Special Issue: The "Conception of God" Debate and the Relevance of Royce

George Holmes Howison's "The City of God and the True God as Its Head": The Royce-Howison Debate over the Idealist Conception of God

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

Royce and the Destiny of Idealism

Mysticism and the Immediacy of God: Howison's and Hocking's Critique of Royce

A World of Difference: The Royce-Howison Debate on the Conception of God

The Middle Royce's Naturalistic Spirituality

The Power to Will: Refiguring Selfhood in Royce's Philosophy

The Appreciation of Natural Beings and the Finitude of Consciousness

The World and Its Selves: Royce and the Philosophy of Nature

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Editor's Introduction

Randall E. Auxier

The years between 1995 and 2001 mark the centennial of an important development in the history of philosophy and of American philosophy especially. In many ways, the decade from 1895 to 1905, culminating in Einstein's publication of the special theory of relativity, can be seen as the turning point between the philosophical idealism that dominated the nineteenth century and the clear emergence of the schools of thought that would dominate the twentieth century. Philosophy was changing in many ways all over the Western world. Notably, Bertrand Russell was abandoning his idealistic beginnings and contributing to the birth of the analytic tradition in philosophy. Edmund Husserl was publishing his *Logical Investigations* and contributing to the rise of phenomenology. Henri Bergson published an essay on the given data of consciousness (translated in English as *Time and Free Will*), his book *Matter and Memory*, and an *Introduction to Metaphysics*, thus initiating the approach that came to be known as process philosophy. In the United States, C. S. Peirce had published a series of articles that inaugurated the new school of pragmatism, quickly winning the support of William James and John Dewey. James, who in many circles had precipitated these changes in Europe and America with *Principles of Psychology*, also published the landmark *Varieties of Religious Experience*. But this amazing shift in philosophy, although it commanded much attention, did not by any means characterize what was happening in the most established circles of philosophy at that time. In spite of the tendency of historians to hold these developments under the spotlight, the mundane truth of the time is that philosophers generally were consumed with a debate between, on one side, versions of materialism, championed by various strains of philosophical Darwinians and Marxists, accompanied also by the school of Herbert Spencer; and, on the other side, various proponents of dialectical or critical idealism, including Lotze's school, numerous neo-Kantians, and various versions of Hegelianism (the latter being especially powerful in Great Britain).
Understanding Josiah Royce's thought generally, and particularly how it changed between 1895 and 1905, requires that we keep before our eyes not only the shifts towards pragmatism, process thought, and phenomenology that were occurring, but also the problems that were occupying the more ordinary philosophers of the time. Royce took for granted the validity of this latter set of concerns even as he wrestled mightily with James and Peirce about the meaning and nature of truth and the existence of the Absolute. Royce's relation to pragmatism has been much written about and well documented, as has his importance for existentialism and phenomenology (particularly through his influence on Gabriel Marcel). Indeed, Royce's influence in these quarters has served to keep his thought alive and current with many present-day philosophers. Many contemporary pragmatists believe Royce's thought can still contribute to the solution of today's difficult problems; in this light Jacquelyn A. K. Kegley's recent work springs to mind (Genuine Individuals and Genuine Communities: A Roycean Public Philosophy). What has not been adequately explored is Royce as an idealist among idealists, Royce's personalism, Royce's logic, and Royce's importance for process philosophy. This issue of PF goes a long way toward filling that gap in our understanding of Royce's thought, and explores the possible avenues for making these aspects of his work relevant in the present.

There is no doubt that American philosophy, at least, would not be what it is today without Royce. But what can Royce do for contemporary philosophy? If the arguments in this special issue of the younger scholars, Jason Bell and Thomas Price, are correct, there is much that Royce can contribute to the philosophical problems that worry us most today. But before we can adequately describe and appreciate their suggestions, it will be useful to recover the portion of Royce's development between 1895 and 1905 that has been neglected until now.

The papers by Gary Cesarz, Joseph McGinn, James McLachlan, Frank Oppenheim, and Stephen Tyman were presented in two successive years at the Society for the Advancement of American Philosophy, first at Marquette University in Milwaukee (1998), and then at the University of Oregon in Eugene (1999). These special sessions were suggested by Thomas Alexander of Southern Illinois University in Carbondale and organized by both of us. I also would call the reader's attention to the paper entitled "The Problem of Evil in the Royce-Howison Debate" by Stephen Tyman, in the Personalist Forum 13, 2 (fall 1997): 107–21. This was Tyman's paper from the first Royce panel in Milwaukee and was published before the idea for a special issue on Royce had come up. Tyman's paper should be read in conjunction
with the other papers in the present issue. Richard Beauchamp’s paper from the same fall 1997 issue, “Towards a Personalist Posture” (252–76), may be profitably read in conjunction with these papers.


In organizing the sessions at SAAP, I believed it would be fruitful to take as a point of departure the famous “Conception of God” debate, in which Royce, traveling back to his Berkeley alma mater, was confronted by one of the founders of personal idealism, George Holmes Howison. Like William James and others, Howison challenged Royce’s absolutism, but not on the grounds that it was a vicious abstraction. Howison contended that Royce’s Absolute, if it existed, would destroy individuality and personhood in both God and all individuals. Howison was a pluralist like James, but an idealist rather than a realist. Thus Howison’s attack was part of what McLachlan has aptly called “the idealist critique of idealism,” and indeed it is very different from the pragmatic critique of idealism. Thus we learn that it was not simply James’ challenge of Royce that contributed to the defense of individuality in Royce’s Gifford Lectures, but that these lectures attempted to answer Howison’s criticisms as well. The various authors in the present issue will take up aspects of this challenge in detail, as well as addressing the history of the “Conception of God” debate. The papers by McLachlan and the first by Cesarz are concerned more with assessing Howison’s criticism and his positive alternative. This is a valuable contribution to the scholarship, since little has been done in this area for over fifty years. The effects of the debate upon Royce’s thought and development are addressed in the papers by Tyman, McGinn, and the second of Cesarz’s papers—and also in my own paper. Oppenheim broadens our understanding of what happened in Royce’s thinking in the time period between the debate and Royce’s Gifford Lectures. Finally Price examines how Royce’s version of process philosophy provides insights for current environmental philosophy, and Bell applies Price’s analysis to questions of community in light of Royce’s personalism and philosophy of loyalty.
This issue of *PF* is the most substantial examination of George Holmes Howison's thought and influence to appear in many decades. Its release also coincides with the reprinting of *The Conception of God*, by Thoemmes Press, Bristol, U.K., which has been for years one of the most difficult-to-obtain books in philosophy in the English language. The 1897 edition of this book, as originally edited by Howison, is the first volume of a three-volume set, *Responses to Royce*, that make available the most important writings on Royce by his contemporaries. It is anticipated that other writings of Howison (apart from those on Royce) will be reissued in later sets also to be published by Thoemmes. It is hoped that the new accessibility of these works may lead to a broader assessment of Royce and a new appreciation for the importance of Howison in the history of American philosophy.