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

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Early in the twentieth century, American philosophers were rarely credited for inspiring new directions in thought that reached beyond the borders of the United States. Of course, Charles Sanders Peirce is a well-known exception. It is perhaps less well-known that Josiah Royce received similar credit. Among continental thinkers, Gabriel Marcel acknowledged his debt to Royce, whose work he considered a "landmark in the development of contemporary thought" for its recognition of the value of the individual and other themes characteristic of existentialist thought.[1]

Such praise for one too often described as an "American Hegelian" or "Absolute Idealist" might seem excessive were it not the case that Marcel is right. Royce was an absolute idealist, but it is misleading to reduce him to a Hegelian and be done with it. Marcel recognized Royce's struggle for "fidelity" (Marcel's technical term that bears close resemblance to Royce's notion of loyalty) to individual experience and suffering, the inescapable context wherein the individual must reckon with truth and error, hope and despair. Royce was too deeply acquainted with the individual's struggle for recognition and value to lose the finite self in a moment of Hegel's Absolute notion as the concrete universal. Royce never hid his debts to German thought, especially to Hegel and Kant. But he was no dogmatic Hegelian, and even less a dogmatic Kantian. In a phrase, if Hegel spoke of the individual as a moment in service of the Absolute, Royce defended the Absolute in service of the individual. This is the distinctive feature of Royce's thought to which Marcel alludes, a feature Royce gradually realized in moving beyond the early enthusiasm of *The Religious Aspect of Philosophy* to a more mature and sober idealism in later works.

It could be argued that The *World and the Individual* and *The Problem*

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1. Gabriel Marcel, *Royce's Metaphysics,* trans. Virginia and Gordon Ringer (Chicago: Henry Regnery, 1956), xvii; cf. xii.

of Christianity aver ontologies of the individual in which absolute reality, the completely fulfilled experience of an Absolute knower, "God," is a necessary condition for preserving the moral significance and epistemic station of the finite individual. Some carry Royce's later emphasis on the individual so far as to say that Royce eventually abandoned the Absolute in his final writings.[2] This, I think, goes too far, but it shows that in the progression of Royce's thought, the individual self and the conditions of its possibility were never far from center stage. Even in his earliest works that most explicitly favor monism, one sees evidence of what was to come in Royce's appreciation of the problems of the individual, a detailed familiarity with the human situation that later moved him to what might be his closest semblance to Hegel. Though not most conspicuous in his early works, Royce aimed to describe the balance between the individual and its context. Thus in "The Possibility of Error," where we find Royce arguing that "the conditions that determine the logical possibility of error must themselves be absolute truth," he begins with the fragmentary experience of the individual, leading to skepticism and relativism, to make his case.[3] In *The Spirit of Modern Philosophy,* we find him arguing from the discrete nature of empirical experience, moral struggle, and human longing to confront "the deepest tragedy of our finitude" with an absolute Self.[4] This is not the talk of one who has lost sight of the individual.

However, in these early works, Royce's arguments conclude in such a way that it is easy to see why some critics, G. H. Howison in particular, thought Royce had lost the finite self in the Absolute. When Royce says that all "thoughts are . . . actually true or false only for the all-including Thought, the Infinite" (RAP, 432), are we not left wondering how this is supposed to enable the finite self to discern error? When Royce states that the "whole world of ideas is essentially *one* world, and so it is essentially the world of one self and *That art Thou,*" it would be reasonable to worry that he lost the individual in the Absolute (SMP, 368).

These statements were precisely what worried Howison in his reply to Royce's 1895 lecture before the University of California Philosophical Union. In fact, some believe that Howison's personalism forced the issue

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2. See Peter Fuss, *The Moral Philosophy of Josiah Royce* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1965), 259–60.

3. Josiah Royce, *The Religious Aspect of Philosophy* (1885; New York: Harper and Brothers, 1958), 385; cf. 389, 393, 395; hereafter cited as "RAP."

4. Josiah Royce, *The Spirit of Modern Philosophy* (1892; New York: W. W. Norton, 1967), 350; cf. 349, 351; hereafter cited as "SMP."

and caused Royce to shift emphasis to the individual.[5] No doubt there is some reason for this view. It was Howison, after all, who invited Royce to Berkeley as the keynote speaker in a debate with Sidney Mezes, Joseph LeConte, and himself.[6] It remains a question, though, whether Howison's worries were as pertinent in 1895 as they certainly would have been had Royce been arguing the same line he took in his earlier works. In fact, Royce saw himself as taking a new approach in his Berkeley lecture and reply to criticisms. He indicated in his letter accepting Howison's invitation an awareness of the flaws in his earlier works and welcomed the opportunity to state his views anew. Moreover, Royce's lecture and reply, the text of which became the bulk of *The Conception of God,* contains the clearest expression of Royce's recognition of the importance of the individual prior to his Gifford Lectures, and it marks a departure from his earlier works. Thus I think it possible to overstress the influence of Howison's view at the expense of what was only submerged in Royce's idealistic thesis.[7] I see the matter of Royce's philosophic growth this way: Royce took Howison's criticism seriously. But Howison succeeded less, I think, in proving there was a fatal error in Royce's thought than in coaxing Royce to explicate how the individual is preserved as distinct even if inseparable from the Absolute.

To see this, let us examine critical portions of the debate against the background of Royce's earlier work. The course I follow below begins with a review of the argument in *The Religious Aspect of Philosophy,* which inspired the 1895 debate. I then turn to the arguments in *The Conception of God* to evaluate the opposing theses of Royce and Howison. There, as I see it, it is less a question of who "won the debate" than of which thesis held more promise. By adopting this view, I hope to exhibit the subtle richness of Royce's thought and to illuminate aspects of a mind that inspired and

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5. For example, see John J. McDermott, "Josiah Royce's Philosophy of the Community: Danger of the Detached Individual," in *American Philosophy,* ed. Marcus Singer (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 168, 169; W. H. Werkmesiter, *A History of Philosophical Ideas in America* (New York: Ronald Press, 1949), 134; Herbert W. Schneider, *A History of American Philosophy* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1947), 465, 481, 488. See also the essays by James McLachlan and Randall Auxier in this issue of *PF.*

6. John Clendenning, ed., *The Letters of Josiah Royce* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970), 324–26; hereafter cited as "*Letters.*"

7. This view about the importance of the individual in Royce's thinking prior to his debate with Howison seems to agree with the analysis of Frank Oppenheim's essay in this issue of *PF.*

anticipated many new paths in philosophy that only came into their own in the twentieth century.

I. The Background of the Debate

The Conception of God was edited and introduced by Howison who, in this sense, had the last word in the debate. In both the introduction and his essay, Howison seems to be responding more to Royce's earlier works than he is to the thesis in "The Conception of God." If so, the debate has its origin in *The Religious Aspect of Philosophy.*

In that book, Royce took on skepticism and pessimism as his starting point and ever-present foiling partners. His aim was to examine the claims and methods of skepticism, push them to extremes in a way reminiscent of Descartes, and show that "we find ourselves . . . in the midst of philosophic truth" (RAP, 10). The term "relativism" might have been a better choice of terms here, for "total relativism" is his main target in the famous chapter "The Possibility of Error" (RAP, 394, cf. 375). However, there are two points worth noting about what otherwise might seem a mere dispute over terminology. In the first place, Royce held that total relativism is the logical outcome of skepticism and pessimism when pushed to extremes. Second and more importantly, Royce realized that relativism is not the first lesson of human experience. To a thoughtful mind analyzing its individual experience, doubt as to what is true and cautious suspicion of what it may hope to see fulfilled precede relativism. These, mixed with a little reflection, get generalized to the point that they become either self-refuting or arbitrarily restricted: self-refuting when shown to be mistaken for fundamental truths, arbitrary when drawn back from the logic of their claims in the face of paradoxes of self-reference. In any case, total relativism is an inference of an insufficiently reflective mind that, while drawing on experience, has somehow missed the correct lesson. And in all cases, the lessons start with recognizing the discreteness and inherent incompleteness of individual experience. This insight led Royce to argue that such a mind, upon becoming sufficiently reflective, must find the completion of its experience in an Absolute Experience.

Furthermore, it led him to infer that if he is right to insist upon the existence of the Absolute, there is an undeniable relation between the finite self and the Absolute such that to lose the former in the latter, in the end, would compromise any reason for inferring the latter. But let us see how Royce actually put his case the first time around.

In the early sections of "The Possibility of Error," Royce approached his problem from the Kantian standpoint, even framing the problem in typical

transcendental form: Given that "we have not the shadow of doubt . . . about the possibility of error . . . How is the error possible?" (RAP, 390). Again, "Since error is plainly possible in some way . . . *What are the logical conditions* that make it possible?" (RAP, 392). But Royce was not satisfied with Kantian answers to his own transcendental questions. In fact, Royce argued that to answer the question of the possibility of knowledge on the basis of postulates and the union of thought and sensation may postpone, but still ends in skepticism. He did so in two ways that I designate the "internal" and "external" problems.

In the first case, the internal problem, Royce argued that even if we allow that our judgments rest on certain a priori postulates for their unity, necessity, and meaning, they would be true only "for the moment in which [they] are made, but not necessarily true for other moments" (RAP, 388). This seems to imply dissatisfaction with Kant's doctrines of the categories, schematism, and transcendental synthetic unity of apperception. For Royce supplemented the observation above as follows:

> In fact future nature is not given to us, just as the past is not. . . . Sense-data and thought unite at every instant afresh to form a new judgment and a new postulate. Only in the present has any judgment evident validity. . . . Such postulates avoid being absurd efforts to regulate independent facts of sense, because . . . we have in experience no complete series of facts of sense at all, only from moment to moment single facts, about which we make single judgments. All the rest we *must* postulate. . . . (RAP, 389)

Now, I have neither the intention nor the space here to challenge Royce's interpretation of Kant's theories. But his criticism is clear enough. To resort to positing a synthetic unity of apperception, after having temporally schematized the categories, is hardly a guarantee that judgments that purport to refer to past or future objects succeed in their reference. Hence we are left in doubt about anything beyond the present.

The situation is not helped by appealing to the certainty of the immediate moment. Let that moment pass, and it too becomes doubtful. As Royce asked, "If everything beyond the present is doubtful, then how can even that doubt be possible?" (RAP, 389). Having arrived at the doubtfulness of doubt, that one may be in error about doubt, the transcendental question of how error is possible arises.

Should we attempt to settle the question in one fell swoop, evade it by resorting to the doctrine of total relativism of truth and error, we necessarily

must fail.[8] As Royce observed, even if we must admit that some judgments are relative to time, specific context, or location of utterance, this doctrine cannot be universalized without falling into the paradox of self-reference, for example, the Cretan paradox (RAP, 394, 406). When applied to the problem at hand in an attempt to "put even scepticism to rest," it attempts to do so by "declaring the opinion *that there is error,* to be itself an error" (RAP, 394). Perhaps a more direct way to put it is that there is no escaping the law of excluded middle and with it all the laws of logic; that is precisely what universal relativism tries to do, only to find that its attempt forces it to affirm what it tries to deny.

The second issue Royce raised with the Kantian solution to skepticism, the external problem, was the problem of representationalism. Whether one appeals to an empiricist, scientific, or Kantian version of that doctrine, we ultimately end in skepticism. The failure of this attempted solution comes about in a number of different ways, as Royce shows. We will consider only two.

Representationalism claims that an epistemic agent is immediately aware of only appearances. We might unite the appearances with forms of intuition and categories of understanding, as did Kant, in order to provide for what Royce called "the appearance of necessity for our judgment" (RAP, 387). To draw on recent variations of this doctrine, we might hold, as do some models in cognitive psychology, that sensations correlated with select neural patterns produce an object of awareness. But the results are the same.

If we adopt a representational model, we are faced with a twofold problem: either we avoid skepticism at the cost of restricting ourselves to the transient sense certainty of merely reporting how things appear at that moment, or we are faced with the absurdity of positing an unknowable *"ding an sich"* that the structured appearance allegedly represents. Royce argues against both options.

In the first case, one may temporarily find contentment in the restricted certainty of reporting how things appear, but it is short-lived. If one is reporting merely on matters of taste or preference, perhaps there is no pressing reason to object. If a judgment is allegedly of a selected fact or a specific truth about reality, serious objections can be raised, and Royce did so. Granting the momentary certainty of a judgment that reports an appearance, one might hold, as C. I. Lewis later did, that the judgment cannot be in

8. RAP, 393–94. Royce considered total relativism the most "formidable opponent."

error.[9] But in what way, Royce asked, can a judgment that reports an arbitrarily given fragment of a larger and more complex reality be true? If truth consists in the agreement between a judgment and its intended object, and error in the disagreement of the two, then the judgment and its object at least must be distinct. But in the present case, this distinctness is elusive.

In a manner that calls to mind Frege's analysis, Royce distinguished the meaning and reference of a judgment.[10] The reference of a judgment is to an intended object; it involves selecting an intended object to which one successfully or unsuccessfully refers. Judgment is selective and intentional. But, if a specific momentary judgment is restricted to any isolated representation that happens to appear, how is the judgment as such preserved? How can such an anemic "judgment" refer, much less be truth-valuable (be either true or false)? Momentary judgments hardly preserve the selectivity and intentionality necessary for judgments to refer, if indeed anything counts as the reference of such a judgment. The possibility of error aside, what has happened to the possibility of truth? As Royce illustrated, "If I aim at a mark with my gun, I can fail [or succeed] to hit it, because choosing and hitting a mark are totally distinct acts" (RAP, 399, my addition). The option above fails to preserve this distinction, and any claim to freedom from error is in doubt. If I am restricted to my representations, then any mark I happen to hit counts as success; intention or "aim" fall by the way. In the end, it returns us face to face with the possibility of error without revealing how error is possible and thereby fails to solve the transcendental question.

In the second case, the external problem turns on the unknowability of a "thing in itself" created by assuming that an epistemic agent is acquainted only with his own representations. To make the point, Royce presented a version of the other minds problem (RAP, 408ff.). Imagine two persons, John and Thomas, who believe they are acquainted with each other, a common enough everyday belief. According to representationalism, though, neither is directly acquainted with the other. Rather, each is acquainted with only his own private representation of the other. John may suppose he knows Thomas. But if all John is acquainted with are his own thoughts, which he assumes to be about Thomas, problems arise.

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9. Lewis used "expressive use of language," not "judgment" to report the "given" in *Analysis of Knowledge and Valuation* (La Salle, Ill.: Open Court, 1946), 179, 182. Still, the functions are close if not equivalent.

10. See RAP, 396–99, 400. Cf., Gottlob Frege, "On Sense and Reference," in *Philosophical Writings*, trans. and ed. Peter Geach and Max Black (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1966), 56–78. I will follow up on this in a later article.

We might presume that Royce appealed to the standard problem of representationalism; that is, if all I ever know are my own representations, how can I ever determine whether they accurately represent the object I assume they are about? Of course, Royce did bank on this aspect of the problem, but with an important original variation he believed would lead to a solution to the question of the possibility of error.

Royce acknowledged that it is in part a problem of finding a way beyond one's representation so as to be able to establish whether it *corresponds* to some object. Indeed, if John's judgments are confined to his private domain of representations, he can never err in reference to Thomas, for Thomas, the thing in itself, can never be an object for John. And for the same reason, neither can John judge truthfully about Thomas. But for Royce the problem involves more. It is not one of evidence or of whether something is given. Rather, it is one of the nature of judgment and how it can successfully refer to an object, that is, choose its intended object. The truth or falsehood of a judgment presupposes, in the first place, that the judgment refers to an object. Only then can we be concerned whether it is true or false; for "judgments are false only in case they disagree with their intended objects" (RAP, 411). If the required relation (reference) cannot be established, then the truth or falsity of the judgment cannot be evaluated. So far, then, the view that we know only our own representations, and regard any supposed object of reference as a *ding an sich,* cannot account for the possibility of error.

Royce developed the problem depicted by our hypothetical John and Thomas in many ways (some of which call to mind the problems illustrated by Turing's test and Searle's Chinese room experiment). The argument's form, purpose, and results, however, remain the same in all of these variations: If John's judgment is confined to his private *representation* of an alleged independent object, Thomas, then it appears he can never be in error since he is judging only his own representation. Worse yet, since such a judgment cannot refer to the intended object, the independent Thomas, it cannot meet the condition necessary for it to agree or disagree with its intended object. Thus it fails as a judgment. Either way, the possibility of error has been left unexplained.

The only remaining way to account for the possibility of error, Royce concluded, is to be found in a third-party standpoint, an option he raised in incomplete form several times earlier in the course of his analysis (RAP, 410, 415, 422). The third-party option proposes a spectator standpoint distinct from, but inclusive of, both John and John's representation of Thomas and Thomas and his representation of John. When Royce first considered this option, he did so as a proposal of common sense that assumes that all

that is needed is a third person who directly apprehended John, Thomas, and their respective representations of each other, and who then could judge the accuracy of the judgments of representation, that is, a third person who directly experiences (1) John, (2) John's judgment of his representation of Thomas, and (3) Thomas himself, then compares 2 and 3 to determine whether 2 agrees or disagrees with 3 (RAP, 410, 416). Were such a standpoint possible, it would account for the possibility of error. If, however, the third-person standpoint were filled by a finite being whose experience was limited to temporalized judgments and representations, as are those of John and Thomas, the option collapses under the same problems that beset John and Thomas. In a manner analogous to the Third Man argument, this option would become aggravated and would break down in a regress of outside spectators, each one successive in the series assessing all who came before. Left that way, it would not explain the possibility of error.

To avoid these problems while preserving the third-party option, Royce argued that the third party cannot be a finite spectator, subject to serially temporalized representations and judgments. Rather, it must be an infinite, Absolute knower to whom are directly present all finite persons with their judgments and representations, for whom time in all its moments is present in "universal all-inclusive thought," and for whom all knowledge of truth and falsehood is immediately present in the all-inclusive thought (RAP, 422–23). Such an Absolute Being would be in a position to know whether John's judgment agrees or disagrees with its intended object, Thomas himself. Such an Absolute Being would thereby complete all incomplete, partial, fragmentary judgments by and of finite beings. Thus, on this supposition, Royce argued, an account is given of the possibility of error. As for error, Royce concluded, it "is an incomplete thought, that to a higher thought which includes it and its intended object, is known as having failed in the purpose that it . . . had and that is fully realized in this higher thought" (RAP, 425).

Now this proposal meets a number of conditions that allow for the possibility of error, given the transcendental form in which the problem is set up. It establishes a referential relation between the judgment of a finite being and the intended object of the judgment. It provides the direct presentation of the object of judgment unmediated by barriers produced by representations. It also avoids the relativism and uncertainty of having to rely on temporalized, partial experiences and judgments. The problem that remains is that all of this is available to and therefore possible for only the Absolute. The finite being might be inclined to complain that this is all well and good for the Absolute, but the question that still troubles us is: How is it possible

for me, the finite being to whom none of this is available, to be in error? To this question, the only sound answer would be the answer given above—the appeal to absolute thought. For if there were such an infinite knower, it would account for how it is possible for finite knowers to be in error. Alas, it does not show how finite knowers can *know* they are in error.

Many issues can be raised that would only aggravate our unease with the absolutist position, but I will mention only the one that is most relevant to our present purposes. In a final comment toward the close of his argument, Royce added, "The infinite thought must, knowing all truth, include a knowledge of all wills, and of their conflict" (RAP, 433). Moreover, "All reality must be present to the Unity of the Infinite thought" (ibid.).

If these conclusions follow from Royce's argument and the parameters in which it was framed, then we are brought back to Howison's worries as expressed in *The Conception of God.* If all wills and all reality are immediately present to the Absolute, it appears that individual freedom and personal responsibility are at risk of being lost in an all-inclusive Absolute Being. Royce was aware that there were lingering issues. In a letter to Howison accepting the invitation to Berkeley, Royce even spoke of "crudities" that left his early position open to criticism and seemed to distance himself from his early treatise (*Letters,* 325 ff.). We have reason to expect a different thesis from Royce in *The Conception of God.*

II. The Berkeley Debate: Royce's New Position

Indeed, in his Berkeley address, Royce approached the question anew. He wrote to Howison plainly stating that he felt free of his earlier book and did not intend to use the lecture to defend it. Having found fault with his earlier book's methodology, Royce meant to do something new.[11] But the changes he made were more than methodological. What was truly new in his Berkeley address was how he redeployed the modal idea of possibility that led to a richer understanding of possible experience, contrast, and the discrete character of human experience. On these reconceived ideas, he based a modal proof for the existence of a necessary being from the existence of contingent beings conceived in terms of possibility, that is, possible experience. To see this, we need to examine the argument in some detail and analyze the main steps that Royce relied on and Howison attacked.

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11. In *Letters,* see the letters to Howison of September 23, 1894 (324–26), and July 30, 1895 (335–37).

The advances in Royce's thought are not always obvious in his new argument. Familiar traits of his way of thinking tend to conceal what was new in his thought. For example, Royce retained the progression from the discreteness of sense experience, to the more unified form of scientific experience and the assumptions of scientific method, to the principle of idealism, to Absolute Experience. This sort of format is typical of Royce and not itself a problem. It is the familiarity of the steps that makes it all too easy to downplay the new and overplay the old.

If we concentrate only on the familiar pattern, we might think that Royce's new argument only substitutes "ignorance" for "error" and replays the transcendental argument in "The Possibility of Error." That seems to be how Howison saw the argument. Some of Royce's remarks tended to promote this take on the new argument.[12] Still, that view is mistaken, for it fails to explain why Royce thought he was doing more than defending his first book. It implies that Royce failed from the start to achieve his expressed goal—a rash view that hardly gives Royce his due. If we are to get at his new insights, it will be by seeing through the distraction of the familiar and not letting it distort what we see.

Let us begin by calling attention to the new argument's form. The new argument bears some likeness to the old; Royce himself even said they were "essentially the same" (CG, 45). This unhappy remark is ambiguous and can be misleading. The arguments are very similar, but they are not the same.[13] In Royce's earlier works, the impact of Hegel and free use of dialectical arguments aside, the general form of the argument is transcendental (that is, given that x is the case, how is x possible?). As we saw above, the question in *The Religious Aspect of Philosophy* was: Given that error and evil are actually the case, how are they possible? This clearly reflects a transcendental form. A similar form appears in parts of Royce's Berkeley lecture when he argued that it is possible to become aware of the ignorance implicit in fragmentary lower-order levels of experience only from a more unified higher-order level. The similarity is important for it partly explains Howison's response to Royce. It is equally important to see that the argument from ignorance is only an element nested in Royce's ontological argument, a point Howison seems to have not fully appreciated.

Howison appears to have let himself get distracted by the familiar. He no doubt recognized the familiar progression we outlined above. He also had

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12. In *Letters,* see the letter to Howison, August 31, 1896 (347–48).
13. Howison even noted this in one place. See CG, x–xi.

Royce's unhappy remark to support his take on the argument. And he was very keen to point out the Kantian features in Royce's lecture (CG, 120). He had only to complete the pattern and draw the consequences of his assumption. Thus Howison may have thought that if the two arguments are the same, then the new one must be transcendental in the same sense as the old. He had good but not conclusive reasons for doing so. But if that is how Howison saw Royce's thesis, it was a mistake. He compounded his error by further assuming that a use of a transcendental argument committed Royce to Kant's form of transcendental argument and also, it seems, to many of Kant's conclusions.[14]

This is evident throughout Howison's essay. Howison's central criticism requires these assumptions. Only on these assumptions could he hold that Royce merely deduced Kant's transcendental principle of "the original synthetic unity of apperception" and then identified it with God (CG, 102, 121–22). Only on this argument could Howison charge that Royce was caught in a dilemma between pantheism and solipsism. And only this view explains that extravagant line of Howison's in which he accused Royce of identifying the finite self with the Absolute, "He is we, and we are He; nay, He is I, and I am He" (CG, 99). In fact, except for those based on articles of religious faith, all of Howison's charges presuppose that Royce was a Kantian gone wrong. As Howison saw it, Royce produced only a digest of Kant's conditions of possible experience and then violated them. Even if Howison was right to see a transcendental form in Royce's argument, his concentration on that element kept him from seeing that Royce's argument is principally ontological and only subordinately transcendental.

When Royce spoke of human ignorance and levels of experience, he was not asking an epistemological question or merely seeking transcendental conditions of how experience is possible. He was asking an ontological question and seeking an existential answer. Royce used epistemological language as a tool to get at the modal relation of possible being to necessary being expressed in terms of the finitude of limited human experience in relation to Absolute Experience. In the end, it is plain that the new argument does not rely on conceptually structured representations, postulates, forms of intuition, or other of Kant's proposals. It seems fairest to say that Royce's method was his own version of criticism, dialectic, and a form of logical

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14. J. M. E. McTaggart made some shrewd observations on the properties and types of transcendental arguments used by Kant and Hegel in *A Commentary on Hegel's Logic* (New York: Russell and Russell, 1964), 11; and *Studies in Hegelian Dialectic* (New York: Russell and Russell, 1964), 21–22 and 21n.

analysis that rivaled his successors. In any case, Royce was not committed to any Kantian conditions that may have been evident in his earlier work. He was not going to retreat to them.

III. Royce's Argument: The Ontological Premise

The ontological form of Royce's argument is evident from the beginning. He began with an explanation of what he means by the word "God," proposing only a concept "in advance of any proof of God's existence" (CG, 7). He selected for his purpose one of the traditional divine attributes commonly ascribed to God in the Judeo-Christian tradition, namely, omniscience. This gave the result that "God" is "a being who is conceived as possessing to the full all logically possible knowledge, insight, and wisdom" (CG, 7). Royce began with a concept of this attribute, not because he thought it alone exhausted the nature of God, or that it would allow us to deduce the full nature of God. Rather, omniscience was simply the attribute that would allow him to draw most directly a conclusion as to whether or not there is a Supreme Omniscient Being whatever else its nature might include.

Also, the fact that Royce began with the concept of only one attribute should not be taken to imply that he thought it possible to exhaustively *deduce* all of the limited number of attributes we mortals commonly ascribed to God, much less exhaustively deduce the complete *nature* of God from a single attribute. That would be an attempt to reduce all divine attributes to one, and Royce was no reductionist. Nowhere, furthermore, did he speak of finite minds possessing (even the *possibility* of possessing) an exhaustive knowledge of *what* God is. Given his deference to St. Thomas Aquinas, Royce would have denied that we can have such knowledge of the *essence* of God (CG, 49). We may not be able comprehensively to know *what* God is in God's entirety, but that alone does not imply that we cannot know *that* God exists. Ignorance of the complete nature of a being does not imply complete ignorance of the being. We may know enough to deduce the existence of God. Royce's beginning is a modest one (see CG, "Supplementary Essay," 186). I see no reason why Royce should not be granted that much.

Royce was now ready to ask the main question of the debate: "Does there demonstrably exist an Omniscient Being? or is the conception of an Omniscient Being . . . a bare ideal of the human mind?" (CG, 7). From his initial definition, and from the form in which he chose to treat the question, Royce expressed his ontological aims. Simply by questioning a bare ideal, Royce gave notice that he had gotten free—and intended to remain free—of Kant's view of knowledge; he had no mere "Ideal of Reason" in mind. By explaining omniscience in terms of "all logically possible knowledge," he

indicated even more: (1) He was starting from the mere possibility of such a being and was not covertly importing existence into his initial concept (as is often alleged of St. Anselm's ontological proof); (2) He set aside superficial rejections of the very idea of an infinite being that were based on sophistical refutations that require an infinite being to be capable of impossible feats such as knowing the last decimal place of pi, whether the class of all classes that are not members of themselves is a member of itself, and other such questions; (3) He indicated that he had no plans of urging reason to a dead end by affirming contradictions and taking a leap of faith as some anti-rational trends in the philosophy of religion appear to encourage. Royce held that the question of the existence of God is rational and can be rationally answered. It is no threat to faith to understand rationally that in which one believes.

As observed above, Royce had no objection to other traditional attributes of God; rather, omniscience just best served his purpose. He defined it as follows: "An Omniscient Being would be one who simply found presented to him, not by virtue of fragmentary and gradually completed processes of inquiry, but by virtue of an all-embracing, direct, and transparent insight into his own truth,—who found thus presented to him . . . the complete, the fulfilled answer to every genuinely rational question" (CG, 8). Against this notion of omniscience, in some very moving passages, Royce pit the fragmentary and incomplete experience of finite beings:

> Misfortune comes to us, and we ask: What means this horror of my fragmentary experience?—why did this happen to me? . . . We are beset by questions to which we now get no answers. Those questions could only be answered, those bitter problems that pierce our hearts with the keen edge of doubt and wonder,—when friends part, when lovers weep, when the lightning of fortune blasts our hopes, when remorse and failure make desolate the lonely hours of our private despair,—such questions, such problems, I say, could only be answered if the flickering ideas then present in the midst of our darkness shone steadily in the presence of some world of superhuman experience . . . [that might] in its wholeness at once contain the answers to our questions, and the triumph over—yes, and through—our fragmentary experience. (CG, 11–12)

This passage suggests the depth of Royce's familiarity with lived experience and, no doubt, caught Marcel's eye. It also gives a preview of the argument to come.

IV. Royce's Argument: Premises of Incompleteness, Relative Completeness, and Contrast

Royce argued from the initial fragmentary and incomplete form of human sensory experience, through a series of more complete but indirect forms of experience, and eventually to Absolute Experience. Each subsequent stage in the series is a standard of relative completeness *in contrast* to which the incompleteness of the preceding stage is judged. Also, each subsequent state is a successive approximation to finally recognizing that Absolute Experience must exist—not an experience possessed by a finite being, but one such as a Supreme Being would possess if there were such a being. Note that Royce's thesis is not that a finite being experiences Absolute Experience; rather, a finite being's experience is one of *recognizing* that there must be such an experience.[15] This is the general thrust of the argument.

As was noted above, the argument is framed in terms of levels of human ignorance. In this version of the argument, Royce introduced a significant change. Here he all but dropped the use of the version of representationalism that relies on a *ding an sich* beyond all possible experience. Instead, he offered a new analysis cast entirely in terms of *incompleteness, contrast,* and *possible experience.*

As a device of presentation, let us try a thought experiment to chart broadly the territory of Royce's argument and highlight key landmarks. Think retrospectively a little further back than the place where Royce began his argument.[16] Let us imagine Absolute Ignorance (AI) as one extreme on a continuum of degrees of awareness ranging from Absolute Ignorance to Absolute Experience (AE). If the latter, as Royce said, has the answers to all logically possible questions, then the former would be devoid not only of any such answers, it would not recognize that there are any questions to be asked. Consider this a limiting case of a state of incomplete awareness. It gets worse; AI would be ignorant even of its ignorance (CG, 29). Thus, it could not be self-conscious. AI would be unaware of difference or anything with which it contrasts. Were AI possible, it would hardly be considered

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15. Royce did not confuse the act of experiencing with that which is experienced; he committed no such fallacy as that which G. E. Moore later attributed to all idealists; see "The Refutation of Idealism," in *Philosophical Studies* (Paterson, N.J.: Littlefield, Adams and Co., 1959), 18–26.

16. I prefer "retroductively," but it is not common usage. The thought experiment is suggested by Royce's remark, "Were you merely ignorant, you could not know the fact" that you were ignorant (CG, 29).

experience; it might involve stimulus-response reaction, but it would not be experience.

Fortunately, we do not have to begin with AI. Human experience is not in so desperate a strait, but neither is it absolute. Royce's analysis begins with sensory experience and the assumption that sensation directly acquaints us with an independently existing reality; a common if unreflective assumption that most humans take for granted and regard as common sense. He began here, not because this was the absolutely lowest possible level of experience, but for what it reveals about human ignorance. Except for the extremes, it matters little where we begin to analyze the experience of finite beings; the finitude of such experience implies its incompleteness. This, in turn, implies the possibility of correcting it. And this implies further possible experience.

It takes little to upset common sense. We have only to recall, as did Royce, that sensory experience may be a product of the human sensory apparatus reacting to the influence of some other reality that is not immediately presented in sensation. On this view, we are not directly acquainted with the reality affecting our senses, but with our sensations. Of the ways this might be interpreted, only one is possible on Royce's new position.

If one takes it to imply that the reality beyond the immediate sensation is a *ding an sich,* an Absolute Reality as it is in itself independent of sensation, then it would appear that human ignorance is final; we will be beset with all the problems of the rigid representationalism Royce addressed in his previous works. How can one hope to know the true nature of reality if one compounds one's commonsense assumption with another assumption that reality is in itself unknowable?

Royce advanced the point with a thought experiment of his own (CG, 17–18). On the assumption above, it is logically possible for the human sensory apparatus to remain unchanged while the unknowable external reality undergoes vast changes. The finite knower, fixed on its familiar sensations with no way to recognize contrast, would never suspect the change in reality. Alter the sensory apparatus, however, and the sensations would change so much that the knower would reach very different conclusions about its world, though actually it underwent no change.

There is a deeper point reflected in these problems about the nature of human ignorance. If knowledge involves experience, and experience includes more than what actually is immediately presented in sense experience, then "our ignorance of reality," as Royce put it, "cannot mean an ignorance of some object [or thing in itself] that we [assume we] can conceive as existing apart from any possible experience or knowledge of what it is" (CG,

19). On that view, experience, which the finite being must rely on, gets lost in a distorted view that cancels any genuine possibility of escaping its ignorance. Experience itself is not under fire here, only the view of experience that requires a *ding an sich.* Something that can only be spoken of as *that of which no experience is possible and with which it is in principle impossible to be acquainted* is no more than an absence described by an empty phrase.

It accomplishes nothing to reply that it is at least "a bare possibility." After all, what is a bare possibility but the absence of contradiction, a consequence empty of both existential and experiential significance? Bare possibility is, therefore, possibility *simpliciter,* not reality. This may seem an obvious point after all that has been said above, but it is important (both now and later) to Royce's argument. It shows that the alleged possibility of an object completely independent of possible experience is nonsense.

Royce's new sense of possible experience rejected the old model of representations produced by the engagement of a set of forms of intuition and categories with an unknowable *ding in sich.* He now conceived of possible experience in terms of *logical possibility* and a new account of what it means for the experience of a finite being to be incomplete. Our ignorance is not ignorance of an inaccessible object, a thing in itself that is in principle impossible to know, but of something logically possible and completely within the realm of possible experience. As Royce said, we lack "a logically possible . . . type of experience . . . a state of mind in which we should . . . be able to say that we had fulfilled in experience what we have now merely in ideal" (CG, 19).

To discover our ignorance cannot mean a state of AI as put in the thought experiment above. We discover it in contrast within a wider context of possible experience. Nothing is discovered but contradiction or at least paradox, nothing corrected or made complete by positing some sort of Absolute Reality beyond all possible experience. Rather, "our ignorance of Absolute Reality can mean only that there is some sort of possible experience . . . that you and I want, but do not now possess" (CG, 19).

Scientific experience is a more complete and unified mode of experience. It has many of the specifics of Royce's new conception of "possible experience." Scientific experience provides an organization of ideas that we use to correct and supplement our sensory experience. It deals with experience reconceived in terms of logically formed ideas that make no appeal to what is in principle unknowable, what is beyond possible experience. Thus scientific experience is a relatively complete standard that exposes the incompleteness of direct sensory experience. "The relatively indirect

experience of science can and does correct the . . . momentary ignorance of our senses . . . [and] reveals more of phenomenal truth than can ever be revealed to our direct sensory states as these pass by" (CG, 21). Ignorance, then, is unorganized experience, and science is a relatively complete, more organized, higher-order experience that reveals and corrects our prior ignorance.

More specifically, science exploits the *contrast* between its ideal of organized indirect experience and direct sensory experience (CG, 29). The organization of science is a result of its being a logically formulated system of interrelated concepts, that is, theoretical entities logically related in a coherent explanation (CG, 21). It is indirect in that theories describe possible experiences by which we anticipate future experiences and frame predictions we can test against direct experience (CG, 24, 28). And, ideal though its means may be, scientific explanation is rightly characterized as "experience" since its questions arise from the incompleteness of direct experience and it resorts to direct experience to test its theories. Most important, though, is that science is carried out within the range of possible experience (CG, 27).

Scientific experience also requires that its ideas be confirmed, not merely by an individual observer, but by a community of observers. This is evident in the demand that experimental results be reproducible and that consensus be reached among competent fellow observers. The idea here is that each individual self be able to test its experience against that of other selves and adjust its system of ideas accordingly until consensus is reached. Of course, a demand for consensus presupposes other minds, and a presupposition is not a proof. Still, in this way, we seek to supplement our own experience with some assurance that it is objective and not a fluke peculiar to our own direct experience.

Implicit in the ideal of consensus is the judgment that one's experience ought to be like that of others (CG, 34). This point is critical. It implies that one is not the only being who has experience and thereby implies an even broader range of possible experience, the experience of those without whom consensus would be impossible. From this possibility, Royce drew another consequence of enormous importance to which we will return.

Royce summed up these aspects of science in two ways that are instructive. The first emphasizes verification: "Every man verifies truth for himself. But . . . the truth that he believes himself to be making out when he verifies . . . he conceives as a truth either actually or possibly verifiable by his fellow or some still more organized sort of experience" (CG, 33–34). The second aspect highlights consensus. Consensus in the community of observers, he explained, is "what they all ought to experience or would experience if their

experiences were in unity" (CG, 35). Together they imply that my experience is verified only in relation to an object of further possible experience open to an individual self and its fellows alike. This is far from the absolute completeness Royce had in mind, but it is a step in that direction. It calls attention to the fact that the possibility of a more complete and unified experience is a genuine possibility, a prospect the concept of which harbors no contradiction and is articulated in experiential terms. We will call on these points again. For now, it is enough to conclude that in science, experience achieves greater unity and scope entirely within the range of possible experience. It appeals only to what can be presented in experience, logical constructs (theoretical entities) conceived solely in terms of what is needed to explain that which is presented in experience, and the possible experience of other selves.

Still, science remains incomplete in many ways. The theoretical entities themselves, in terms of which science frames its explanations, are abstract, selective, and therefore incomplete. Moreover, to verify these ideal explanatory devices, scientifically organized experience must appeal to direct experience that, incomplete and fragmentary as it is, allows the confirmation of ideas to depend on the private sensory experience of a finite self. Consensus helps but does not fully overcome these limitations. Multiplying instances of experience distributed among the members of a community of observers yields no more confidence in our own experience, for example, unless we already have confidence in our own—particularly in our own experience of the other observers. Thus, any lack of confidence in our first-person experience recreates the same problem on an even greater scale, compounded by a plurality of consensus seekers; for consensus itself involves indirect experience of each other. The result is one of incomplete experience, tentative understanding of each other, an uneasy consensus if any. It is more coherent than direct experience, perhaps, but not entirely so and certainly not absolute.

These residual limitations do not entirely undo the case for scientific experience. As Royce reminded us, the partial success of science shows that experience requires not "a reality foreign to all possible experience" but "an adequate knowledge of the contents and objects of a certain conceived or ideal sort of . . . organized experience, . . . one that found a system of ideas fulfilled in and by its facts . . . indirectly, tentatively, slowly, fallibly" (CG, 28). Thus, scientific experience remains limited but not undone. And since we can recognize the limits of scientific experience, it indicates a more complete possible experience in contrast to which the incompleteness of science is made plain.

This, however, is not the final lesson to be drawn from the examination of scientific experience. As Royce saw, just because science appeals to consensus as a form of possible experience does not prove that this form of experience is more than a mere possibility or that consensus is actually achieved. A stronger case can and must be made that we are intersubjectively aware of each other, a case that shows not merely that we *need* it to be so, but that it *is* so.

V. Royce's Argument: Premises of Contrast, Consciousness, and Idealism

Clearly awareness of self-identity apart from self-consciousness is impossible. Royce further held that it is impossible for an individual to be self-conscious without being socially conscious or conscious of other selves. Only in a social context can distinct selves be individuated. This is the larger consequence of the ideal of consensus that I alluded to earlier. The existence of other selves is essential to his argument; proving this would show that possible experience other than my own is more than a bare possibility and would remove any threat of solipsism.

Royce knew the importance of his new work in this area. He featured it in his public address and in three other lectures he delivered during the same visit to Berkeley.[17] In the lectures, he used psychological cases to show that self-identity is possible only in a context of contrasting self-consciousness with social consciousness. Self-identity, he argued, is an ongoing product of our individual growing self-consciousness discovered in the course of learning to distinguish ourselves not merely from other things presented in our consciousness, but from other selves. We might begin by unreflectively repeating behavior patterns of others, then learn to imitate them deliberately, or modify the patterns, or even refuse to continue the imitation due to disappointed expectations.[18] In short, the more we each learn from and about others, the more we learn how we each are like and unlike one another, and thus develop self-consciousness and our own self-identity. Of course,

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17. Royce, "Self-Consciousness, Social Consciousness and Nature, I," *Philosophical Review* 4, 5 (September 1895): 465–85; with part 2 in the same journal, 4, 6 (November 1895): 577–602. The third lecture was published as "Some Observations on the Anomalies of Self-Consciousness, I," *Psychological Review* 2, 5 (September 1895): 433–57; with part 2 in the same journal, 2, 6 (November 1895): 574–84. Special thanks are due to the Pusey Library of Harvard University for allowing me to use copies of the original drafts of these papers in the Royce archives.
18. Royce, "Self-Consciousness, Social Consciousness and Nature, I," 474.

empirical observations of this sort, being contingent, lack ontologically necessary force. But the significance embedded in such facts acquires greater force upon realizing that, all along, we have been assuming about each other that we are similar conscious beings. As Royce put it, "In so far as I am a social being, I take my fellow's experience to be as live and real an experience as is mine" (CG, 34). Still, the above is not yet a proof. The psychological processes described above only show that we *in fact* learn to conduct ourselves as if there were other minds, a contingent fact that assumes other minds exist but fails to prove that there are other minds. Scientific experience can take us no further. It can bring us to recognize the need for consensus and with it intersubjectivity. By its own methods, though, science cannot show how consensus is possible, much less give a proof that science actually *achieves* consensus. Science presupposes intersubjectivity, but it cannot demonstrate such experience is the case. A more forceful proof is called for.

To supply one, Royce reconceived consensus in terms of his modal conception of possible experience and argued that, understood in this way, to seek consensus is to evaluate our experience against an ideal standard and thus assent to the proposition that "I ought, on the whole, to experience what other men experience" (CG, 35). This can be generalized. Notice that the very formulation of the ideal involves a tacit appeal to the experience of others, explicitly and implicitly in the phrase "I ought." *If* others exist, then the individual experience of each should be subject to the same ideal standard. Royce thus inferred that consensus seeks an ideal of "what they all *ought* to experience, or *would* experience if their experiences were in unity; that is, if all their moments were linked expressions of one universal meaning which was present to one Universal Subject" (CG, 35, emphasis added). This describes a possible experience that is both ideally unified and implies possible experiences other than our own. But as Royce admitted, it still seems only "a mere ideal of a bare possibility" (CG, 35). Is there anything more here than a bare possibility? Royce thought there was.

In the case of finite selves and their experience of themselves and of each other, the argument might be put most directly as a case of *modus ponens*: If I am self-conscious, then there must be other selves of which I am aware and against which I am contrasted; I am self-conscious, therefore there must be other selves; and so on. The problem in putting it this way is that it seems to posit the self-conscious self as a primordial datum that is given first and from which the consciousness of others is derived, a view Royce rejected. In fact, his point was the opposite—that only in contrast to another self can I become aware of my being a self, and only in contrast to

another consciousness can I become aware of my consciousness *as* mine. Taken this way, even though my self-consciousness is partly a product of contrast with other selves and therefore is not primordial, this view confirms the antecedent of the first premise used above. My being self-conscious therefore depends on my being socially conscious. If we keep these points in mind, we can retain the proof as a useful way of putting Royce's insights about finite beings. Yet, the simple proof itself, even if valid and sound, lacks persuasive clout. The argument below strengthens its claim.

In the case of Absolute Experience, the proof needs one more premise: the correlativity of reality and experience, which must itself be demonstrated (CG, 30). This is a classic principle of idealism that Royce understood in light of his new insights into possibility, contrast, and experience. This principle, of course, is controversial from a purely logical point of view. But logic alone is not the only arbiter in ontological matters, and Royce made a case for the principle that is quite strong.

Royce's argument for the principle is closely tied to his denial of the *ding an sich.* As already observed, if we postulate reality as that which cannot be the content of possible experience hence in principle unknowable, but insist that reality is at least a bare possibility, then we have postulated nothing more than a "that" which is an absence of contradiction. This result, we noted, lacks existential and experiential significance. It also neglects contrast. Bare possibility can involve no contrast. The alleged *ding an sich* cannot be that against which a finite being contrasts its experience, since that would imply that it had some sort of experience of the unexperiencible. Hence contrast, in virtue of which a finite being recognizes the incompleteness of its direct experience and discovers a more organized experience, must itself be within possible experience.

If so, then the only meaningful sense of "reality" is reality as the content of possible experience—that is, a *relational* sense derived from *contrasting* what is present in direct experience with what is indirectly known in more organized experience. For example, direct experience is discovered to be fragmentary in relation to what science explains (and sometimes confirms) as the true facts indirectly experienced in terms of its more complete, organized system of ideas. This holds even for theoretical entities not confirmed in direct experience (a point that entails one more negative consequence of the so-called *ding an sich*). Royce held that unconfirmed theoretical entities remain conceivable and related to the range of possible experience, for they are contents of a more coherent system of ideas, corrected, as it were, and distinguished from both what is presented in direct experience and from confirmed theoretical entities by the fact that they are not confirmed in direct

experience. The way Royce put it shows his idealism to be robust enough to cope with counterfactuals: "To conceive of any human belief as false . . . is to conceive this opinion as either possibly or actually corrected from some higher point of view, to which a larger whole of experience is considered as present" (CG, 31). Again, "To assert that all human experience is illusory, is to say that an absolutely inclusive experience, if there were one, would have present, as part of its content, something involving the utter failure of our experience to attain that absolute content as such" (CG, 32). Unconfirmed theoretical entities may merit being tabled but not absolutely discarded, for they are not contradictory. They are logically possible but unconfirmed idealities, suitable "would have beens" had things been otherwise, hypotheticals contrary to fact (as possible worlds theorists are wont to speak). Royce put it modally when he said, "[T]he reality we seek to know has always to be defined as that which either is or would be present to a sort of experience which we ideally define as an organized—that is, a united and transparently reasonable—experience" (CG, 30). Reality as *ding an sich* lacks even counterfactual sense.

Correlative to the above, it makes no more sense to speak of possible experience as an experience of a bare possibility than to posit a *ding an sich.* To do so would be to speak nonsense about having a pure experience, devoid of contrast, and therefore of nothing at all. Is that in any conceivable sense an experience?

To address this, consider a modified version of our earlier thought experiment. Imagine a continuum with pure ignorance (PI) at one extreme and pure experience (PE) at the other. Is not an alleged experience, such as PE, just an abstract designation of the extreme at the other end of the continuum opposite PI? It must be. For just as PI isolated from any possible contrast is necessarily ignorant of its ignorance, so PE with no possible contrast is a similarly vacuous state, an alleged experience of nothing at all, not even of itself, an empty phrase about an absence.

How different are these two alleged states? Both are devoid of any awareness of themselves and, as isolated from any possible contrast, devoid of awareness of anything not themselves. As such, neither one is a possible experience, neither one is an object of possible experience, and so both are beyond all possible experience. In that sense, both are modally equivalent to a *ding an sich,* that is, impossible. The only way to avoid this paradox, then, is to acknowledge contrast as essential to possible experience, and find that reality and experience are correlative. The principle of idealism does just that. With this, Royce dealt a devastating blow to notion of reality as *ding an sich.* The argument itself is reminiscent of Hegel's assault on Kant's notion,

but Royce delivers his blow with greater clarity.

We can now apply these results to the question of whether other minds exist. Above, we noted the contingency of empirical evidence and the lack of persuasive clout in the elementary logical argument for the claim that self-consciousness uncontrasted to social consciousness is impossible. In spite of all that was said, the argument left the nagging suspicion that it merely restated the argument from analogy in logical form.

But all of these worries are done away with by Royce's refutation of the doctrine of the *ding an sich;* this was his winning move. Consider the argument from analogy. In one form or another, it covertly presupposes a *ding an sich.* According to that argument, I am an immediately given datum to myself as a conscious and self-conscious being; all I ever know of (what I assume to be) another self are appearances presented to my direct experience. The appearances look and behave in ways I assume are analogous to the way I take myself to look and behave. Whatever it is I experience, all I have to go on are appearances presented in my experience, and these I interpret, by analogy, to be evidence of a being that I only assume is conscious and self-conscious like myself. On the assumptions of the argument, I never directly experience the consciousness or self-consciousness of the assumed other, for of this assumed other I have only the data of *my* sensation. Thus, the other as a conscious and self-conscious self is never an object of possible experience. It is a *ding an sich.*

Had this dreadful conclusion been Royce's, his thesis would have been undone, for it implies not merely that we never actually *know* the other self but that other selves are not even within *possible* experience, hence simply impossible. This would lead directly to solipsism and to one of the charges Howison leveled at Royce (CG, 100). If I am a datum immediately given to myself, as the argument from analogy assumes, then I am the only self I can conclude to exist.

Royce, however, refuted the notion of a *ding an sich* and did not regard the argument from analogy as a proof. He was not committed, therefore, to any of its conclusions. Hence, he avoided solipsism and is not subject to Howison's charge.

What alternative view on other minds does this leave us? It leaves us with a relational view that parallels what Royce held about reality and experience being correlative. That is, it leaves us the view given earlier in our elaboration on the simple logical argument, but supported by and reconceived in light of Royce's refutation of the *ding an sich,* the argument expressed in our thought experiment, Royce's insights on contrast, and ultimately by the principle of idealism, correctly understood. For together

these show that it could not be otherwise than I am aware of my being a self in contrast to another self, or I am aware of my consciousness *as* mine in contrast to another consciousness.

My self-consciousness, hence my self-identity, are not primordial, for they are in part a product of contrast with other selves. This is as it must be. After all, I do not now, never have, and never will know myself exhaustively; neither will any such experience of the other ever be exhaustive. To put my self-identity and self-consciousness first as some sort of primordial being or state of awareness never did and never could reveal myself to me with any degree of completeness, much less exhaustively. Besides, such a view is impossible to hold, for it presupposes the *ding an sich* that Royce has already shown to be impossible.

Rather, I come to know the other as I come to know myself; and conversely, I come to know myself in the course of coming to know the other. This is possible only through experienced contrasts of what is directly, if incompletely, presented in experience with either what is yet to be experienced in forthcoming possible experience or what is indirectly experienced in terms of confirmed or disconfirmed hypotheses—in human terms, hunches, expectations, disappointments, recollections, duties and commands, sorrows and hopes. Ours is always an itinerant course of supplementing incomplete by more complete experience; ours is the being of *"homo viator,"* as Marcel later said, "being on the way."[19] Our way is that of actualizing our possibilities within possible experience, the only sense of possibility open to us.

Contrast reveals that finite beings do not endure the absolute individuality of monads, absolute self-contained centers of experience (cf. Howison, CG 91). Royce, we can now see, had deeper ontological reasons for holding self-consciousness and social consciousness to be correlative, reasons only assumed in scientific experience. But even if there is social experience (for example, consensus), it alone is not enough to explain or encompass either the real as content of experience or the range of possible experience. We will return to this point in a later section.

It is crucial to emphasize that the relation between reality and experience is correlation, not identification. To mistake this correlation for an identity relation ignores the contrast between the two, and to ignore the contrast would be to revert to the extremes in our thought experiment. Royce

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19. Gabriel Marcel, *Homo Viator: Introduction to a Metaphysic of Hope,* trans. Emma Craufurd (Chicago: Henry Regnery, 1951), 11, 25.

therefore could not have meant an identity relation when he defended the principle that reality and experience are correlative concepts. Thus experience and reality must fall between the extremes described in our thought experiment, that is, must be understood in terms of possible experience and all this requires. The idea of a pure experience of a bare possibility is not in any conceivable sense an experience. It is not, in any case, what Royce had in mind when he spoke of possible experience for either finite beings or an omniscient being. It may be what mysticism tries to capture. It also may be what Howison thought when he accused Royce of pantheism, solipsism (CG, 98, 100), and mysticism (122). It is not Royce's view (CG, 49).

VI. Critical Interlude I

Let us pause here and observe that had Howison fully appreciated the essential place of contrast in Royce's argument—especially in regard to the principle of idealism and, in particular, the possibility of self-identity, self-consciousness, and social consciousness—he might have taken a different path of criticism than he did (CG, 108–9). He almost certainly would not have confused correlation with identity and thought that Royce had identified finite with Absolute Being (CG, 94). He would not have charged Royce with pantheism (CG, 97, 100); if there is no identity, there is no ground for the charge. Yet Howison conflated correlation with identity and asserted, "[I]f the Infinite Self *includes* us all, and all our experiences . . . in the unity of one life, and includes us and them *directly*; if there is but one and the same final Self for us each and all; then with a literalness indeed appalling, He is we, and we are He; nay He is I, and I am He" (CG, 98–99). This is Howison's main criticism of Royce. It might have fit Royce's earlier works, but with respect to the present argument, it is misplaced.

We have already shown how Royce was not open to the charge of solipsism, given his refutation of the doctrine of the *ding an sich.* It now should be clear that Royce was also innocent of pantheism for essentially the same reasons he was innocent of solipsism. Since the relation of one self to another cannot be identity, there is no basis for reducing the two selves to one. There is not even reason for partial identity. Consider two selves, S1 and S2. Without identity relating the two, there is no basis for S1 to identify S2 with even a part of S1 itself by reducing S2 to a bundle of sensations presented in S1's direct experience. Correlation grounded in contrast is the fundamental relation, not identity. Thus both sides of the dilemma in which Howison hoped to catch Royce are undone.

Some final observations on Howison's criticisms will be made below. There also remains a final logical difficulty in Royce's argument that must

be discussed. But first we have to draw Royce's conclusion that an Omniscient Being exists.

VII. Royce's Conclusion

By the end of section V above most of the pieces of the argument were in order. The thought experiment we used in that section analyzed and defended each piece of Royce's position: contrast, the modality of possible experience, intersubjectivity, and the principle of idealism. Perhaps it is not precisely how Royce made his case, but I think he would have approved, for it is faithful to his view and leads to the following preliminary and partial conclusion: "Reality, as opposed to illusion [such as a *ding an sich* and an absolutely pure experience], means simply an actual or possible content of experience, not in so far as this experience is supposed to be transient and fleeting, but in so far as it is conceived to be somehow inclusive and organized, the fulfillment of a system of ideas, the answer to a scheme of rational questions" (CG, 32). This defines a concept of reality as the correlative content of an Absolute Experience. It recalls Royce's initial conception of an Omniscient Being. However, it only states a possibility; it is not a proof. Royce saw that he needed two more steps to justify an inference from possibility to actuality to complete his proof.

He began the final stretch by appealing to two basic lessons from above, the first being that experience other than our own is possible. We have already shown that other selves exist and therefore that consensus is possible. We correct and supplement our finite experience in consensus, a more complete possible experience of reality as a possible content of that experience. As Royce said, we seek "an ideally united experience [that], if it could absolutely define its own contents, would know reality" (CG, 35). In other words, we pursue Absolute Experience, though we never *comprehensively* experience it for ourselves.[20] We also know that, for reasons given above, consensus is not equivalent to truth or to fully completed experience; it is incomplete. So consensus does not fill the bill; it does not fulfill its projected goal. And it looks as if we are seeking "a mere ideal of a barely possible unity" (CG, 35). This led Royce back to his ultimate question

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20. The phrase "*possible* Absolute Experience" was Royce's way of alluding to Kant's "Ideal of Reason," a regulative principle, according to Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. Norman Kemp Smith (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1965), B643–B648, B657; hereafter cited as "CPuR." Royce held Kant's position to be invalid.

whether Absolute Experience actually exists.

Here, Royce asked, is this ideal unity "more than a bare possibility? Has it any such concrete genuineness as the life of our fellows is believed to possess?" (CG, 35).[21] It must be more, for bare possibility is nothing at all, whether as bare possibility of experience (PE above) or as bare possible content of experience. Now he had to prove that it is not just a mere possibility but an actuality.

The second lesson is the correlativity thesis. Royce used this to reformulate the questions asked just above in the form of two sets of two questions that he insisted are "precisely equivalent." The first set affirms:

> (1e) Is there any such real unity of organized experience? which is equivalent to:
> (1r) Is there, not as a mere possibility, but as a genuine truth, any reality? (CG, 35–36)[22]

Royce immediately reformulates these questions to ask:

> (2e) Is there an absolutely organized experience? that he claimed is equivalent to the question:
> (2r) Is there an Absolute Reality? (CG, 36)

Both sets of questions restate his correlativity thesis, the second in its final form. From a purely logical standpoint, they are at the very least truth-functionally equivalent in that they both would have the same truth value. Referring to "reality" and "experience," Royce even said, "Make one a bare ideal, and the other becomes equally such. If the organized experience is a bare and ideal possibility, then the reality is a mere seeming" (CG, 36). We must not take him to mean this in a merely truth-functional sense, however, as that would not support his case; from the truth-functionally "true" truth value of two false statements, nothing of ontological significance follows. We also know that he was not asking about an identity relation, as shown in sections V and VI. These equivalences, then, can only be taken in the sense of the correlativity thesis defended in our thought experiment.

It is clear that 1e cannot be affirmed or denied without affirming or denying 1r, and 2e cannot be affirmed or denied without affirming or denying

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21. Hence the argument for intersubjectivity.
22. Where "e" = experience, and "r" = reality.

2r. This much we might be prepared to accept. It should also be clear that Royce did not hold that the counterparts of each set are equivalent; 1e is not equivalent to 2e, nor 1r to 2r. The questions in set 1 are expressed in terms of "any," while those in set 2 are expressed by the term "Absolute." He had no intention of conflating the two terms. Royce's argument depends neither on a spurious equivalence claim nor on slippery definitions. Were it only a matter of affirming the correlativity thesis and inserting "Absolute" in strategic slots in the argument, the argument would have been finished by now —but fallacious. In any case, whether Royce asked the question in terms of "any" or "Absolute," he was still speaking in terms of possibility, asking only whether there is any actuality corresponding to the possibilities as described. This is the final form of his question.

Royce followed a different line of reasoning to address this question. He thought he saw what was needed in the relation between categorical and hypothetical propositions. This analysis is the most important and interesting move in the argument, and apt to be the most controversial. So we will examine the issue critically before we consider a defense. For our purposes, we should see his full statement.

In section V above, we defended Royce's critique of mere possibility and found that, regardless of whether we speak of a possible experience or a content of possible experience, there can be no mere possibility. As Royce now put it, "there can be no such thing as a merely possible *truth,* definable apart from some actual experience" (CG, 36–37). This means, he explained:

> To say: So and so is possible, is to say: There is somewhere in experience, an actuality some aspect of which can be defined in terms of this possibility. A possibility is a truth expressed in terms of a proposition beginning with *if,* or a hypothetical proposition,—an *is* expressed in terms of an *if.* But every hypothetical proposition involves a categorical proposition. Every *if* implies an *is.* For you cannot define a truth as concretely true unless you define it as really present to some experience. . . . I can easily define my actual experience by expressing some aspect of it in the form of a supposition, even . . . one contrary to fact, but I cannot believe in the truth of such a supposition without believing in some concrete and experienced fact. (CG, 37)

As the crux of Royce's argument, this passage is both remarkable and puzzling. One the one hand, it gives evidence that Royce knew the recent thinking on hypotheticals advanced by Boole, Bradley, Herbart, and others,

that categorical propositions can be reduced to hypotheticals.[23] He even made some use of a peculiarity of material implication in his examples of possible truths, contrary to fact hypotheticals (CG, 37, 196).[24] On the other hand, he seemed to invoke an assumption of classical logic when he said "every *if* implies an *is,*" and "every hypothetical proposition involves a categorical proposition." If his argument turns on reducing a classical categorical proposition to a hypothetical and then translating the latter back into the former, he will not be able to use this type of inference to prove the existence of God, and he may have opened himself to charges of fallacy. This is a serious problem, so we may as well deal with it here.

One might argue that Royce correctly said that a statement of one's actual experience can be translated into the form of a hypothetical. I can state, for example, "All the stuff on my desk (*S*) is used in service of philosophy (*P*)," a true categorical proposition (*SAP*) that assumes existential import. From this I can infer, "For any *x,* if *x* is stuff on my desk, then *x* is in service of philosophy," a universally quantified hypothetical of the form $(x)\{Sx \supset Px\}$. The critical difference between the two is that the latter makes no existential claim, thus it cannot imply the former. Yet that is what it looks like Royce was trying to do when he said "every *if* implies an *is.*" If that is what Royce had in mind, then clearly his argument is fallacious and fails.[25]

An obvious reply might be that Royce was not conflating classical categorical propositions with the modern view of hypotheticals. Rather, the argument was framed in strict compliance with classical logic, which does permit expressing categoricals as hypotheticals provided both are based on the same assumptions. But this only highlights the problem, for one of the assumptions of classical logic is existential import. If existence has been assumed all along, then the argument still fails, since it has not proved the actual existence of a given being from the mere possibility of that being. Viewed this way, the argument appears to have smuggled existence into its

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23. In *Letters,* see the letter to William James of Jan. 8, 1880 (76–77), showing Royce had been concerned with these issues for a long time. F. H. Bradley's analysis was widely known by 1895, having first appeared in 1883 in *Principles of Logic* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1958), 1:44ff.

24. Formally, $(f \supset f) \supset t$ permitted by material implication, as in "I will give thee my daughter if thou canst touch heaven" (CG, 37). Royce, though, explains it experientially, not formally.

25. This criticism I first brought against Royce in the original version of this paper read at the annual conference of the Society for the Advancement of American Philosophy, Marquette University, 1998. I now believe I was mistaken.

premises and opened itself to the classical criticism of ontological arguments.

This line of criticism seems conclusive at first glance. But I do not think it can be made to stick. Royce, after all, was well aware of the traditional criticism widely accepted against St. Anselm's argument. He was not likely to leave himself carelessly open to that criticism; otherwise he would not have taken pains at the beginning of his proof to point out that he was starting with only the *possibility* of an Omniscient Being. I also think that he was not confusing classical and modern logic, and therefore, was not simply arguing:

$$\phi A \psi \rightarrow (x)\{\phi x \supset \psi x\} \rightarrow \phi A \psi$$

He could not have thought it valid to translate a hypothetical back into a categorical or that they mutually imply each other; the fallacy is too plain. Rather, I think Royce was calling attention to the argument's modality and to the fact that in order to be anything more than mere absence of contradiction, possibility requires something other than itself in contrast to which it is restricted in scope and rendered more than a mere possibility. In other words, any possibility over and above a mere absence of contradiction must be circumscribed by actuality. This point should strike us as familiar. It was illustrated in our discussion of unconfirmed theoretical entities as conceptual deviations from what is actually confirmed and that thus presuppose an actual reality from which they deviate.

To put it another way, Royce was appealing to a version of Aristotle's principle that possibility (or "potentiality" in Aristotle's case) presupposes actuality, a principle that has since been found by many to be essential to modal logic and possible worlds theorizing. The move was sound on Royce's part, so I do not dispute that the only meaningful sense and use we can make of possibility is in contrast to actuality. It also put him in good company from Aristotle to recent philosophers of the caliber of Alvin Plantinga and others.[26] The principle itself is a watershed in philosophy;

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26. This group includes classical metaphysicians, modern modal logicians, and possible worlds theorists alike. We find the principle in Aristotle, Aquinas, Leibniz, Kant, Hegel, and others before Royce. After Royce, see Nelson Goodman, *Fact, Fiction, and Forecast* (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1973), 57; Nicholas Rescher, *A Theory of Possibility* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1975), chap. 1; Plantinga, *The Nature of Necessity* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992), 48; and others. Most recent thinkers, except Plantinga, use the principle for purposes other than

some philosophers accept it and others do not.[27] Royce, I hold, was correct to adopt it.

Still, how he had to frame the principle in order to use it must be examined. Let us begin by emphasizing that Royce was not assuming the principle simply because he needed some sort of device to get his argument over the hump from possibility to actuality. It was forced upon him by the constraints of modality. Reflect for a moment on the options open to anyone attempting to conceive of a possibility as something more than a mere absence of contradiction. To do so requires that it be contrasted with something other than itself. The only alternatives to mere possibility as such are actuality and impossibility, the latter being no option at all. Therefore, possibility can be contrasted only with actuality.

We also should observe that to hold that possibility presupposes actuality is not to covertly assume existence. It is a discovery come upon after examining the notion of a possible somewhat and finding that it is nothing more than mere possibility (absence of contradiction) unless contrasted to something other than itself. Since actuality is the only open alternative to which possibility can be contrasted, then in this sense, possibility presupposes actuality. This is relevant to, but should not be confused with, an inference to the existence of a necessary being. So far, the arguments above show only that possibility presupposes some actuality.

In light of the above, when Royce said "every if implies an is," he was not invalidly deriving $\phi A \psi$ from $(x)\{\phi x \supset \psi x\}$. Rather, he was recognizing an inescapable fact enunciated in the principle that possibility *presupposes*

Royce's. Few if any mention Royce. There may be indirect influence through C. I. Lewis, founder of modal logic and Royce's student. See Lewis's "Logic and Pragmatism" and "Types of Order in the System Σ," in *The Collected Papers of Clarence Irving Lewis* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1970), 4, 360–70.

27. Of the several contributors to this issue of *PF* with whom I most clearly disagree about the outcome of the Royce-Howison debate, at least one of them, Auxier, has explicitly rejected this principle, and has indeed argued that the rejection of this principle is at the heart of all process philosophy. See his essay "Concentric Circles: An Exploration of Three Concepts in Process Metaphysics," *Southwest Philosophy Review* 7, 1 (January 1991): 151–72. Here Auxier argues that there is an essential difference between potentiality and possibility in relation to actuality and that this difference is what distinguishes substance metaphysics from process metaphysics. This might be the source of the disagreement about who won the debate. But Royce is not, at this point in his thought, a process philosopher, assuming we accept this account of process philosophy. Whether he later became a process philosopher is open to discussion.

actuality. To be clear, let us first reduce this to purely formal terms and then interpret it in Royce's terms. To say that something *presupposes* another is to say *p* presupposes *a* only if *p* can have no definite truth value unless *a* is true; that is, *p* is neither true nor false unless *a* is true.[28] Royce was close to this when he said, "there can be no such thing as a merely possible truth, definable apart from some actual experience" (CG, 36), and, "unless there is such an actual experience, the bare possibility expresses no truth" (CG, 38). These remarks are incomplete in that they do not mention a merely possible falsehood. But Royce was at least stating part of what is given formally above. Add the truth value "false," and we get a proposition stating a mere possibility can have no definite truth value (can be neither true nor false) apart from some other true proposition stating an actuality.

Let us now restate the above in Royce's terms of possible experience (the only sense of possibility open to us), contrast, and the correlativity thesis. We also should recall two points from our thought experiment: that possible experience cannot be PE but requires contrast and a content of possible experience, and the real cannot be a *ding an sich* but must be something open to contrast as a content of possible experience. Now, to put it directly, a possibility qua possible experience presupposes an actuality qua actual experience; or, a possible experience must be circumscribed by an actual experience. To express it fully, a possible experience can have no truth value unless an actual experience is true; that is, a possible experience can be neither true nor false unless an actual experience is true.

It is admittedly awkward to speak of experience in terms of truth or falsehood; it is more common to speak of either having or not having experience. Still, putting it as we did exposes the meaninglessness of an alleged possible experience that can be neither true nor false; to speak of such an experience is to speak of an experience of nothing at all. This is equivalent to PE in our thought experiment, which is no experience at all.

To avoid the awkwardness admitted above, let us restate our claim in experiential terms: A possible experience can have no confirmation status unless an actual experience is confirmed. That is, a possible experience can be neither confirmed nor disconfirmed unless an actual experience is confirmed. The meaninglessness of a so-called possible experience that can be neither confirmed nor disconfirmed is striking. Since confirmation status can only be determined within possible experience, and such an alleged

28. As we have seen, Royce used "involves" and "implies" interchangeably; he did not use "presuppose." But he did use a formulation very close to mine. Hence, I use "presuppose."

experience is beyond any possible confirmation status, it is PE.

Similarly, given the correlativity thesis, we should put the same point in terms of a content of possible experience. Expressed propositionally, this is to say that a proposition stating a possible content of experience can have no truth value (can be neither true nor false) apart from some other proposition that states that an actual content of experience is true. Here is the point expressed in terms of experience: A possible content of experience can be neither confirmed nor disconfirmed unless an actual content of experience is confirmed. Again, to speak of a so-called possible content of experience that can be neither confirmed nor disconfirmed is to speak of an alleged somewhat not within possible experience, plainly a contradiction. This is an absurdity correlating to those shown above only here we are left with the *ding an sich.*

In broadest terms, possibility as possible experience is circumscribed by actuality as actual experience. Again, the circumscription is not about *assuming* existence; it is about a necessary limit, a *contrast.* Royce has already shown that contrast is essential to the domain of possible experience; without it, no experience is possible. It is the same for this principle; without it, we get only PE or a *ding an sich.*

Framing possibility in terms of possible experience, in Royce's way, is itself a circumscription of possibility that specifies a domain in which possibility can be meaningfully articulated. Thus whatever is either possible or actual must be understood in terms of experience. Now, as was argued in earlier sections of this essay, the experience of finite beings is never exhaustively complete. Whether we consider the experience of finite beings individually or consensually, it is incomplete and always open to revision. It is, therefore, never fully actualized. This means that the experience of finite beings is always qualified by possibility to some degree, in terms of possible experience. It may become increasingly specified or circumscribed as we successively correct and supplement it. But for that very reason, it must still be qualified in terms of possibility. As such, it *never is identical* to an exhaustively complete experience, that is, Absolute Experience. Rather, incomplete possible experience *presupposes* complete actual experience, that is, Absolute Experience. With this, Royce is almost prepared to affirm the existence of Absolute Experience and Absolute Reality as the correlative content of that experience.

Thus, in Royce's words, "whenever we talk of reality as opposed to mere seeming, [we] assert of necessity . . . that *if* there were an organized unity of experience, [it] would have present to it as part of its content the fact whose reality we assert. The proposition cannot, as a merely hypothetical proposi-

tion, have any real truth unless to its asserted possibility there corresponds some actual experience . . . not of bare possibility, but of concretely actual experience" (CG, 37–38). And he concludes, "unless there is such an actual experience, the bare possibility expresses no truth" (CG, 38). Let us call this Royce's penultimate conclusion.

We might think that having shown that since Absolute Experience is a necessary presupposition for possible experience, and that since there are finite beings some of whose possible experiences are confirmed, then necessarily Absolute Experience exists. But Royce was not satisfied to draw that conclusion, if for no other reason than that such an inference makes it appear that Absolute Experience is contingent upon possible experience. He was more concerned that his position not be misconstrued as having come to only a *projected* ideal towards which we strive in the course of successively supplementing and confirming our experience.[29] He was determined that his position not be mistaken for Kant's view that the idea of an Absolute Experience is a mere ideal of reason that has only a "regulative" function for guiding reason in "bringing systematic unity into our knowledge" (CPuR, B601–B602, B644).

Faced with a Kantian sort of critique, Royce took one final step to complete his argument and show that any view like Kant's (KV) is entangled in paradoxes of self-reference. Think what it would mean, Royce asked, to accept such a view. It would be to acquiesce to a view that claims to necessarily restrict *all* experience within the limits of the possible experience of finite beings. Anything more is not an actual Absolute Experience, but a ideal of a completed synthesis of experience, which for finite beings is nothing more than a mere "aim" or "intent" beyond which, for all we know, is only "silence—perhaps error" (CG, 39).

Such a view, Royce held, must turn on itself. To *assume* it to be true that *all* experience is ultimately restricted to the limited and often erroneous experience of finite beings implies that the *totality* of experience is itself either given (1) as the content of some actual experience, or (2) as an actual experience of the totality of contents of experience. Either way, it cannot be an experience of a finite being. As Royce observed, even though we can know that our finite experience is limited, "still, just in so far as it is finite, it cannot know that there is no unity beyond its fragmentariness" (CG, 40). Were finite (and self-conscious) experience to assume of itself either option

29. Royce, CG, 39. Kant spoke of the regulative use of the ideas of reason as projections (CPuR, B675).

1 or 2 above, Royce argued, it would be Absolute Experience:

> For if any experience actually knew (that is, actually experienced) itself to be the whole of experience, it would have to experience how and why it were so. And if it knew this, it would be *ipso facto* an absolute, *i.e.,* a completely self-possessed, experience, for which there was no truth that was not, as such, a datum . . . to its comprehending thought. Only such an absolute experience could say with assurance: "Beyond my world there is no further experience actual." (CG, 40)

But by hypothesis, on KV there is no Absolute Experience, only a restricted manifold of finite experiences. Yet in order to claim that "the totality of experience is exhausted within the manifold of finite experience" is true, there must be an actual experience of that totality. However, an actual experience of the totality is Absolute Experience. Thus, on a view such as this, in order for KV to be true, it must assume the truth of that which KV asserts cannot be true. Conversely if that which KV asserts cannot be true must be assumed to be true, then KV itself cannot be true. Either way, KV is self-refuting, given its restrictive thesis, and thus is false.

The paradox here is analogous, in ways, to Russell's paradox, the class paradox that frustrated Frege and haunted Russell in their respective attempts to reduce mathematics to formal logic.[30] It will be instructive to examine the similar structure of the paradox Royce found in Kantian-like views on the limitations of experience. First we will consider a generic version of the class paradox (CP), then follow with five Roycean (anticipatory) variations on his theme (RT). I give CP to show the form of the paradox; each RT adds layers of content Royce dealt with in his argument.

CP: Assume (1) there is a class (C) of all classes that are not members of themselves. (2) We may ask: Is C a member of C? (3) Assume C is member

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30. Gottlob Frege, *The Basic Laws of Arithmetic,* trans. M. Furth (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1967), 127–33; these pages state his admission and analysis of the contradiction; pages 133–43 give Frege's attempted way out of the paradox. I say "haunted" Russell, for the paradox led to his theory of types, and, when that and other axioms were seen to be troubling or unnecessary, led to the ramified theory of types. Many philosophers of mathematics and logicians remain dissatisfied with both theories. For Russell's analyses see *Principles of Mathematics* (1903; New York: Norton and Company, n.d.), chaps. 6, 10, and appendix A; 79–81, 101–3, 510–12.

of C. Then (4) if C is a member of C, then C is a class that is not a member of itself; and so, (5) C is not a member of C. If we assume (6) that C is not a member of C, then (7) C is a member of itself and, by meeting the membership condition, is a member of C. Either way, contradiction results. It is not that assumptions 3 and 6 create the problem; the problem is in 1, and with issues about extension/intension on which Russell and Frege disagreed.

Now, let us apply this to the various Roycean themes and his criticism of KV. RT1 and RT2 assume KV. The last three, RT3–RT5, do not assume KV.

RT1: Suppose there is a KV experience (E) that purports to apprehend that *all* experiences are restricted within the limits of finite experience (for example, Kant's experience of his critique of the ideal of reason). If E is an experience of all experiences, E is an experience of totality. Now, all experiences about which E judges are finite (by hypothesis) and as such, are fallible, incomplete, and fragmentary, as Royce would say. Let us now ask: Does E experience itself; is it self-conscious? Since E is supposed to be of *all* experience, assume that E experiences itself, thus it is self-conscious. But if *all* experience is finite, incomplete, and fallible, then E must also be so characterized. Thus, as finite, incomplete, and so on, E cannot be an experience of all experiences. Thus E is not E, a contradiction.

RT2: Now let us assume that E does not experience itself, is not self-conscious. If E does not experience itself, then there is at least one experience that is not experienced by E. Thus, E cannot be an experience of *all* experiences. And so, E is not E; a contradiction again. Similar paradoxes can be generated for each way of being finite listed above—incomplete, fallible, and so forth—but that would be pointless.

The error here that leads to the contradiction is not the assumption that E is or is not self-conscious. Rather the error that entails the contradiction is the original hypothesis KV, namely, that *all* experience is restricted within the limits of finite experience. KV must be denied.

RT3: Assume there is an experience (E) of all experiences. Now ask: Is E such that it experiences itself? If it is not, E omits itself, hence it is not of all experiences; thus we have a contradiction

again. If E does experience itself, though, then we do not meet with contradiction. But this is so only if we deny the assumption that all experience is restricted to finite experience, that is, deny KV. Are we entitled to deny this assumption? Yes, for we have already seen that KV leads directly to a contradiction in RT1 and RT2.

Variations RT1 to RT3 give the gist of the argument. RT3 actually gives Royce's ultimate conclusion. But to make sure, let us precisely lay out the two options in RT3. RT4 and RT5 neatly map onto CP with one critical exception in RT5. As in the last option of RT3, RT5 entails no contradiction.

RT4: Assume (1) there is an experience (E) of all experiences not experiences of themselves, that is, an E of all nonself-conscious (nsc) experiences. Now ask: (2) Is E a member of the class of nsc experiences; that is, without experiencing itself (nsc-ly), does E experience all nsc experiences? (3) Assume E is a member. Then (4) if E is a member of the class (that is, if E does experience all nsc experiences without experiencing itself), then (5) E is nsc. But either (6) E experiences itself because it is the experience of *all* nsc experiences; or (7) is not the experience of *all* nsc experiences since, by 5, E omits one nsc experience, which is again a contradiction. Contradiction results even if we supplement 1 of RT4 with an exclusivity clause: an E of all *and only* those experiences not experiences of themselves, that is, an E of all and *only* nsc experiences. Thus, an E that is assumed to be of all experiences and is itself nsc must be rejected.

RT5: Assume (1) an E of all experiences not experiences of themselves, that is, an E of all nsc experiences. Again ask: (2) Is E a member of the class of nsc experiences; that is, does E, without experiencing itself (nsc-ly), experience all nsc experiences? (3) This time, assume E is not a member. Then (4) if E is not a member of the class of nsc experiences (that is, if E does not experience all nsc experiences without experiencing itself—that is, does not nsc-ly experience all nsc experiences), then (5) E is not nsc; thus (6) E self-consciously experiences all nsc experiences. Here, however, no contradiction results.

In RT5, conclusion 6 affirms 3, and is compatible with assumption 1. We could create a contradiction here, but only if 1 was framed exclusively: an E of all *and only* experiences not experiences of themselves. However, there is no reason to assume an exclusivity clause since such a clause leads to contradiction. At any rate, such a clause is just a way of sneaking KV back into the equation, and there is no reason to do that since KV itself is contradictory. Thus we must deny any such clause in regard to RT5. There can be an experience that self-consciously experiences all other experiences. In fact, since all options except RT3 and RT5 have been undone by contradiction, we must affirm that not only can there be, but there must be an E that experiences all experiences and is self-conscious.

When we consider this conclusion together with Royce's penultimate conclusion that possible experience presupposes actual experience, it follows that there actually exists an Absolute Experience (AE) correlative to reality as a content of that experience. Royce put it best when he concluded:

> To assert a truth as more than possible is to assert the concrete reality of an experience that knows this truth. Hence—and here, indeed, is the conclusion of the whole matter,—the very effort hypothetically to assert that the whole world of experience is a world of fragmentary and finite experience is an effort involving a contradiction. Experience must constitute, in its entirety, one self-determined and consequently absolute and organised whole. (CG, 41)

With this, Royce arrived at the experiential counterpart correlative to the statement of reality with which we began this section. Such an experience, being an experience of all possible and actual experience, and being self-conscious, is an Absolute Experience, hence an Omniscient Being. Moreover, its existence is necessary. Consider it for a moment. There can be no such thing as "possibility as such," or "possibility of nothing in particular at all," or "mere possibility." So possibility, in order to be even minimally meaningful, must be expressed in terms of possible experience. But the latter necessarily presupposes actual Absolute Experience as above described. Thus this Omniscient Being is a necessary being. Howison, as we know, tilted at this conclusion. But before we return to our remarks on Howison's criticism, let us make some final points on our analysis of Royce's argument.

There are many points that could be drawn from analyzing Royce's use of the paradox of self-reference in contrast to Russell's paradox that cannot be explored here. The main ones, however, are the following two.

First, the parallel between Russell's thought on classes and Royce's on the experience of all experiences is such that I suspect there may be no more striking way to show the force of Royce's argument against KV. The reception of and response to Russell's paradox was such as to inspire new lines of research and a large part of the past century of philosophy. A similar recognition of the relevance of Royce's discoveries in his respective areas of inquiry is past due.

We also should note that, in RT3 and RT5, the parallel to CP breaks down; that is, the paradox of self-reference does not arise. This is because in these variations, we forego assuming KV, a necessarily false thesis that imposes indefensible constraints on experience and that cannot adequately account for self-consciousness. The lesson here seems to be this: When we assume a concept of something that is inherently finite (finite experience, as proposed by Kant and others), and assign it a function that is ultimate and beyond its scope, it generates paradoxes of self-reference. In other words—and in regard to the question of experience as Royce dealt with it—we meet with such paradoxes when we take finite experience as paradigm and assign it a capacity beyond its scope (such as the capacity to establish necessarily the ultimate limits of itself). This is to elevate finite experience to the function and level of Absolute Experience. Since contradiction is the result of doing so, we should avoid doing so.

Finally, it should be clear from the above that Royce had not argued merely to Kant's "original synthetic unity of apperception" and then mistaken it for Absolute Experience, or God. Nothing so logically pernicious was going on in his argument. Yet that is all that Howison believed Royce had achieved. In fact, Royce showed that it is impossible to stay within the constraints of KV. As we have shown, Royce was subject to neither the "transcendental illusion" nor to Howison's misinterpretation. Howison's other criticisms had their force, but his main assault on Royce does not stand. This and Howison's other criticisms we will take up below.

VIII. Critical Interlude II

We have already commented on Howison's main criticisms of Royce in section VI. We now may draw a general conclusion regarding how Howison understood Royce and consider some of his other criticisms.

The basic error in Howison's understanding of the dispute was to think that Royce had steadfastly held to a Kantian line of transcendental argument, deduced nothing but Kant's notion of transcendental "original synthetic unity of apperception" (CPuR, B131–33), and then misidentified it with God (CG, 120ff.). In other words, he believed that Royce had fallen for the

"transcendental illusion" Kant had warned against (CPuR, B352).[31] This would explain why he thought it devastating to Royce's position when he asked:

> *Whose* omniscience is it that judges the ignorance to be real?—*whose* absolute experience pronounces the less organised experience to be really fallacious? Well,—whosoever it may be, it is certainly acting in and through *my* judgment; if I am the thinker of that argument; and in every case it is *I* who pronounce sentence on myself as really ignorant . . . it is *I* who am . . . the only direct authority, for the connexion put between the reality of the ignorance or of the fallacious experience on the one hand and the reality of the implicated omniscience on the other. (CG, 108–109)

Had Howison been correct, it would have been Royce's view, and not KV, that became tangled in the paradox of self-reference. As we have seen, this is not the case. Alas, since Howison himself explicitly adopted KV, his remark above might be more fittingly applied to his own view. Royce's argument does not imply that he or any finite being has Absolute Experience when they discover the limits of their various beliefs or outright error in their own direct experiences.

What exposes the error in finite judgment to finite beings is not that we have somehow risen to the level of Absolute Experience. Rather, we discover our ignorance in the incompleteness of our knowledge by the failure of our experiences to remain coherent, the pragmatic failure or partial success of a theory, the confirmation/disconfirmation of theoretical ideas, or the failure to reach consensus. The failure to achieve *coherence* for finite experience is itself the evidence that our ideas have not achieved a complete *correspondence* to reality.[32]

Yet, given that the real is such only as a content of and correlative to experience, then that reality of which we seek a more complete grasp already exists as a content of experience—not ours, but of Absolute Experience. The real is that to which we seek to adjust our experience and ideas, and as such it exists as it does regardless of our finite, incomplete grasp of it; the real is

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31. Specifically, the second and third paralogisms, the fourth antinomy, and the ideal of pure reason. Also see B600–602, B604, and B607.

32. This is a common misunderstanding held about idealism; it is mistakenly thought that idealism eschews correspondence. Berkeley, McTaggart, Kant, and even Hegel retain a place for truth as correspondence in their theories.

not contingent on finite beings. Still, since the real exists only in so far as it is the content of experience, and thus must be experienced, it can only be such for an Absolute Experience.

Complete coherence, and therefore *complete* correspondence, characterize Absolute Experience, not our finite experience. We judge on the basis of incomplete experience and limited knowledge; we never escape the incompleteness of our knowledge. In fact, we do not even have complete knowledge of ourselves or our fellows. Yet, incomplete as our knowledge may be, it is enough to be sure that we have some knowledge of ourselves and other selves.

Similarly, to claim to have proved the existence of an Omniscient Being is neither to claim nor imply that one has exhaustive knowledge of such a being, much less is an omniscient being oneself. But even if one lacks exhaustive knowledge of the being whose existence is in question, one might know enough to know *that* such a being exists. As was explained in section III above, ignorance of the complete essence of God does not imply complete ignorance of God. We may not comprehensively know *what* God is in God's entirety, but that does not imply that we cannot know *that* God exists. We may indeed know enough to deduce the existence of such a being. Royce thought only that we knew enough to prove the existence of God. Accordingly, he sought only to prove *that* such a being exists, not *what* it is in its entirety.

When Howison asked, "*whose* omniscience" and "*whose* absolute experience," and decided that it was "*my* argument" and "*my* judgement" and "*I* who am the authority," he revealed his mistake in that he wrongly assumed that Royce's argument was based upon and constrained within Kantian presuppositions. He failed to see the modal character of Royce's argument. Thus his main criticisms, in the end, were beside the point.

On the other hand, Howison was right to observe that Royce had not shown that the Omniscient Being whose existence he had argued for was the God of the traditional western faiths. Howison noted that in arriving at "absolute experience," Royce omitted such traditional attributes as divine grace, love, and fatherhood of Christ (CG, 94, 96). The observation is true enough; Royce's argument neither relied on nor deduced these attributes of God. At most, Royce insisted on the similarity of his argument to St. Thomas's proofs to fix a connection to the traditional idea of God as expressed by faith (CG, 49). If Royce was referring to St. Thomas's "Third Way" (the argument from contingent to necessary being), then I think he was right to see a similarity. But this is not in itself enough to establish the connection he sought.

In fairness to Royce, though, if the issue was over traditional attributes of God, his argument was based on one of the traditional attributes, namely, omniscience. Moreover, nothing in his argument necessarily precluded ascribing other traditional attributes to God on some other basis such as faith or revelation. In fact, his arguments concerning the centrality of contrast and that self-consciousness requires social consciousness suggest a way of understanding the traditional doctrine of the Trinity. This is a theological matter on which I can offer only the suggestion and must leave for a properly trained theologian.

In the end, though, the demonstration of all of the traditional attributes of God was not the issue at hand; it just was not Royce's job. The issue was to prove that a necessary being, God, exists. And on this count, Royce produced what he was invited to do. Thus Howison's objection on this point, although true, seems to have little bite.

One final criticism that Howison leveled seemed to find its mark, in that it motivated Royce to produce a 219-page essay to supplement to his original lecture. Howison charged that the monism inherent in Royce's conception of Absolute Experience undermined the possibility of the existence of a plurality of individuated, self-determined, free persons, and undermined personal moral responsibility (CG, 111–13).

Howison was correct, of course, to argue that Royce had not explicitly addressed these issues in his argument for the existence of God. And Royce, for his part, knew that he had not directly addressed them in his Berkeley lecture. However, this criticism was based on Howison's belief that Royce's position was necessarily either pantheistic or solipsistic, a charge we have already seen to be false. As was shown above, given the essential function of contrast in his analysis of experience and theory of intersubjectivity, Royce was not open to either charge. These two points in his doctrine provided for the possibility of individual persons. Still, to allow for the individuation of persons is not to explain the possibility of their freedom or responsibility. Royce realized this and set to work to show how individual freedom and responsibility is possible and compatible with his view.

Thus in this last respect, Howison's criticism served a valuable purpose. Most of his criticisms, we have seen, were wide of their mark. The questions of personal freedom and responsibility inspired Royce to produce a more complete account of the individual self, one that more explicitly accounted for moral freedom. Nevertheless, I would maintain that this was a new task that was secondary to the primary issue of the Berkeley debate.

With respect to the primary question, Royce took the most direct route to his goal. The question of whether Royce's proof itself is conclusive turns

on whether or not one accepts the principle of idealism, the correlativity thesis. This is where it is likely to be most vulnerable. As I have tried to show, however, if possibility must be interpreted in terms of possible experience, then to conclude anything more about reality and experience over and above their mere possibility, we must accept the correlativity thesis. If that principle holds, the proof is sound.

My case for this conclusion rests on my attempt to reformulate Royce's argument as a modal proof. Such arguments are notoriously difficult and often harbor twists and turns that go unsuspected by the one using a modal proof. My interpretation, therefore, may be confronted in ways I was unable to see. If so, that would be my failing, not Royce's. In any case, should my statement of Royce's argument be undermined, that would still leave Royce's statement itself to be contended with. But is that not how it has always been with the ontological argument—that it is attacked from one angle only to be reaffirmed from another?

IX. Conclusion

Earlier in this essay, I remarked that I regarded the value of the debate as less a matter of who won than of which position held more promise. It should be clear that we must decide in favor of Royce. This decision is not based simply on my conclusion about the success of the argument or the failure of Howison's criticisms. Rather, it is based on the fact that Royce's way of framing the issue and thinking his way through it had consequences beyond the issue at hand. Those consequences I have tried to make plain throughout this essay. By emphasizing its modal character, Royce's way of putting the issue connected him very clearly to some of the most important philosophers of the past and some of the most important philosophers and issues that were to dominate the twentieth century.

There are obvious connections to Aristotle, Anselm and Aquinas, Kant and Hegel. But putting Royce's argument in modal terms suggests reexamining his predecessors in those terms as well, particularly Kant and Hegel. That Aristotle and the two medieval philosophers can be examined modally is not new since their concern with and work on modality is explicit in their texts. But in the case of Kant and Hegel, it often goes unnoticed that they too were addressing modal issues. Idealism cannot be fully understood if we insist on reducing it to the single thesis that ultimately there is one basic substance, mind. Idealism is a modal thesis.

The modal character of Royce's argument also suggests connections between Royce and his successors and their issues. Marcel made the connection between Royce and twentieth-century existentialism easy for us; he

admitted it, appealed to Royce in his own works, and wrote a book on Royce's metaphysics. But Royce's relation to the issues that motivated such philosophers as Russell and Frege, possible worlds theorists, and modal logicians seems to have gone largely unnoticed. It is hoped that the discussion above of Royce's use of both modal concepts and the paradox of self-reference helps fill this gap and suggest new lines of research. PF