society which trains individuals in moral self-consciousness. Royce is extremely perceptive in regard to this conflict.

[To the extent that] society becomes more skilled in the external forms of culture, it trains its servants by a process that breeds spiritual enemies. That is, it breeds men who, even when they keep the peace, are inwardly enemies one of another; because every man, in a highly cultivated social world, is trained to moral self-consciousness by his social conflicts. And these same men are inwardly enemies of the collective social will itself, because in a highly cultivated social order the social will is oppressively vast, and the individual is trained to self-consciousness by a process which shows him the contrast between his own will and this, which so far seems to him a vast impersonal social will. He may obey. That is conduct. But he will naturally revolt inwardly; and that is his inevitable form of spiritual self-assertion, so long as he is trained to self-consciousness in this way, and is still without the spiritual transformations that some higher form of love for the community,—some form of loyalty, and that alone,—can bring.77

This higher form of unity with other men rounds out Royce's definition of a community. The common memories and hopes, the spirit expressed in the community's life, and the loyal commitment of the member to the whole are the aspects of his complete definition. He equates loyalty with a free and faithful adoption of a cause.78 By fidelity to such an end, the individual surpasses the temporary estrangements of social life, or at least assumes a posture that is comparable to "viewing the present in the light of the eternal." This moral stance is not to be ascribed to ordinary social relations. Rather it is unique to communal living, and the spirit of that living, made possible by freely bestowed loyalty, is what Royce terms the "Will to Interpret." Some of the concrete expressions of this spirit were noted above. These expressions are said to be more than the acts of a single member or of the combined members of the community. They belong to the Geist, or better, they proceed from one will to meaning. This will is analogous

77 Royce, The Problem of Christianity, I, 142-43.
78 An extensive, though incomplete, reading of Royce's works indicates he may have ignored the moral ambiguity of loyalty to an ultimate cause. Both the fanatic and the utopian are capable of fidelity to some cause. Perhaps the work of Paul Tillich on the topic of "ultimate concern" best analyzes the moral uncertainty of allegiance to causes.
to Pauline charity. It is a will to reconcile men.79 The genuine loyalty of a man to his chosen cause is an expression of this will. He adopts a decisive attitude that wills the unity of mankind. The question to be answered below is whether this will to interpret is identical with an Absolute Will.

To find an answer to this question, we will consider a further description Royce offers of one man's knowledge of other men. Already dismissed were the possibilities that this knowledge could be an intuition or a single concept or percept. The knowledge must be interpretative and communal. It is something more than a polite inquiry into our neighbor's health. The reconciliation of which Royce speaks can be described as an understanding of what human relations are from the viewpoint of an ideal observer. Loyalty to a common cause implies some hint as to what the ideal goal of that cause will bring. If one could assume the stance of a man who had reached that goal, then he would understand all men in their individuality and their oneness. But such a stance is not reached by any individual, and so speech of it is by way of analogy. Royce affirms a similarity between the ideal goal of the will to interpret and the experience of comparing distinct ideas so that a clear insight into their meaning is attained.80 He does not develop this example unfortunately, but it is enough for our present purpose to note that this use of analogy in respect to a final insight has occurred in the two previous works. The following quotation may describe better the separation between human experience and the ideal goal.

I am ideally aiming at an ideal event,—the spiritual unity of our community. I can define that unity in perfectly empirical terms; because I have compared pairs of ideas which were my own, and have discovered their mediating third idea. But I do not expect to perceive that unity as any occurrence in my own individual life, or as any working of one of my own personal ideas. In brief, I have to define the truth of my interpretation of you in terms of what the ideal observer of all of us would view as the unity which he observed. This truth cannot be defined in merely pragmatic terms.81

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80 Ibid., p. 252.
81 Ibid., pp. 215-16.
Note should be taken that the truth of my interpretation of another person is again said to be known only to an "ideal observer." Such an agreement between idea and object was known only to the Absolute in both previous works. Royce thus seems to retain the premise of subjective idealism even in this last work. Ideas are the sole content of the finite interpreting mind. Reality as known is reserved for an ideal insight into the whole "time-process." And since that synoptic vision does not occur in any one moment of time, finality must be described in terms of the category "as if." This is not to say that the process of comparison comprising interpretative knowledge does not attain absolute truth. But it is interesting that Royce limits this absolute truth to two types: the deductive certainty of pure mathematics and the moral certainty of an interpretation that prompted a good deed. In neither case is it said that the real is known to the finite interpreter. Other references to the truth arrived at by comparison seem to be limited to exact definitions, and by that Royce may mean analytic propositions.

All the questions of knowledge and the teleological function of ideas can be drawn together in analyzing Royce's notion of the Universal Community. This is his final specification of the meaning of "community." He defines it as a "community of interpretation whose life comprises and unifies all the social varieties and all the social communities which, for any reason, we know to be real in the empirical world. . . ." He adds, "the history of the universe, the whole order of time, is the history and the order and the expression of this Universal Community." There is no attempt to justify empirically this final notion of the community. The previous analyses of social meaning were based on such experiences as those of common objects and other minds. But this metaphysical concept is to be compared to an act of faith. This is not so surprising

83 Ibid., pp. 272-73.
84 Ibid., p. 377.
given the earlier definition of any true community. The act of loyalty to a cause, while a frequent enough experience, can hardly be justified if the goal sought is still outstanding. And since the model for this universal community is the Pauline Church, the "groanings and travail" of the world's societies forcefully remind one that the goal is an ideal one.

Again the lesson learned in The World and the Individual returns. The outcome of the mystic's concept of Being required that both finite striving and the final reconciliation be real. For the Pauline Community this means that there is one universal aim but a baffling assortment of interpretations of that aim. In Royce's less theological terminology, there is an endless order of time contrasted with an ideal goal of final meaning for all that occurs in time. "This pursuit of the goal, this bondage of the whole creation to the pursuit of that which it never reaches,--this naturally tragic estrangement of this world from its goal,--this constitutes the problem of the universe." And part of that problem lies in understanding how an endless series of interpretations can be termed the progressive realization of one spiritual meaning. This question was taken up in Royce's famous "Supplementary Essay" in The World and the Individual. It also is the basic problem to be treated by Royce's later concept of the Will to Interpret.

The solution offered in the "Supplementary Essay" is logico-mathematical. Briefly put, the Absolute is described as an infinite system expressing a single purpose. The Absolute is to be regarded as a self and hence is said to be a determinate whole not only of thought but also of will and experience. But if this self is to be a whole, it cannot have a final experience, a last term to its infinite series. Otherwise the finality in question has no need of finite effort. The solution Royce adopts is borrowed from a German mathematician,

Julius Dedekind. His idea of the Kette, or infinite system, asserts that all the members of an infinite series are determined all at once by the definition of that series. In other words, the series as a particular whole and each of its members are determined by the specific order that the series by definition follows.\(^87\) Each part of the series can represent the system as a whole. This summary is perhaps all too vague, but what it indicates is that a part is defined in terms of the whole while yet being representative of the entire series. This is consistent with what has been said of the teleological function of ideas. That is, the internal meaning of an idea is only fulfilled in terms of the Absolute while yet unconsciously intending that whole.

In The Problem of Christianity the process of interpretation is ideally described as an infinite sequence of interpreting acts. The goal of any one of these acts is a complete understanding of the problematic situation being interpreted. A satisfactory solution may be reached in some situations by only a single act of interpretation. But there are some problems that demand a series of interpreting acts. And there are other problems of which a full understanding must remain an ideal limit, i.e. a cooperative venture by many interpreters only approximates this end by endless interpreting acts.\(^88\) The final interpretation, were it reached, would be absolute truth. As noted above Royce apparently restricts such an achievement in the temporal order to pure mathematics, irrevocable moral decisions, and analytic propositions. A final interpretation of the world is thus said to lie beyond human cognition.

Is this to say that the final meaning of the world is not real, that it remains only a goal not yet reached? This question must be viewed from both poles of reality--the finite and the divine. Already asserted was the vagueness of meaning, the short-sighted aim of most ideas. But Royce has consistently

\(^{87}\)Smith, Royce's Social Infinite, pp. 32-33.
\(^{88}\)Puss, The Moral Philosophy, p. 124.
affirmed an unconscious reference by an idea to the whole. The teleology of the whole thus functions through the part. So from a finite perspective the final meaning of the social world can be said to be a goal. Recall Dedekind's concept of the Kette. The process of interpretation is said to be endless (i.e. without a final interpretation), and yet every interpreting act within that endless sequence is the expression of a single purpose, Royce's "Will to Interpret." This will to interpret is the basis of the chain (Kette) or series of interpretations. It can only be fulfilled, completely expressed, through that endless series. So much for the finite perspective. There is also the aspect of totality in Dedekind's theory. All the communal acts of interpretation are said to be the expression of the one will to interpret. The sequence of acts must then be given in its entirety by this one purpose just as a sequence of numbers is given by a formulation that defines an endless equation. Since this will is the expression of the life of the Universal Community (its Geist), all the interpretations of the community are given completely at the instant the community is initiated.89 This is one argument for the reality of the final interpretation. It is based on Royce's adaptation of a mathematical theory in his "Supplementary Essay." What remains to be seen is whether Royce asserts the reality of a final interpretation in The Problem of Christianity.

Already established is the teleological function of the will to interpret expressed through an endless series of interpreting acts. What can be said of this will in its wholeness? Royce describes it as a "spiritual process which, in its wholeness, interprets at once the endless whole of time." 90 He asserts that, since the existence of the real world was earlier shown to depend on interpretation, the world must have an interpreter. Not just countless interpreters comparing, more or less successfully, their ideas, but one interpreter,

89Smith, Royce's Social Infinite, pp. 86-89.
who knows the real, must exist. This interpreter is part of the Universal Community, its spirit.

The World is the Community. The world contains its own interpreter. Its processes are infinite in their temporal varieties. But their interpreter, the spirit of this universal community,--never absorbing varieties or permitting them to blend,--compares and, through a real life, interprets them all.

A final, complete interpretation is thus real from the side of the divine interpreter. Equally real are the interpreting acts which are brought together and compared by this interpreter. The whole of reality is, therefore, a universal community of finite interpreters whose spiritual unity is the life of one interpreter. This whole Royce's explicitly calls the Absolute. However, does this use of the word mean what it meant in his earlier works? Peter Fuss, as was already indicated, thinks not. He argues that the Absolute refers to the generalized concept of the community embracing all the multiple types of social groupings. What follows below argues to the contrary.

Royce does say what Fuss understands to be the meaning of the Absolute. But this is not the whole of what he says. The social world is comprised of multiple interpreting societies which, in an ideal way, share one goal, namely, the spiritual unity of mankind. For Fuss this yet to be reached goal places a moral obligation on each individual. The unity of the world, the universal community, is thus something of a moral postulate. But Royce explicitly asserts that this unity is present to an "experience which itself includes a synoptic survey of the whole of time." The multiplicity and complexity of the entire social world constitutes one "Sign" which is interpreted. So Fuss is correct to the extent that he says the Absolute is the social world, i.e. is a sign to

91Ibid., pp. 269-70.
92Ibid., p. 324.
93Ibid., p. 296.
95Royce, The Problem of Christianity, II, 286.
be interpreted. But he is incorrect in taking this to be an exhaustive
definition of the Absolute. The "divine life" includes both a universal
community and that community's interpreter. From a finite perspective, the
synoptic vision of this interpreter will always remain in the future. It is
the still outstanding reconciliation of the individual with the community
accomplished by the divine interpreter. 96 In the real order of time, this final
unity is experienced as a moral ideal. If this were not the case, the mystic's
concept of the Absolute would be true. Instead, there is a real working out
of the conflicts of our ideas and the problems of human relations. But the
resolution of these conflicts and the solution of these problems is also real.

The world is the process of the spirit. An endless time-sequence
of events is controlled, according to this account, by motives which,
endless in their whole course, interpret the past to the future.
These motives express themselves in an evolution wherein to every
problem corresponds, in the course of the endless ages, its solution,
to every antithesis its resolution, to every estrangement its
reconciliation, to every tragedy the atoning triumph which interprets
its evil. 97

This reconciliation at the end of a long process marks the defeat of all
evil and the banishment of absurdity from the world. There is to be no surd
left uninterpreted, no meaningless act outside the single spiritual meaning of
the world. Serious problems attend this part of Royce's metaphysics, but
our present interest is not to resolve them but to present his conclusions as
he gives them. The question is still whether the Absolute of The Problem of
Christianity is identical to the Absolute of the two previous works. Royce
certainly continues to stress the importance of avoiding the Absolute of a
mystical experience. The tragedies and triumphs of the temporal world must be
real events known to the Absolute. In that case, the divine consciousness is

96 "And, if, in ideal, we aim to conceive the divine nature, how better can
we conceive it than in the form of the Community of Interpretation, and above
all in the form of the Interpreter, who interprets all to all, and each individual
to the world, and the world of spirits to each individual." Ibid., p. 219.
97 Ibid., pp. 373-74.
not timeless, or at least Royce argues that it is not (his critics have not been unanimous on the success of his arguments). But that there is such a divine consciousness, an absolute interpreter for the world, is asserted in *The Problem of Christianity*. Therefore, the Absolute is not to be exclusively identified with the Universal Community. This is where the present thesis most directly contradicts Fuss' interpretation of Royce's metaphysics.

Fuss agrees that the goal of thought in Royce's earlier and later periods is the same, namely, a "conspectus," a higher viewpoint that unites all meaning in one ideal system. He agrees that Royce consistently denied the attainment of this conspectus by any individual at any one moment. Where Royce departs from his earlier works, according to Fuss, is in his substitution of the Community of Interpretation for the earlier Absolute Consciousness. This Community is said to consist solely of the activities and interrelations of finite individuals. The final goal of that Community is, therefore, yet to be won. The response of this thesis has been lengthy and preliminary to the following conclusion.

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98 "We do not declare, in our metaphysical doctrine, that the divine consciousness is timeless. We declare that the whole order of time, the process of the spirit, is interpreted, and so interpreted that, when viewed in the light of its goal, the whole world is reconciled to its own purposes." Ibid., p. 378.

The question, which we are now in a position to answer, is whether there is an Absolute Consciousness radically discontinuous with finite minds. Put another way, we can ask if the reconciliation sought by all interpretation is given only as a moral ideal or is it in fact the fulfilled purpose of an Absolute Will. Hopefully the previous analysis of The Problem of Christianity has shown that the latter question should not be phrased disjunctively. From a finite perspective, the universal community is still hidden and will remain so. Consequently, the moral directive for all loyal men is, "Since you cannot find the universal and beloved community, create it." But in terms of the divine life, all the moral conflicts and antithetical ideas of the social world are said to be compared and resolved. Just as error and truth in the two earlier works were made possible by the judgment, the comparison, of the Absolute Knower, so too the determination of ultimate meaning, i.e. the absence of any absurdity, rests with a divine interpreter.

That such an interpreter is real, for Royce, has been shown above. The synoptic vision of this interpreter is said to span the whole temporal order holding together in one insight all the deeds and purposes of the social world. As present in finite beings, this vision of finality is the Will to Interpret. Its theological function is identical to the true internal meaning of ideas which, in The World and the Individual, was the purposeful striving after a single complete meaning known only to the Absolute. The Will to Interpret is identical with what Royce earlier termed Thought driving finite minds beyond their specific interests and aims to a final meaning for all reality. Since this complete meaning is known to the divine interpreter, and Royce repeatedly insists no finite

100 Royce, The Problem of Christianity, I, 359.
individual can attain it, the Absolute Consciousness must be radically other than
any finite consciousness. This conclusion is consistent with the descriptions
of Absolute Thought or Will in the two earlier works. In all three works,
analogies are used to estimate this Absolute Insight in terms of the human
comparison of ideas.

Finally, if there are to be any reservations about identifying the
Absolute of The Problem of Christianity with the Absolute of Royce's earlier
period, they will consist in pointing out the added complexity of the Absolute
as both Community and as Individual. There is both the Community embracing
all the varieties of temporal societies and the Interpreter of that Community.
In his earlier works, Royce rarely emphasized the social rootedness of knowledge.
But he repeatedly strove to surpass the mystic's concept of Being by emphasizing
the reality of finite effort and desire. Without this finite pole, the divine
life is revealed as nothingness. With the writing of The Problem of Christianity,
this pole is comprised of countless social activities. The opposite pole of the
divine life takes the form of an interpreter who reconciles this multiplicity
to its own oneness. This reconciliation is the Universal Community, yet to
appear but already known in an insight spanning the whole of time. Royce's
metaphysics, therefore, continues to found the final meaning of history, the
ultimate truth of reality, on an Absolute. His concept of a community of
interpretation is a new formulation of the finite world, but in no instance is
this new term exhaustive of the meaning of the Absolute.
Selected bibliography:


The thesis submitted by William Joseph Zanardi has been read and approved by members of the Department of Philosophy.

The final copies have been examined by the director of the thesis and the signature which appears below verifies the fact that any necessary changes have been incorporated and that the thesis is now given final approval with reference to content and form.

The thesis is therefore accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Philosophy.

May 18, 1972  
Date  

Signature of Advisor