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Howison's Pluralistic Idealism: A Fifth Conception of Being?

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The debate between Josiah Royce and George Holmes Howison made it very clear that idealism in America was not as unified a body of philosophic doctrine as its opponents might have wished—divisions and refined differences always make the critic's work harder. A dispute within idealism was developing during this time between monists and pluralists. Similar things were happening in England and Europe. In England in 1893, McTaggart circulated an essay that expressed a pluralistic personal idealism that went against Bradley's monistic idealism. On the continent, neo-Kantianism was contending with Hegelianism. In America, the division became most pronounced during roughly the last two decades of the nineteenth century and reached a high point at the turn of the century in Royce's *The World and the Individual*[1] and Howison's *The Limits of Evolution.*[2] Below, I explore the context and main ideas involved in the dispute between these two idealists. Though I will be concerned mainly with Howison's views, I hope to clarify the issues that distinguish both philosophers.

In *The World and the Individual,* Royce gave an argument for the Absolute that resembles in some ways his earlier arguments presented in *The Religious Aspect of Philosophy*[3] and *The Conception of God.*[4] The argument in his Gifford Lectures differs in being framed in terms that stress the

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1. Royce, *The World and the Individual*, 2 vols. (1899, 1901; New York: Dover, 1959).
2. Howison, *The Limits of Evolution and Other Essays* (New York: Macmillan, 1901) hereafter cited as "LE."
3. Josiah Royce, *The Religious Aspect of Philosophy: A Critique of the Bases of Conduct and of Faith* (1885; New York: Harper and Brothers, 1958).
4. Josiah Royce et al., *The Conception of God: A Philosophical Discussion Concerning the Nature of the Divine Idea as a Demonstrable Reality,* ed. G. H. Howison (New York: Macmillan, 1897; rpt., Scholarly Press, 1976), hereafter cited as "CG."

ontological over the epistemological significance of his analysis. In *The World and the Individual,* Royce moves through analyses of the problems in realism, mysticism, and critical rationalism (Kantianism) to find a solution to the residual problems of these in absolute idealism, the fourth and final Conception of Being. Royce claimed his four historical Conceptions of Being exhausted the possibilities. Howison, in turn, held that he had come upon a new Conception of Being to which Royce had failed to attend.[5] In this sense I refer to Howison's position as a "Fifth Conception of Being."[6]

I. Summary of Howison's Philosophical Outlook

Howison is not widely recalled in contemporary philosophic literature. He is remembered as an inspiring teacher and the founder of the University of California Philosophical Union at Berkeley. Beyond this one might think him unimportant, or at most of only modest influence. But this would be unfair and diminishing. John McDermott described him as a "gifted American philosopher."[7] Royce himself considered Howison important enough to recognize in the product of Howison's "moral sense" a challenge sufficient to shake his confidence in his notion of Absolute Experience.[8] What was this moral sense with which Howison faced the Absolute? In order to understand the thought of both men more completely, it is important that we consider the vision Howison held in light of some of its historical and conceptual aspects.

Howison's philosophical career began as a member of the St. Louis Hegelians, a group from which he derived a lasting, even if eventually negative, debt to Hegelian idealism. When Howison began to distinguish his ideas from the main trends, he set his personal idealism against the prevailing forms of reductionism, specifically the monism of Hegel's absolute

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5. G. H. Howison, "Personal Idealism and Moral Aims," in *George Holmes Howison, Philosopher and Teacher: A Selection from His Writings with a Biographical Sketch,* ed. John W. Buckham and George M. Stratton (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1934), 141; hereafter cited as "P&T."

6. Josiah Royce, letter to Howison, April 8, 1902, in *The Letters of Josiah Royce,* ed. John Clendenning (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970), 433; hereafter cited as "Letters."

7. John J. McDermott, "Josiah Royce's Philosophy of the Community: Danger of the Detached Individual," in *American Philosophy,* ed. Marcus G. Singer (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 168.

8. Robert C. Whittemore, *Makers of the American Mind* (New York: William Morrow, 1966), 388.

idealism and Spencer's evolutionary naturalism, and against Comte's positivism. This is important; it was reductionism, specifically the reductionistic tendency of monistic theories, that most worried Howison. Royce apparently was not the origin of the issues in philosophy that motivated him. As Howison recalled, he did not know of Royce's "substantial membership . . . in the school of Hegel" until the end of 1885.[9] That was nearly a year after Royce published *The Religious Aspect of Philosophy* and six months after Howison delivered his "Modern Science and Pantheism" at the Concord School of Philosophy (P&T, 190n). It seems ironic that Howison considered himself "still a good Hegelian" in 1885;[10] for in that essay, he had already begun laying the grounds for rejecting Hegelian monism, embracing instead the ethical individualism of his vision of personal idealism (P&T, 196–97, 197n). In any case, Royce had not yet figured into his thinking (any mention of Royce in "Modern Science and Pantheism" occurs in footnotes added in a late revision; P&T, 202n and 203n). It is simply a historical fact that Howison's personal idealism did not begin in reaction to Royce. Monism, idealistic and naturalistic, seems to have been the object of Howison's concerns from early in his career, but initially he concentrated particularly on Hegel and Spencer, not on Royce.

Later though, during and after his debate with Royce at Berkeley, published as *The Conception of God,* the need to oppose absolute idealism became more urgent for Howison. By at least 1894, upon the ascendancy of Royce's system, no doubt was left that Royce had become the focus of Howison's opposition to monistic idealism. Seen in this historical setting, Howison's vision should be taken as a proposed alternative to monism in general, idealistic and naturalistic. Howison's personal idealism as a Fifth Conception of Being was intended to transcend both Royce's monism and the naturalism of Darwin and particularly Spencer.[11]

The common thread running through both naturalism and idealism, and to which Howison was responding, is that each in its respective terms seeks to explain all that is in terms of a single all-encompassing principle or being: nature in the case of naturalism, mind or spirit in the case of idealism. In the West since pre-Socratic times, naturalism has proposed theories that try to

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9. G. H. Howison, "Josiah Royce: The Significance of His Work in Philosophy," *Philosophical Review* 25 (May 1916): 235.

10. Ibid.

11. Howison discussed both Darwin and Spencer but, comparatively speaking, has relatively little to say about Darwin. He seems most familiar and concerned with Spencer.

explain nature, minds, and all else in terms of an all-encompassing being called "nature"; that is, to explain nature in terms of itself is to reduce all to nature. Monistic idealism pursues a similar end in terms of Absolute Spirit; that is, it tries to explain mind, nature, and all else in terms essential to mind. Putting both theories this way sets in relief the fact that both approaches apparently threaten to run in circles or at least run into paradoxes of self-reference. The main advantage idealism has over naturalism is that idealism can ultimately appeal to our self-evident awareness of self-consciousness to blunt any sense of self-referential paradox. Yet, according to Howison, both naturalism and absolute idealism fail, although for different reasons. Naturalism fails because it ultimately presupposes mind, which it cannot coherently explain. He holds that a full-scale naturalistic explanation of mind must end in paradox. Either it will end up (1) explaining away what it presupposes, and thereby undermine the possibility of (even a restricted) naturalistic explanation; or, (2) if in order to avoid 1, it holds back from trying to naturalize mind fully, it fails to be a full-scale explanation of everything. Absolute idealism fails since its monistic explanations allegedly explain away the freedom and individuality of persons in an all-encompassing Absolute. To Howison's mind, only a pluralistic idealism can reconcile nature with spirit and preserve individual, free persons.

One of the persistent problems in Howison's presentation of his personal idealism is that in all of his accounts, he was reluctant to come forth with an actual demonstration. This was a common complaint among many of his contemporaries, Royce and McTaggart among them, the latter suggesting that Howison "expounds" but does not demonstrate.[12] Yet, unless I am wildly mistaken, there is a discernible procedure followed among Howison's several presentations of his view that comes close to being an indirect proof.[13] In separate essays, he addresses the different doctrines opposed to his and sets up a series of disjunctive syllogisms with the opposing view as one of the terms and his as the other. Then, by *reductio ad absurdum,* he tries to reduce the opposing view to absurdity, which leaves his view

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12. See J. M. E. McTaggart, "Review of *The Limits of Evolution,*" *Mind* 43 (July 1902): 387–89; H. N. Gardiner, "Review of *The Limits of Evolution,* 2nd ed.," *Journal of Philosophy, Psychology, and Scientific Method* 2, 10 (May 11, 1905); and Josiah Royce, three letters to Howison, December 1, 1895, October 5, 1897, and April 8, 1902, in *Letters,* 338–39, 360–61, and 433.

13. James McLachlan has gone a considerable way towards articulating these as a proof in his essay in this issue of *PF.*

standing as the only alternative.[14] We should be able to see this below in his treatments of evolutionary naturalism and Royce's monism.

II. "Scientific" Metaphysics: Kant's Contribution to the Debate

Let us begin our closer analysis by considering the main lines of Royce's argument in *The Conception of God,* for that is where the differences between Royce and Howison first became most evident. In turn, we will consider Howison's position in *The Conception of God* and *The Limits of Evolution.*

In *The Conception of God,* Royce presents an argument for the existence of the Absolute based on the contingency and inherent incompleteness of human knowledge. I will review only three stages in the argument. When we examine the contents of and beliefs based on sensory experience, Royce holds, we find that they are of passing value. We also find that if we proceed on the basis of a judgment of sensation, it is soon falsified by conflicting with other experiences that the judgment was either incorrectly or prematurely generalized to include. Impressive in its immediacy, sensory experience inclines us to interpret our world in terms only of what is directly available through the senses. We mistake empirically sensed appearances for reality. Initially unaware of how our sensory limitations have restricted and shaped what we assume we know, our experience at this level is fragmentary, incomplete, and endlessly subject to correction (CG, 11–13).

We fare better in two ways if we turn to scientific experience to improve the reliability of our knowledge. The first is that with patient, organized observation, we become aware of order and regularities embedded in experience. But even this more rigorous form of experience has limitations. One of the first lessons of science is how our sensory limitations have in fact shaped and restricted what we assumed we knew. What we mistook for reality is only our "specific and mental way of responding to the stimulations reality gives us . . . [that] *represents,* not the true nature of outer reality, so much as the current states of our own organizations" (CG, 17). At this level of experience, we discover the error of interpreting what we take to be reality in terms of only what is empirically available. Though Royce framed his point in terms of scientific interpretation, no doubt he also had parts of Kant's doctrine in mind at this point in his argument. But he had no intention of staying within the limits of Kant's analysis of experience. For his part,

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14. See also Auxier's elaboration of this point in his essay in this issue of *PF.*

Howison held that Royce failed ever to get beyond Kant (CG, 102f., 120).[15]

Scientific understanding, however, provides a second way around the initial fragmentariness of direct sense experience. Scientific thought seeks to unite the fragmentary experiences and the regularities we sometimes discover through controlled observation by appealing to unobserved theoretical items (matter, atomic structures, forces, and the like). These items are selectively conceived and assumed to have just those properties necessary to explain selected regularities in experience. On this basis, hypotheses are formulated and tested against direct experience to see if we can confirm our ideas. But this process reveals precisely that aspect of experience, unattended to in scientific thought, that misleads us to assume that if a hypothesis is confirmed, something of the outer reality has been grasped and the fragmentariness of the sensory experience has been overcome. If unconfirmed, we have only to seek further in reorganized possible experiences (reformulate our hypothesis) for verification. This, Royce says, is a product of adjusting our immediate experience to an "ideal organized experience" (CG, 29–30). What advocates of the scientific view fail to notice, Royce holds, is that although the method of scientific experience improves on brute experience, it achieves only partial success by being selective, and only holds at bay—without overcoming—the fragmentariness of experience, leaving our account of experience vulnerable to the ever-open possibility of revision (CG, 28). Truth is ever forthcoming, that is, at least a successive approximation to truth. Some may be content to postulate fallibilism as the human condition, while others elevate it to a property of the natural world. But it is at best only an incomplete response to the fragmentary nature of human experience. It leaves reality unknown and presents in its place a selectively conceived, incomplete idealization of how reality might possibly be.

This is the more important (and Kantian) aspect of scientific explanation, Royce thought, for it reveals that the method proceeds only by postulating reality as a realm of possibility, a range of possible experience, shaped by the conditions of experience. Refine it as we might by the selective conditions of scientific thought, the latter remains but a filter, a higher order set of conditions in terms of which we seek to unify our experience. The real apart from this remains an unknown possibility.

Many are content with this analysis of our experience and satisfied that

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15. See also G. H. Howison, "The Real Issue in 'The Conception of God,'" *Philosophical Review* 7, 3 (September 1898): 521.

we cannot get beyond the limitations of human experience. Some schools hold that either we must cautiously stay within the bounds of finite experience nodding in reverent, agnostic silence to the thing-in-itself, or abandon talk of the thing-in-itself and resign ourselves to speaking of the world only as *the world-as-experienced.* Royce himself is in partial agreement with the conclusion that our empirical knowledge is conditioned by the limits of possible experience. What he finds to be of most value here is the notion that the real must be conceived in terms of experience, an insight he will later exploit.

Here, however, Royce finds paradox looming and denies that we cannot transcend these limits. To turn back in silence is to ignore the insight that compels us to transcend the limits to which scientific experience has grown accustomed, and to fail to see the full significance of the experience criterion of reality. On this score, Howison agrees with Royce that our empirical knowledge is conditioned within the bounds described by Kant, Howison being quite emphatic about his commitment to Kant. And he agrees that we face a paradox that can and must be transcended. At this point, though, the two philosophers part company: Royce pursuing in Absolute Experience the way beyond the paradox, Howison seeking it in his vision of the City of God. I summarize these below.

Kant taught that the conditions of experience are the conditions for "objects of possible experience."[16] As applied in scientific thinking, this can be taken in the two ways outlined above; that is, as leading either to agnosticism concerning the real as it is in itself, or to the real-as-experienced. In either case, if we inquire no further, we end up conceiving of reality in terms of possibility—possible experience to be sure, but possibility nonetheless. Royce does not reject the concept of possible experience, but it must be understood and used in a clear and circumspect way; otherwise paradox results. Royce argues that the insight above can be taken in only one way. It cannot be interpreted in terms of the "thing-in-itself," for if we do we consign ourselves to ignorance, to the contradictory view that the "reality" (in terms of which we sought to unify and explain our fragmentary experience) is unknowable and can never be an object of possible experience. To explain possible experience in terms of that which is beyond possible experience violates the requirement with which Kant (and Royce and Howison) began. Thus this way is closed. Yet neither can we be completely

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16. Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason,* trans. Norman Kemp Smith (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1965) B166, cf. B303; hereafter cited as "CPuR."

satisfied with a view that reality, as an "object of possible experience," is that which we do not *yet* know but could know indirectly, if we simply modify the selective conditions by which we seek to indirectly grasp the possible object. This way gives us only a "filtered experience" (not what is presently real, but what that present reality will have been at some future time), leading not finally to the real, but to an endless sequence of other filtered experiences as it were. Distributing this among a community of observers does not ultimately solve the problem of ignorance, for we merely get the same problem repeated by a plurality of observers seeking a consensus, which itself involves a filtered experience of each other. Experience, thus, remains fragmentary and incomplete.

Finally, we can take the insight that the real must be conceived in terms of experience, as Royce thinks we must, as implying the existence of "one self-determined . . . absolute and organized whole" (CG, 41). This must follow, Royce argues, for the following reasons. At each level of tentative unity of our otherwise fragmentary experience, each experience reveals itself to be limited, conditioned, and incomplete. Yet the objects presented at each level are assumed to be real and, therefore, objects of possible experience. But if experience is the criterion of reality, then the totality of realities (be they experiences, or items postulated by science as objects of possible experience, or observers and consensus seekers) constitutes the content of an Absolute Experience. All real objects are at least objects of possible experience. If so, and no objects are possible beyond the totality of objects of possible experience, then an Absolute Experience must exist, for there can be no experience without an experiencer, and hence the content of the totality of possible experience must be the experience of some real being. Thus Royce concludes that an Omniscient Being, God, must exist as that which experiences "the totality of the world of finite experiences" (CG, 41).[17]

III. Howison's Critique

In reply, Howison tries to show the absurd consequences of Royce's monism, and opens with the charge that it "is not idealistic enough" (CG, 89). By

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17. Those familiar with the classical arguments for the existence of God will recognize the parallel between Royce's argument and those in Aristotle, Aquinas, and Leibniz that infer a necessary Being from the contingent existence of finite Beings. The summary in the text is quite brief and omits many of Royce's insights. However, I have examined Royce's argument much more thoroughly in another article in this issue of *PF*, to which I refer the reader.

this, Howison means that whatever Royce has proved, it fails to rise to genuine Absolute Being, much less God in a traditional Christian sense. He condemns Royce's notion of the Absolute on grounds that it does not possess the traditional theistic properties of God, that is, source of grace, benevolence, and fatherhood of Christ (CG, 96, 100). It is as if Howison expected Royce to prove attributes of God that are more a matter of faith rather than philosophic proof. This criticism seems hardly fair as Royce's argument, after all, was not intended to prove all traditional attributes of God. Royce's main intention was to give a direct argument for the existence of a necessary being (not its complete nature), and he sought to do so on the basis of some attribute (omniscience, a unique property traditionally ascribed to deity) that would enable him to do so. Moreover, the properties Howison himself ascribes to God, such as being one person limited by many coeternal persons (CG, 94, 113) yet being the ideal type in the minds of those coeternal persons, hardly seems more traditional.[18] Nevertheless, other criticisms brought by Howison are more to the point. I will focus on the two principle charges that Howison believes land Royce in a dilemma: pantheism and a failure to get beyond Kant.

Howison's charge of pantheism seems to follow from Royce's argument that all finite experiences are the contents of an Absolute Experience, but it plays off of an ambiguity in Royce's argument. Royce argued that Absolute Experience is the necessary condition for the possibility of the totality of finite experiences, transforming an epistemological argument from ignorance into an argument "*a contengentia mundi.*"[19] This appears to imply that, if you and I and all our experiences are the contents of the ultimate experience of an Omniscient Being, then we are merely part of that Being. After all, the argument rests on the experience criterion of reality, which entails that reality can only be the real-as-experienced and therefore subject to conditions of possible existence. If so, Howison's famous retort to Royce would seem to follow: "He is we, and we are He; nay, He is I and I am He" (CG, 99). In less exuberant words, Howison thinks that Royce has *identified* the totality of finite beings with Absolute Being. If so, then Royce is open to the charge of pantheism. If Howison is correct, then our individuality, moral responsibility, and freedom are also lost in Absolute Being, "the sole real agent" (CG, 99).

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18. Cf. Howison's "Personal Idealism," P&T, 129.
19. G. Watts Cunningham, *The Idealistic Argument in Recent British and American Philosophy* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1969), 429ff.

Howison's second charge that Royce failed to get beyond Kant also rests on an alleged identification. Let us accept, Howison argues, the validity of Royce's argument, and agree that each preceding level of fragmentary experience is unified in and thus requires a succeeding higher-order level of experience. Let us accept that sensory experience receives its unity and explanation in scientific experience, and the latter is unified by the conditions of possible experience, and the last by an ultimate, unifying, Absolute Experience. What has Royce achieved? According to Howison, no more than a deduction of the Kantian Synthetic Unity of Apperception. This, Howison holds, is what Royce mistakes for "Absolute Experience" and then labels "God" (CG, 102–103, 108, 111). If he is right, Royce has merely identified the Kantian "I think" with God, itself a fallacy, and failed to transcend legitimately Kant's conditions of experience. Howison further charges Royce with having fallen into solipsism (CG, 105). "Is it not plain," he asks, "that I, who am convincing myself by that syllogism, am the sole authority" for its validity and thereby "implicate myself in actual omniscience"? (CG, 109). Royce, it would seem, has no attractive options open to him.

IV. The Ethical Ground of Howison's Alternative

Having shown to his satisfaction the error in Royce's argument, Howison felt free to put forward his own system, a vision he calls the "City of God" (CG, 93–94, cf. 127). He insists that the only way to avoid the unwelcome conclusions he imputes to Royce is to postulate the "full *otherhood*" of finite beings (CG, 98). This move, he thinks, is necessary to preserve freedom and individuality of persons. This is what it means to be a *person,* to be a self-determining, hence creative being. "Unless creators are created," he says, "nothing is really created" (CG, 97). More fully stated, his vision is one of "[L]ife eternal . . . in that true and only Inclusive Reason, the supreme consciousness of the reality of the City of God [is] the Ideal that seats the central reality of each human being in an *eternal* circle of Persons, and establishes each as a free citizen in the all-founding, all governing Realm of Spirits" (CG, 113). The allusions to stoicism, St. Augustine, Fichte, and Kant are evident.[20] But Howison believes he is "banking off" Kant and transcending a residual contradiction he sees in Kant's critical idealism (CG, 125).

Howison does not claim he has given a proof of his system in *The Conception of God,* nor does he set out to, his purpose being "chiefly critical

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20. G. H. Howison, "Personal Idealism and Its Ethical Bearings," *International Journal of Ethics* 13 (July 1903): 447, 450, 455 (hereafter cited as "PIEB").

and . . . negative" (CG, xxxiii). He only offers "suggestions towards transcending" Kant's restriction of knowledge to objects of sense, and the radical separation of theoretical from practical reason (CG, 123, 125). To do this, he insists, we must accept as "demonstrably true" Kant's thesis of nature as a system of phenomena, a system of objects of possible experience constituted through the a priori forms of space and time, and primarily the category of causality. He then, quite rightly, observes that these are necessary but not sufficient conditions for a science of nature; for the forms of intuition and the categories of understanding establish only the possibility of science, not its actuality. To accomplish the latter, he holds, we must "make non-limited use of the Categories . . . before science is made out" (CG, 126). Such a use, he claims, gives us nothing less than the "elements of moral and religious consciousness" on which science and "Nature itself" is based (CG, 126–27). For a "proof," or what Howison considered a proof, we must turn to his other writings collected in *The Limits of Evolution.*

This work collects many of Howison's previously published essays revised to form a multifronted approach to his system. Each one emphasizes a different aspect of his vision and all end in the City of God, but the title essay best serves our purpose here. In "The Limits of Evolution," Howison begins by stating his fundamental Kantian commitment to the transcendental ideality of space, time, and causality, affirming that they are a priori conditions of experience. He holds that Kant demonstrated this thesis beyond dispute and feels he can hardly improve upon it (LE, 21).[21] Since nature is experienced, it is at least a manifold of objects of possible experience and, as such, conditioned by the a priori forms of intuition and categories of understanding. Since nature is encompassed in space and time and determined throughout by cause/effect relations, and the source of these conditions is the mind, the rational consciousness of the human epistemic agent, nature is determined by the human mind (LE, 35, 40–41). This conclusion is behind Howison's main criticism concerning monism, naturalistic monism in particular.

The theory of evolution was the dominant version of naturalistic monism on which Howison focused his attention. The doctrine of evolution holds that the origin of a species is a process of natural selection by means of the mutation of individual members of a species and extinction of others possessing less successful variations. Howison does not dispute these claims. He accepts them as a naturalistic explanation of the natural traits of organisms as

21. Cf. "Human Immortality: Its Positive Argument," LE, 298.

phenomena in nature (LE, 40). But he observes that since organisms and the processes involved in evolution are themselves products of the causal relations in nature, and nature is determined by a priori conditions imposed by human minds, human minds cannot be a product of evolution. Rather, space, time, causal relations, and anything determined by these (the evolutionary process) are products of the human mind. The human mind, therefore, as the condition for these forms and categories, cannot be conditioned *by* them. Thus he concludes that the mind is neither spatially, temporally, nor causally determined but is an eternal, free, and creative being (LE, 47, 49). Howison considers this argument sufficient to show the inadequacy of the thought of Spencer and Darwin.

In reference to the "method of demonstration" I described above, we can see that Howison has set the stage for presenting his own theory. He has given reasons sufficient to justify, he believes, setting aside both Royce's monistic idealism and the naturalistic monism implicit in evolutionary doctrine. Both forms of monism being negated disjuncts of Howison's disjunctive syllogism leave his pluralistic idealism as the only option left standing. But Howison still needs a positive statement (and defense) of his view.

To that end, Howison appeals to the primacy of practical reason in Kant's moral doctrine, particularly Kant's notion of duty as articulated in terms of the second and third versions of the categorical imperative (CI). It is from the CI that Howison seeks to derive a notion of person. He seems to realize that it is not enough to infer that minds are eternal, free beings in the epistemic manner summarized above; that gives only indeterminacy. Rather, more is needed to specify such a being as a self-determining, creative, individual person. These are the properties of personhood, according to Howison, recognizable only in our fundamentally moral being (LE, 38).

The third formulation of the CI, in particular, requires that all rational beings act so as to preserve themselves as self-legislating members in a kingdom of ends.[22] Howison neither questions nor defends the CI; he simply adopts it as something demonstrated by Kant. This is not an adequate approach in speculative metaphysics. But it is easy to see why he appeals to the CI; it provides him with all the key concepts he needs to make his case for the plurality of persons that constitute his City of God: that is, the concepts of end, community, and self-legislation (self-determination), the

22. Immanuel Kant, *Groundwork of the Metaphysic of Morals,* trans. H. J. Paton (New York: Harper and Row, 1964), 100–102.

latter being causality in "the strictest sense" (LE, 38). Since these properties specify the personhood of beings who condition space, time, and causality, Howison holds that all nature is conditioned (and in a sense "created") by a community of such persons. He even claims that the CI "is in reality the very first principle of knowledge" (PIEB, 455). The way that Howison puts these concepts together may give us some insight into his City of God.

Notice that by relying on the results of Kant's transcendental aesthetic and analytic, Howison himself at first derives no more than Kant's transcendental "I think." By itself, this is only a formal condition. If the "I think" is understood, however, in terms of the conditions of duty, Howison holds, the "I think" is found to be a person. This he thinks has the advantage of avoiding monism from the start. After all, the CI requires a community, a plurality of persons, to be a meaningful law, not simply one person. Is it really possible for a person to fulfill a law that requires one to be an "end in itself" if one is only a singular, absolutely alone individual? Is not the very idea of such an individual fulfilling a law just as meaningless as a private language?

Consider the following: How is it possible to violate the CI? One might try by violating the formulation that forbids treating persons as less than ends in themselves. Suppose Tom is the solitary person in question. To violate the CI, Tom would have to treat himself as less than an end in himself. But just what is it to make an exception of himself if Tom is the only person in existence, or the only person he supposes to exist? It cannot be done. In making himself the exception, Tom also freely legislates the rule and the exception together as a rule. Any effort to contradict the rule is simply a new rule. Thus, it must be that there exists a number of persons in order for the CI even to make sense. In this way Howison hopes to avoid at the start any tendency toward a monistic version of idealism.

Also from the conditions of personhood, Howison uses "end" to introduce the notion of final causality into his system. He does this in order to explain his conception of person and derive his conception of God. He first interprets "end" to mean "the fulfillment of a purpose." This allows Howison to import the notion of final causality into the moral context of persons acting in accordance with the CI and conclude that to be an end in oneself is to act in a self-determining way to fulfill a purpose. Each self-determining act is an achievement of a goal such as the fulfillment of one's rational nature. Since such acts are self-determined, self-caused (in the teleological sense), persons engage in acts of self-creation and thus fulfill themselves as ends in themselves. This, Howison believes, is the true significance of the CI and Kant's idea of "the causality of freedom" (LE, 38–39).

How does God enter into the picture here? God is *posited* as the "Ideal Type" of person who expresses Himself, in each individual mind, as the image of complete self-actualization (LE, 52). Such an Ideal Type, Howison maintains, necessarily exists as a distinct person, supreme because fully self-actualized, who by the final causality of love inspires all finite minds to strive eternally for fulfillment (LE, 54). God is but one person among many in the City of God, supremely fulfilled but still only one among many.

V. Three General Criticisms of Howison

Many interesting points can be raised about this argument, but I will address only three. Howison believed that his doctrine of the City of God succeeded where all other philosophies (idealistic and naturalistic) had fallen short (PIEB, 458). Above we focused mainly on two forms of monism, the errors of which Howison thought he had identified and avoided making in his own philosophy. It is important, however, to recall that he also found fault with Kant's critical idealism for introducing a division between theoretical and practical reason, another view he believes he has transcended (CG, 125–27). So there are three points I would like to make.

We might recall that Howison's broadest charge against Royce is that his idealism "is not idealistic enough" (CG, 89). The basis for this remark is that Howison believed that Royce had remained too attached to Kantian foundations (CG, 120, 123). As a consequence, Howison thought Royce never successfully proved anything more than Kant's synthetic unity of apperception, a mistake that Royce compounded by identifying the "I think" with God (CG, 99, 102). Two observations should be made here, one in behalf of Royce, and one in regard to Howison's disposition toward Kant.

I have replied to Howison's criticisms of Royce extensively in my later paper and so will not repeat my findings in full here. But a review of the gist of it will be useful. Howison claims that Royce *identified* finite beings with Absolute Being. On this assumption, Howison argues that Royce is committed either to pantheism or to solipsism. But did Royce rest his case on an identity relation? The very occasion of this question reveals an ambiguity in the idea of "unity" that Howison plays upon, namely, confusing a dependency relation for an identity relation. To seek a more complete and unified understanding of fragmentary experiences by subsuming them under the more organized and comprehensive experience of science is no more an identification of the two than is the claim that red is a color is an identification of red and color. Do we lose the distinctness of red simply by recognizing that it is a color? Clearly, Royce no more *identified* the contents of the totality of experience with the Absolute than did Kant identify the empirical

contents of experience with the a priori conditions of experience. To recognize that *x* is conditioned by *y* is not to identify *x* with *y*. For this reason, Howison's famous "I am He" argument seems rather disingenuous.

Concerning Kant, is it not curious that Howison attacks Royce on the grounds of being too Kantian when Howison himself draws so liberally from both the theoretical and practical divisions of Kant's philosophy? Howison believed that Royce remained constrained within the limitations of Kant's conditions of experience and then mistook the "Transcendental Synthetic Unity" for Absolute Experience. If Howison is right, then Royce did not transcend Kant's conditions, he only violated them. This criticism will not hold against Royce. But it does seem to hold against Howison. Is Howison's thesis not open to the charge he brought against Royce? Is it not Howison's view that violates rather than transcends Kant's conditions? He accepts Kant's analysis of space and time; much of his argument against naturalism depends on the thesis of the ideality of space and time. Howison also accepts the conceptual conditions of empirical experience, particularly causality as a category of the understanding. He unreservedly embraces both Kant's "I think" and the notion of noumena. He thus lays claim to a Kantian basis for his thesis. However, by suggesting the unrestricted use of the categories in his plan to apply them to moral consciousness (CG, 126), is he not moving unabashedly to violate Kant's conditions rather than transcend them? I think we have seen that he intended to and did so.

In order consistently to follow through on his plan, Howison would have had to deny the distinction between phenomena and noumena. This, however, would have made it impossible for Howison to appeal to Kant's specific arguments for the ideality of space, time, and causality, which, in turn, would have undermined his position on naturalism. Denying the distinction between phenomena and noumena also would have undermined Howison's grounds for affirming the existence of noumena, which he needed for his concept of a person.

This is not to say that Howison's vision is without merit. It is only to say that, if it is to be defended, it must be reconceived on different grounds. One might still argue for the ideality of space, time, and causality and also for the reality of God, personhood, and freedom. But one cannot claim to be arguing on the basis of Kant's particular transcendental arguments (given their built-in assumptions and restrictions), for a priori knowledge of the latter three concepts, without falling prey to the "transcendental illusion" Kant warned

against.[23] One might transcend, modify, or even reject Kant. But one cannot do so by accepting Kant's precise arguments and then ignoring their specified limits and consequences. One will have to find a different basis and rely on different arguments.

This perhaps explains why many of Howison's contemporaries thought he had not yet produced a proof for his thesis. Except for the method I attributed to him above, search as one might, one does not find any evidence in Howison's writings with which to refute his critics. In a reply to McTaggart, Howison essentially conceded the point when he said, "McTaggart is quite right in pointing out that all of this needs to be done in full detail before one can claim to have made a proof of Personal Idealism clear of *all* queries. And this I hope some day yet to accomplish."[24] Again, this is not to deny the value of the truths and insights described in Howison's writings; one can speak the truth without being able fully to prove it—and I think there are many truths here to be found.

Finally, it is important to note that Howison believed he had reconciled spirit and nature.[25] He insisted that he had succeeded where naturalism had failed. As I put it earlier in this essay, he saw what was needed to finish the quest begun by the pre-Socratics to explain being in terms of itself. It cannot be done in terms of nature; insofar as nature is conditioned by space, time, and causality—each of which is conditioned by the existence of minds—nature is explainable not in terms of itself but in terms of spirit. Furthermore, since spirit is the source of the conditions that determine nature, finite minds are not reducible to natural phenomenal beings. Rather, they stand free of the conditions of nature. And since they are self-conscious, self-determining, creative beings, they are the only beings that fulfill the age-old quest. For Howison, self-conscious spirit is the only being explainable in terms of itself.

If one looks at this insight in light of recent attempts to reduce mind to brain, as the eliminative materialists would have us do, or to naturalize epistemology, or any other reductionistic aim, its value becomes clearer. It

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23. Immanuel Kant, *Prolegomena to Any Future Metaphysics,* ed. and trans. Lewis White Beck (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1950), ss. 13, Remark III, 32, and p. 117; CPuR, B88, B399–B402, B427, to mention only a few.

24. G. H. Howison, "In the Matter of Personal Idealism," *Mind* 12 (April 1903): 228 (emphasis in original).

25. The theme of the conference at which this paper was read was "Naturalism and Spirituality in American Philosophy," *Society for the Advancement of American Philosophy Newsletter* 82 (January 1999): 1, 4.

expresses the recognition that there are limits to reductionism. Howison's arguments may not stand, but that does not diminish the value of his insight. As I have said, too often it struck me that a proof of the system was always forthcoming, but never quite arriving. Be that as it may, Howison's essays remain an inspiring vision of one who philosophized in earnest.