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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 *McLachlan*
- Howison's Pluralistic Idealism: A Fifth Conception
of Being? *Cesarz*
- Royce and the Destiny of Idealism *Tyman*
- Mysticism and the Immediacy of God: Howison's
and Hocking's Critique of Royce *Auxier*
- A World of Difference: The Royce-Howison
Debate on the Conception of God *Cesarz*
- The Middle Royce's Naturalistic Spirituality *Oppenheim*
- The Power to Will: Refiguring Selfhood in
Royce's Philosophy *McGinn*
- The Appreciation of Natural Beings and the
Finitude of Consciousness *Price*
- The World and Its Selves: Royce and the
Philosophy of Nature *Bell*
- Reviews

About the Contributors

Randall E. Auxier is associate professor of philosophy at Southern Illinois University, Carbondale, editor of the *Personalist Forum*, and editor of the Library of Living Philosophers.

Jason M. Bell is a graduate student in philosophy at Vanderbilt University.

Gary L. Cesarz teaches philosophy at Auburn University, Auburn, Alabama. He previously taught at the University of New Mexico, College of Santa Fe, and Chapman University. Besides his work in Royce, his research is in metaphysics, idealism, Aristotle, Kant, early modern and nineteenth-century philosophy, and topics in phenomenology. His publications have appeared in *Husserl Studies*, *Ancient Philosophy*, *Southwest Philosophical Studies*, and *Journal of the History of Philosophy*.

Joseph P. McGinn is associate professor of philosophy at Lock Haven University of Pennsylvania.

James M. McLachlan is associate professor of philosophy and religion at Western Carolina University. He is currently a visiting scholar at the Claremont School of Theology. He is the author of *The Desire to be God: Freedom and the Other in Sartre and Berdyaev* (1992) and several articles on personalism.

Frank M. Oppenheim is professor of philosophy at Xavier University in Cincinnati and is author of many books and articles, including *Royce's Mature Ethics* (1993) and *Royce's Voyage Down Under* (1980). In 1999 he received the Herbert W. Schneider Lifetime Achievement Award from the Society for the Advancement of American Philosophy.

Thomas W. Price is a doctoral candidate in philosophy at Southern Illinois University, Carbondale.

Stephen Tyman is professor of philosophy at Southern Illinois University, Carbondale, and is author of numerous articles and *Descrying the Ideal: The Philosophy of John William Miller* (1993).

Contents

About the Contributors	iii
Editor's Introduction	1
<i>Randall E. Auxier, Southern Illinois University, Carbondale</i>	
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	5
<i>James McLachlan, Western Carolina University</i>	
Howison's Pluralistic Idealism: A Fifth Conception of Being?	28
<i>Gary L. Cezarz, Auburn University</i>	
Royce and the Destiny of Idealism	45
<i>Stephen Tyman, Southern Illinois University, Carbondale</i>	
Mysticism and the Immediacy of God: Howison's and Hocking's Critique of Royce	59
<i>Randall E. Auxier, Southern Illinois University, Carbondale</i>	
A World of Difference: The Royce-Howison Debate on the Conception of God	84
<i>Gary L. Cezarz, Auburn University</i>	
The Middle Royce's Naturalistic Spirituality	129
<i>Frank M. Oppenheim, S.J., Xavier University, Cincinnati</i>	
The Power to Will: Refiguring Selfhood in Royce's Philosophy	143
<i>Joseph P. McGinn, Lock Haven University, Pennsylvania</i>	
The Appreciation of Natural Beings and the Finitude of Consciousness	153
<i>Thomas W. Price, Southern Illinois University, Carbondale</i>	
The World and Its Selves: Royce and the Philosophy of Nature	167
<i>Jason M. Bell, Vanderbilt University</i>	
Reviews	185
<i>Campbell's Interpreting the Personal: Expression and the Formation of Feelings</i> , reviewed by Richard A. Beauchamp <i>Magee's Confessions of a Philosopher: A Journey Through Western Philosophy</i> , reviewed by Joseph H. Wellbank <i>Kaufman's Welfare in the Kantian State</i> , reviewed by Joseph Harvey Council <i>Howie's The Bluffton Charge: One Preacher's Struggle for Civil Rights</i> , reviewed by Randall E. Auxier <i>Ellis's Just Results: Ethical Foundations for Policy Analysis</i> , reviewed by James B. Sauer <i>Sartwell's Act Like You Know: African-American Autobiography and White Identity</i> , reviewed by Janet Elizabeth Handy	

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.

Regarding George Holmes Howison's personal idealism, which plays a major role in the discussions in this issue, readers should be aware of two additional papers by James McLachlan: "George Holmes Howison: The Conception of God Debate and the Beginnings of Personal Idealism" in *PF* 11, 1 (spring 1995): 1-16, and "The Idealist Critique of Idealism: Bowne's Theistic Personalism and Howison's City of God" in *PF* 13, 1 (spring 1997): 89-106. A further important contribution to understanding Howison was made also by Rufus Burrow Jr. in "Authorship: The Personalism of George Holmes Howison and Borden Parker Bowne," *PF* 13, 2 (fall 1997): 287-303.

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. □