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Josiah Royce and Communal Semiotics

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Josiah Royce (1855-1916) was one of the most prominent philosophers of the so-called 'golden age' of classical American philosophy. As a leading member of the Harvard philosophy department, he was in the unique position of publicly presenting an absolute idealism during the period of the development of the counter-movements of pragmatism and instrumentalism. Consequently, he was forced to defend his program against the sustained attacks of James, Peirce, and Dewey. At the same time, however, he accommodated the teleological and voluntaristic elements of pragmatism to his unique form of idealism, and even went so far as to call his own perspective an 'absolute pragmatism'. His debates with James in the early 1900s on the problems of consciousness and the nature of ontological plurality compelled him to become sensitive to forms of difference and temporality that lay outside the atemporal realm of the absolute self.

Of even greater importance was his openness to the early semiotics of Peirce and to the strategies of abduction and interpretive musement that supported Peirce's theories of method. Royce had numerous and detailed conversations with Peirce about many aspects of his philosophy, and Peirce repaid the compliment by reading and analyzing, once in print, Royce's major works. Just recently, Peirce's missing letter to Royce of June 30, 1913, briefly dealing with Royce's 1913 work *The Problem of Christianity* (Clendenning and Oppenheim 1990), was discovered and published. This letter, to be quoted from later, indicates that in spite of his serious illness Peirce was still committed to his dialogue with Royce. Around 1912 Royce carefully read Peirce's early (1860s) papers on the self and semiotics and made these essays central to his own conception of the semiotic community. In addition, Royce read and appreciated Peirce's 1908 'A neglected argument for the reality of God'. Royce quickly recognized the profound and far-reaching implications of Peirce's writings and used them to develop a theological and social theory of sign systems that not only augmented Peirce, but, in several key respects, went beyond Peirce's formulation. In particular, Royce broadened semiotics by locating it within a much more complex and theologically sensitive theory of interpretive

communities that showed the intimate correlation between semiotics and hermeneutics (Corrington 1987).

It is important to stress that Royce was in no sense a mere follower of Peirce. His own philosophical perspective was developed before his contact with Peirce, and owes its impetus more directly to Kant and post-Kantian idealism. It should be remembered that Royce spent a year studying in Germany before completing his graduate education at Johns Hopkins. His dissertation, submitted in 1878, was an analysis of post-Kantian epistemologies and their attendant theories of self-consciousness. In many respects, both Peirce and Royce represent developments within Kantianism, even though both thinkers made radical critiques of such Kantian presuppositions as the thing in itself and the corollary phenomenal/noumenal distinction. While Peirce transformed transcendental categories into the logic of semiosis (Apel 1981), Royce rejected the finite perspective of Kant and located the categories within an atemporal absolute self that contained all of the contents of finite minds (Kuklick 1972).

To get a clear picture of Royce's unique contributions to semiotics, it is first necessary to give a brief account of his philosophical evolution. Three fairly distinct periods can be distinguished in Royce's work, each using a dominant metaphor to exhibit the correlation of finite and infinite minds. In his first period, roughly between 1885 and 1895, Royce uses the metaphor of *parallelism* as it pertains to two distinct forms of self-consciousness to detail the way a finite thought will correspond to the already realized idea in the mind of the absolute. In his second period, roughly between 1896 and 1911, Royce uses the metaphor of *mirroring* to show how one form of self-consciousness enters into an infinite self-representative series in which each member of the series mirrors all of the others. In his final period, roughly from 1912 until his death in 1916, Royce uses the metaphor or concept of an *infinite interpretive community* that articulates and ramifies signs as it moves toward semiotic transparency. During this last period Royce integrates Peirce's semiotic theories with his own conception of Christianity and transforms his own absolute idealism to allow for plurality and the time process. In addition, Royce's unique logical system, termed 'system Sigma', supports his semiotic theory and grafts it to a metaphysical structure of ordered series (Oppenheim 1987). Royce's contributions to semiotic theory thus emerge from his last period particularly as embodied in *The Problem of Christianity* (1913). Before detailing his later semiotic theories, I will examine his two earlier

periods. The focus will be on those elements that point directly toward his later semiotics of the community.

The Parallelism Between Finite and Infinite Ideas

In 1885 Royce published his first major book, *The Religious Aspect of Philosophy* (hereafter abbreviated as *RAP*), which presents a series of arguments for the existence of an absolute mind. The first half of the book deals with the relation between religion and ethics, while the second half deals with the epistemological foundations of absolute idealism. The second half of the text is the more relevant for our purposes.

Royce rejects realism, with its belief that thoughts correspond to an independently real external object, in favor of a modified Kantianism. Like Kant, he insists that there can be no reality that is not part of some experience. The 'postulates' attempt to go beyond immediate experience into the realm of the 'non-data' and thereby seek the conditions for the possibility of experience. The postulates must both order experience and account for a realm outside of finite experience. By definition, such postulates of pure reason cannot attain warrant within experience, and thus seem to have a dubious epistemological status. Experience cannot function without the postulates, yet it cannot, on its own grounds, vindicate the truth of the postulates. Royce attempts to solve this problem by arguing that the postulates are directed not toward independent objects, but toward other fulfilled thoughts in the mind of the absolute. The finite postulates generated by the human mind receive their warrant insofar as they parallel the identical (although atemporal) thought in the absolute mind. Royce makes the argument from the negative case of an illusion:

An illusion in my consciousness will mean a failure to correspond with the world-consciousness. A truth for my consciousness will be a relation $a : b$ that corresponds with some relation $A : B$ in the world-consciousness. But for the world-consciousness itself there will be no question of its own truth or falsity. It will be for and in itself. (1885: 348)

A finite thought is a mere illusion insofar as it fails to parallel a given thought in the world-consciousness. Note that Royce does not refer to an independent state of

affairs or an empirical causal datum. My thoughts correspond to thoughts in the world-consciousness rather than to anything outside experience. Royce can retain his view that nothing outside of experience can exist by locating all finite experience, which is fragmentary and time-bound, within infinite and atemporal experience.

Royce deepens his argumentative structure by appealing to the difficulty involved in knowing another finite mind. He takes as his example the impossibility of one person knowing the true internal reality of another. His two imaginary figures, John and Thomas, are asked to find each other's true ideas. What quickly emerges is a series of ideal selves that are projected onto the embodied but elusive other self. John has an idea of Thomas that may or may not correspond to the true Thomas. Thomas, of course, has an idea of the idea that John has of him, and this idea may itself be false. These idealized selves can, in principle, multiply indefinitely with no resolution of the problem of their truth. Since one finite mind cannot enter into another, a non-finite mind must somehow intervene to show a 'third' possibility that compares the first two (i.e., the initial ideas John and Thomas have of each other) for accuracy. Royce's proposed solution is as follows:

Suppose then that we drop the natural presupposition, and say that John and Thomas are both actually present to and included in a third and higher thought. To explain the possibility of error about matters of fact seemed hard, because of the natural postulate that time is a pure succession of separate moments, so that the future is now as future non-existent, and so that judgments about the future lack real objects, capable of identification. Let us then drop this natural postulate, and declare time once for all present in all its moments to an universal all-inclusive thought. And to sum up, let us overcome all our difficulties by declaring that all the many Beyonds, which single significant judgments seem vaguely and separately to postulate, are present as fully realized intended objects to the unity of an all-inclusive, absolutely clear, universal, and conscious thought, of which all judgments, true or false, are but fragments, the whole being at once Absolute Truth and Absolute Knowledge. (1885: 422-23)

The absolute mind represents the realm of the 'third' and realized thought that can compare the ideas John and Thomas have of each other with the truth behind them. Since we cannot enter into another finite mind—not to mention an independently

real external world—through the forms of finite experience, we must do so through the third possibility held out by the absolute. Finite ideas, of the form $a : b$, receive their warrant when they are found to parallel the infinite thought $A : B$. The absolute can see directly into the minds of John and Thomas, and can provide the means whereby these minds can overcome their finite limitations. Royce does not tell us, however, just how this process is supposed to work in practice. At this point he is mainly concerned with giving an epistemological argument for the necessity of the absolute.

There can be no error if there is no possibility of absolute truth. Royce's famous 'argument from error' insists that it is logically impossible to distinguish truth from error outside of an atemporal absolute that sees all sides of a given question simultaneously. This absolute is an atemporal unity that stands as the guarantor for all knowledge claims. Errors are shown to be such only because of the mediating 'third' idea that is part of the internal and fulfilled life of the absolute.

Royce is not only concerned with establishing the epistemological necessity of a unified absolute; he also wants to establish a locus for the unification of human wills. Royce was a voluntarist throughout his career and insisted that thoughts were driven toward some kind of teleological fulfillment. A given thought is not only a plan for action (a position he accepted as it was later presented by James), but a willful movement toward an ideal state of consummation. The self is unified through the will and not through some kind of static substance. The absolute therefore serves as the ultimate and unified will that can govern and tame all finite and fragmented wills. Royce concludes *RAP* with the claim that the finite self can transcend evil by entering into the goodness of the absolute, which compels us to recognize that evil is but a shadow of the greater reality of the good.

Royce's early philosophy does not contain an explicit semiotic, but it does prepare the ground for what is to follow. This ground becomes clearer when we see how he begins to shift toward a social conception of reality that modifies and transforms his monistic absolutism. As his thought developed Royce came to see the universe as a series of minds, all of whom contribute to the fullness of the absolute. His voluntarism provided the means whereby he could develop a theory of individuation. The will, rather than form or substance, becomes the principle that separates one self from another. By the end of the 1890s Royce had moved toward a richer metaphysics that would ultimately make it possible for him to develop a social semiotic.

His next major work in philosophy, written after his historical study of California and his only novel, appeared in 1892. *The Spirit of Modern Philosophy* (hereafter abbreviated as *SMP*) acknowledged his debt to the Kantian and post-Kantian traditions. In this work he offers brilliant exegeses of Kant, Hegel, Fichte, and Schopenhauer, and shows the inner unity of the post-Kantian tradition. For our purposes, two conceptions are important: his emergent social conception of the self and his distinction between what he calls the 'world of description' and the 'world of appreciation'. Both conceptions point toward his growing sense of the hermeneutic and semiotic possibilities within finite human experience.

Self-knowledge cannot be envisioned as an atemporal intuition of a static substance; it involves a time process in which numerous aspects of the self enter into dialogue with each other. The given individual is thus the locus of part-selves and the place where other selves enter into its own evolving life. In a sense, the self is a monad with windows that lives out a life parallel to other selves. In *SMP* Royce states:

In order to know myself at all, I must live out an indefinitely numerous series of acts and moments. I must become many selves and live in their union and coherence.... All these acts, we see, involve at least the appeal to many selves, to society, to other spirits. We have no life alone. There is no merely inner self. There is the world of selves. (1892: 209)

By 1892 Royce had become sensitive to the fact that the self is constituted by numerous and somewhat distinct selves that operate independently. At the same time, however, these fragmentary part-selves enter into the full constitution of the individual and work in concert to provide a rich internal life. By the time Royce encountered Peirce's semiotic in 1912, he had already laid the foundations for the semiotic theory of the correlation of part-selves to the integral self. Both the absolute and the finite human subject can be understood to be loci of numerous part-selves.

In examining human experience, Royce concluded that there were two fundamental dimensions or worlds exhibited in the knowledge relation. The first he termed the 'world of description'. This world is that of external spatio-temporal or phenomenal interaction, and corresponds to the world of science. The second he termed the 'world of appreciation'. This is the world of immediacy, and does not

involve an external referent for its ideas. The human self must live within the tensions between these two worlds. The world of appreciation is the more important of the two because it is closer to the inner life of the absolute. The world of description is a kind of shorthand for the much richer and fulfilled world of appreciation. The finite self relies on the external world of description because it only has fleeting glimpses into the world of appreciation. For the absolute there is only the world of appreciation, a world that contains all of reality in atemporal immediacy. Royce contrasts these two worlds as follows:

The world in its wholeness appears to us in space and time as a describable system of phenomena, bound together by rigid law [world of description]. That, however, just this system of phenomena, these atoms, these physical laws, this order of nature should be there, rather than some other equally describable system, with other atoms and other types of motion,—this seems to us the mere fact, the gigantic caprice of nature. Viewing this same caprice in its other aspect, namely, as a system of appreciable truth and of the inner ideals of the Logos, we do not indeed get rid of the aspect of what Hegel called *Unmittelbarkeit* or 'immediacy' about the world. It is what it is. So the Logos, from eternity, and in one organic all-embracing act, constitutes his system of appreciative truth. (1892: 428-29)

In the world of appreciation we gain access to the meaning and intelligibility of the world. In the world of scientific law, also referred to as the realm of the scientific 'postulates', we only get a series of phenomena that have no ultimate explanation. Our brief and fleeting glimpses into the world of appreciation, the world of atemporal immediacy and ultimacy, give us clues about the nature of the absolute. The human realms of appreciation are thus microcosmic analogues of the absolute's world of appreciation.

By the conclusion of his early period Royce had probed into the plurality of selves within nature and within the individual self. He had deepened his grasp of the knowledge relation by augmenting his metaphor of parallelism—that is, of the $a : b$ and $A : B$ relations—with the distinction between the external world of description and the internal (and fulfilled) world of appreciation. The $a : b$ relation exists in a fragmentary way within the world of description, while the $A : B$ relation exists in pure form in the world of appreciation. Without these important innovations he could not have worked his way toward his mature social semiotic,

which relies upon the conception of part-selves and upon the teleological structure of the life of appreciation.

His next important developmental phase came out of his sustained encounter with the mathematical theories of Cantor and Dedekind (Flower and Murphey 1977). These theories helped him to see the self as a member of an infinite self-representative series, and thus as a true microcosm of the intelligible world of the absolute.

The Mirroring Relation and the Actual Infinite

The transition between the first and second phases of Royce's development can be seen most clearly in his 1897 essay, 'The absolute and the individual', written as a supplementary piece to his 1895 work *The Conception of God* (Royce 1897), which is an extended analysis of the problems of the self and the absolute. *The Conception of God* argued for an atemporal absolute as the foundation of all experience. Royce's work received sharp criticism from his former Berkeley professor, Le Conte, who accused him of ignoring human freedom and the principle of individuation. Royce wrote the supplementary essay to answer these criticisms and to advance his own insights into the legitimate role of plurality within the life of the absolute. The 1897 piece is thus especially important, because it is a direct reply to a serious critic who recognized Royce's vulnerability to the charges of a sterile monism—charges that were echoed by James. In responding to Le Conte, Royce was compelled to deepen his social and communal sense, thus preparing the way for his later metaphysics of the community of interpreters. The supplementary essay thus marks the transition between the two arch metaphors of parallelism and mirroring.

Royce began to introduce mathematical images into his argument to augment his earlier stress on post-Kantian conceptions of self-consciousness. If the absolute is a self, it is also a system, not unlike a system of numbers which have internal and logical connections. The mathematical conception of an infinite series, each member of which could generate the others when proper rules were applied, struck Royce as a perfect model for the internal life of the absolute. He maintained that the absolute was a total system:

The concept of the Group, in modern mathematics, precisely corresponds, in particular instances, to the idealist's conception of the Total System of possible thoughts. A Group is a system of ideal objects such that, by a definite construction process, you can proceed from any member of the Group to any other, while this process, if exhaustively carried out, defines all possible objects that fall within the Group. (1897: 208)

A thought in a finite mind is thus analogous to a numerical member of a group (class). Each group member has a definite place within the group and yet points to all other members of the group. Through a process of generation, the total system can be constructed from one or more members. As we will see shortly, this notion of an actual infinite became central to Royce's second philosophical phase and freed him from his earlier notion of a simple atemporal self-consciousness. Each member of the Group mirrors the totality in its own way and has its own principle of individuation.

As noted, Royce based his principle of individuation on the will. Each self has a series of purposes and struggles to attain unity for its life. The divine will serves to unify all finite human wills so that each can participate in the growth of purpose in the universe. No two wills are identical, and each preserves its unique features. Royce answers the charge of monism, and the corollary denial of finite freedom, by insisting that no will, when genuine, is to be denied by the absolute (God). Finite purposes enrich the divine life and make the universe more vital than it would otherwise have been (Oppenheim 1967).

The 1897 supplementary essay, 'The absolute and the individual', prepared the way for the more detailed study of class or group theory that appeared at the end of the first volume of Royce's 1899 *The World and the Individual* (hereafter abbreviated as *WI*). In this massive two-volume work Royce works through what he calls 'the four historical conceptions of Being': the realistic, the mystical, the critical, and that of his own absolute pragmatism. Realism asserts that the object exists in full independence of the subject and can be empirically explored. Mysticism effaces the subject/object diremption to attain a kind of premature unity. The critical (Kantian) conception lives in the world of postulates and denies that we can gain access to the real in itself. The final conception of Being, that of absolute pragmatism, insists that thought corresponds to its object precisely because its object is another thought. Once again Royce argues that finite minds are isomorphic with the mind of the absolute. For our purposes, the most important part of

WI is the supplementary essay, 'The One, the many, and the infinite', which uses mathematical theories of the actual infinite to criticize Bradley's notion that relations cannot be real. Royce was concerned with showing that both relata and relations are equally real and equally important in the life of the absolute.

The absolute is an infinite multitude in which each member is determinately real. Bradley's denial of relation, on the grounds that the ascription of any relation (or quality) to the absolute would entail an infinite fissure or regress (a classic 'third man' argument), is challenged on the grounds that all relations belong within an interlocking system of mutually illuminating moments. Relations are purposes and hence active in determining the shape of the absolute. Bradley can reject relations because he did not understand the centrality of will in the life of the absolute.

The infinite (absolute) is a self-representative system and not a static form of detached and non-relational self-consciousness. Royce relies on Cantor's theory of the *Mächtigkeiten*, or the analysis of grades of infinite multitude, to show how any given number contributes to an infinite iterative series. Using an image that also appears in Peirce, he envisions a perfect map of England that must have all details in common with the country itself. Upon completion of the map it is necessary to add a copy of the now completed map to the original map, since the map is now a genuine and determinate part of England. Of course, the miniature representation of the original map must itself be represented as it is now a part of the world of England. Yet this new map must itself be represented as well, as it too is a part of the map and therefore of England. This process generates an actual infinite in which there can be no last map. England functions as the first member of the series and is not generated from any other member. The important point, however, is that each representation (map) is a perfect mirror of all other maps, and thus of England. Any member of the series of maps can be extracted from its series and used to generate every other member of the series. The series itself is constituted by incremental grades of infinite magnitude.

Each image in the map series is distinct and internally self-representative. Reality as a whole is an infinite self-representative system, and is thus fully knowable in its plenitude. Since Royce early on linked the concept of 'self' to that of the 'absolute', it follows that the self, whether finite or infinite, must be a system analogous to the map(s) of England. Royce states:

And, indeed, if the Self is anything final at all, it is certainly in its complete expression (although of course not in our own psychological life from instant to instant) a self-representative system; and its metaphysical fate stands or falls with the possibility of such systems. (1899: 513)

Needless to say, no living self will recognize immediately that it is in fact an infinite system. Logical analyses must show the self that its particular psychological states are themselves fragments of the absolute and can, when penetrated to their core, illuminate the internal life of the absolute. This daring claim signals Royce's commitment to the internal correlation of human and divine minds so that my thoughts are themselves thoughts within God.

The world of the absolute is, as noted, the world of purposes. If you detach thoughts from purposes, as did Bradley, you cannot understand the correlation between the finite and the infinite. Each self is linked to the infinite self-representative life of the absolute through its specific form of mirroring, in which its purposes help to fulfill and to illuminate the divine life. Thus Royce wished to link purposes with his conception of ordered systems:

Hence, for us, the Absolute must be a self-representative ordered system, of *Kette*, of purposes fulfilled; and the ordered system in question must be infinite. I accept this consequence. The Absolute must have the form of a Self.... And these aspects enable me to conceive the Absolute not only as infinite, but also as determinate, and not only as a form, but as a life. (1899: 545)

The relation between a finite self and the infinite is not quite a semiotic relation because it remains too closely tied to a kind of self-identity, a form of relation that Peirce would call degenerate secondness (*CP* 1.365). A finite purpose (and all thoughts are purposes) mirrors the infinite purposive series within which it finds itself. Even though the thought points to the infinite in some respect, it does not generate interpretants or further signs. The metaphor of 'mirroring' does not lend itself to a full semiotic articulation because it closes off the kind of asymmetrical relations necessary for the generation of a series of interpretants. Royce had to free himself from his commitment to total symmetrical isomorphism before he could understand the deeper triadic logic behind semiosis. Further, he had to deepen his sense of the time process and thus come to see how an infinite series of signs can

emerge into its own outside of the internal mind of the absolute. Yet his work with mathematical conceptions of infinite and continuous series did enrich his understanding of the internal life of the self and its forms of representation. By the turn of the century he had moved decisively beyond a kind of neo-Hegelianism toward the social and communal view that would enable him to build a forceful and compelling semiotic theory of actual communal life.

The Infinite Interpretive Community

Royce's breakthrough to a fully semiotic perspective occurred in the years 1911 and 1912, when he carefully restudied Peirce's early semiotic essays. In *The Problem of Christianity* of 1913 (hereafter abbreviated as *PC*), he lists five of Peirce's essays that had the greatest influence on his own semiotic theory: 'On a new list of categories' (1867), 'Questions concerning certain faculties claimed for man' (1868), 'Some consequences of four incapacities' (1868), 'Grounds of validity of the laws of logic: Further consequences of four incapacities' (1868), and 'Sign' (1901) from volume two of Baldwin's *Dictionary of Philosophy and Psychology*. In addition to his fresh reacquaintance with Peirce, Royce engaged in a lengthy and detailed study of the Bible with particular attention to the epistles of St. Paul. The combination of Peirce's early semiotic with the theological insights of St. Paul produced a powerful and highly nuanced framework that remains one of the most important achievements of the classical American philosophical tradition (Clendenning 1985; Oppenheim 1976). Because of his theological sensitivities, Royce was able to invest his theory of the semiotic community with an ethical and religious core that proved to be deeper and more subtle than that provided by Peirce. In particular, his concept of the 'community of interpretation' advanced the Peircean problematic into new areas of inquiry and analysis, thus laying the foundations for a general social hermeneutic (Apel 1981; Corrington 1987).

PC consists of sixteen lectures originally given at Oxford University between January 13 and March 6, 1913. They were published shortly thereafter with minimal changes. As noted, Peirce received a copy of the book from the author and made brief comments in his above-mentioned letter to Royce of June 30, 1913 about the concept of the triad and its relation to semiosis. Unfortunately, we do not know if Peirce was able to finish the book, as he merely states:

I began your book with great interest but was obliged to lay it aside until I can do more in a day than I can yet. You may be very sure that I shall study it unless my end overtakes me, on which missing that reading would be one of my principle regrets. (Clendenning and Oppenheim 1990: 143)

One can perhaps assume that Peirce looked at the parts of the text dealing directly with his own work. For our purposes it is important to note that Royce fully acknowledged his debt to Peirce, but was also very clear about the ways in which he wanted to move beyond or away from Peirce's conception of the life of signs. In particular, he does not concern himself with the various forms of reference pertaining to sign function, and has nothing to say about the division of signs into the triad of icon, index, and symbol. Royce was far more interested in what happens to a given sign when it enters into public forms of analysis and comparison and thereby receives new meanings from the ongoing community of interpreters.

The basic question behind *PC* is that of modernity. How can the so-called 'modern man' still affirm the metaphysical beliefs of Christianity in the light of both higher-critical studies of the Bible and a growing skepticism about the divine? Further, how can the Christian doctrine of original sin be compelling to a generation trained in social psychology? Royce attempts to answer the question or problem of modernity by rethinking the Biblical message and by showing how Christianity preserves metaphysical insights that are compatible with the new semiotics and his own kind of pragmatic idealism. His focus for his analysis of the Bible is on the epistles of St. Paul, the parables of Jesus, and the Gospel of John. His focus in semiotics is on the process of interpretation that makes a given sign available to the larger community of interpreters. Before detailing his semiotic theory, a few words must be said about his unique Biblical hermeneutics.

Royce, acknowledging the profound effects of critical method as applied to the Bible, denies that we can know anything positive about the founder of Christianity. Even more to the point, we cannot even be sure as to which sayings attributed to Jesus are genuine and which are the result of redaction and the compilation of the oral tradition. Consequently, it is imperative that we shift attention away from the historical Jesus toward the letters of St. Paul, where the true theology of the church begins to emerge into some clarity. Royce argues that Jesus left his small community with a series of cryptic and hermeneutically dense sayings that cried out for an interpreter. These sayings entered into the early church and presented a serious challenge to its own struggling forms of self-identity. Paul

was the first hermeneute of the church precisely because he wove the cryptic sayings of the founder into a coherent theological fabric that dealt with such issues as the *Parousia*, the fulfillment of time (*kairos*), and the nature of the church as the body of Christ. Royce argues that without Paul the church would not have attained a strong self-identity, and would quickly have faded into oblivion. Yet Paul could not create the primitive church on his own. Royce insists that the Spirit, as the counselor, infused Paul and helped him toward his theological position.

Throughout *PC*, Royce works on the two parallel tracks of the historical and the essential (metaphysical or categorial). The first half of *PC* details the rise and triumph of the primitive church under the guidance of Paul, while the second half details his own theory of interpretation and sign function. The primitive church thus becomes the primary historical paradigm of the true sign-using community. While Royce's analysis of the early church is highly romantic and somewhat dated theologically, it remains an impressive analysis of just how a given historical community can emerge into some kind of hermeneutic and semiotic transparency.

Jesus preached the message of the coming of the Kingdom of Heaven, but failed to articulate its ontology. Of course, under the impress of Jewish apocalypticism, Jesus would be little inclined to work out the structure of something so immediate and so cataclysmic to human history. Paul's problem became that of explaining the delay in the arrival of the end of time, and the personal and social problems that resulted from this delay. His own ontology of the community is thus a response to this curious time between the Resurrection and the decisive end of history. Paul's hermeneutic choices reveal a special kind of urgency that is, for Royce, no longer compelling. The transition from the historical to the essential requires that we transform Paul's message so that it can function outside his particular (and perhaps idiosyncratic) understanding of history.

Theologically, Royce cannot be easily classified. On the one hand, he goes against the liberal tradition by affirming the utter centrality of sin and the need for atonement. On the other hand, he downplays the eschatological core of the early church, and thus is more in line with the liberal tradition and its emphasis on gradual social amelioration. The conceptual heart of Royce's theology is to be found in his Pauline notion that the community is really the body of Christ. While he refuses to enter into the historical Christological debates, he does affirm what may be called a Spirit Christology that emphasizes the historical and temporal presence of Christ within human communities. For Royce, the Logos is

merely one dimension of the Spirit and not some kind of eternal structure. Ontologically, then, Royce sees the sign-using community as the embodiment of the Spirit, which is also the chief agent of interpretation, and as the growing body of Christ.

Royce approaches his communal theory from several angles. He frequently refers to the social psychology of Wundt, with its argument that there is something akin to a group mind that is greater than the sum of its members. When dealing with the individual self, he contrasts Bergson's theory of intuition with Plato's categorial emphasis, finding that both are incomplete. For Bergson, life consists in having certain immediately fulfilled perceptions, while for Plato life consists in cognition of formal structures. Yet neither perception nor conception are sufficient for the life of the mind. Royce adds a 'third' notion to the first two—that of 'interpretation'. The individual self is thus an interpreter of its own life, linking perceptions and conceptions to make interpretations. Royce is particularly critical of James's pragmatism because it is held to be merely dyadic and trapped in the opposition of perception and conception. For James, at least as pictured by Royce, a given conception is analogous to a check drawn on a bank account. The check must be turned into cash value by applying it to a given perception. If the hoped for perception fails to materialize, then the check will have no value. James thus privileges perceptions over conceptions, thereby stressing a kind of epistemological immediacy. Royce contrasts James's dyadic pragmatism with the triadic view of Peirce, which denies anything like a simple perception of the self:

Charles Peirce, in the earliest of the essays to which I am calling your attention, maintained (quite rightly, I think) that there is no direct intuition or perception of the self. Reflection, as Peirce there pointed out, involves what is, in its essence, an interior conversation, in which one discovers one's own mind through a process of inference analogous to the very modes of inference which guide us in a social effort to interpret our neighbors' minds. (1913: 285)

An interior dialogue is an interpretive analysis of various parts of the self. This inner conversation is directly analogous to social communication and involves the same triadic structure. Royce takes pains to show how the temporal aspects of the triad (i.e., the dialogue between past, present, and hoped-for selves) interact with

the triad of perception, conception, and interpretation. The latter triad can best be termed the 'hermeneutic triad', as it pertains to intra-psychoic life before its externalization into signs (Corrington 1986). Of course, Royce acknowledges that it is almost impossible to isolate a pure perception or a pure conception and that we usually deal with their combined form in an interpretation. Some interpretations have more perceptual content, while others have more conceptual richness. In either case, all interior knowledge is interpretive.

Moving from the interior self to the public self, Royce preserves the hermeneutic triad but adds the external moment of semiosis. All interpretations must issue in public signs. Even in our most intimate interior dialogues we generate signs that are at least potentially public. A sign is thus any interpretation that is or can become public—that is, can become available to another interpreter or interpretee. Communication is between and among embodied interpretations (that is, signs). All mental life is semiotic insofar as it functions to embody specific interpretations. At the core of the semiotic self is the will that unifies interpretive and semiotic structures behind a concrete purpose. Each individual thus moves beyond his or her interior life through the externalization of signs and purposes.

Royce argues that the social dimensions of the self are actually prior, both temporally and ontologically, to the purely personal dimensions. My interior dialogue is actually a product of social contrasts in which the division between the 'I' and the 'not-I' becomes sharpened. Social contrast gives me a distinct sense of my unique purposes and thus of my unique signs and interpretations. As my will comes into conflict with other wills, I recognize that there are differences between selves and that these differences have purposive sign systems at their core. Once this recognition takes hold, it is possible to move toward some sense of social communication and social method, thus breaking through the isolation of the private semiotic sphere.

As we saw in the first two phases of Royce's development, he came to recognize the social dimensions of the absolute and attributed social categories to the world as a whole. Nature is not some kind of indifferent causal system, but a semiotic structure that is funded with mind. Royce defends an ontology similar to the kind of panpsychism found in the later Peirce. World history—that is, the history of pre-human orders—is actually self-recording through geological and biological sign systems that are easily decoded:

In sum, if we view the world as everywhere and always recording its own history, by processes of aging and weathering, or of evolution, or of stellar and nebular clusterings and streamings, we can simply define the time order, and its three regions—past, present, future—as an order of possible interpretation. That is, we can define the present as, potentially, the interpretation of the past to the future. The triadic structure of our interpretations is strictly analogous, both to the psychological and to the metaphysical structure of the world of time. (1913: 289)

Royce's social semiotic is grafted onto a cosmic model which assumes that all events and structures are temporal, to some degree mental, and semiotically dense. In an analogous sense the various geological strata in the Grand Canyon, for example, represent a kind of mute conversation within the time processes of the earth. A causal sequence is an interpretive event in which one event passes its semiotic structures on to another. The cosmic foundations of social semiosis are themselves triadic. Event A—say, a stellar super-nova—interprets or conveys its magnitude and power, event B, to another relevant cosmic complex, event C. Needless to say, such a primitive semiotic event is not intentional; but it is, at least for Royce, to some degree mental. To be an effect is to be a new interpretant within an ongoing causal sequence. The super-nova prevails in certain respects in certain orders and is thus qualified in some ways. As an event, event A, it may be relevant in innumerable ways (events B, B1, B2, B3, etc.) to innumerable consequents (events C, C1, C2, C3, etc.). There is no end to the number of possible signs that may emerge from a given event.

Royce downplays the distinctions between mental and non-mental events precisely because of his commitment to a kind of metaphysical idealism. He does not make sharp distinctions among the different forms of semiosis, and stresses the common structures permeating what today would be called phytosemiosis, zoosemiosis, anthrosemiosis, and what could be called cosmic semiosis. However, he does take issue with that kind of panpsychism which does not properly locate the human mind within and against larger social structures. In particular, he is quite critical of James's conception of the 'compounding of consciousness' as presented in the fifth lecture of his 1909 *A Pluralistic Universe*, where James argues that distinct forms of consciousness blend at the fringe of awareness and become compounded into one larger consciousness. Royce insists that James links selves in a way analogous to how drops of mercury blend together to form a

new, larger unit. This is not the kind of social consciousness attained in the writings of Paul; it denies the individuality of finite purposes and their rightful place within the life of the universe. The true communal element permeating the self is not a compounding of distinct forms of consciousness, but the recognition of a common past that is shared with other distinct selves.

If the universe is a temporally bound community of common signs, then that small part of it represented by human interpretive communities is also bound by temporally qualified signs. Two or more minds enter into a communal relation when they have one or more dominant signs in common. Royce refers to this nascent and minimal sense of past signs as the 'community of memory'. By the same token, two or more minds may join together to form a 'community of hope' in which there are one or more dominant signs of expectation. A true interpretive community, as opposed to a mere natural community which is not aware of its relation to past and future signs, is aware that its identity is found through its common signs rather than through some kind of blending of moments of consciousness. Royce shifts toward what can be called an objective analysis of communal life. While James moves toward a tentative sense of community through his understanding of drops of consciousness, Royce insists that communal life is founded on and secured in signs that are public and objective—that is, held in common by interpreters who are part of the public time order. Blending his historical and essentialist arguments, Royce argues that the Lord's supper represents the dominant past sign animating the community of memory, while the symbol of the resurrection represents the semiotic core of the community of expectation. James's account simply fails to acknowledge either the time process or the public locus of semiotic systems.

What is the proper object of an interpretation? That is, what do signs, which are the public embodiments of interpretation, signify? As noted, Royce is not especially concerned with the specifics of semiotic reference; instead, he focuses on the social and communicative aspects of sign function. Yet he does have a sense of the extra-semiotic content of the sign. An interpretation is directed toward something mental:

Now it appears that the word 'interpretation' is a convenient name for a process which at least aims to be cognitive. And the proper object of an interpretation, as we usually employ the name, is either something of the nature of a mind, or else is a process which goes on in a mind, or, finally, is a sign

or expression whereby some mind manifests its existence and its processes.
(1913: 281-82)

Minds and their manifestations are that to which signs refer. Royce places a great deal of emphasis on the mentality of all cosmic and interpretive life. In a sense, to be is to be a self with a minimal degree of mentality. The life of interpretation thus involves three components: a conversation between selves, an interpreted object that is a mental expression (a sign), and an interpretation that is itself a sign. This triad, unlike the internal hermeneutic triad, is public, and can be termed the 'semiotic triad'. Put in slightly different but commensurate terms, this triad is that involving an interpreter, a sign, and an interpretee for whom the interpretation is made. Of course, a given self can be both the interpreter and the interpretee whenever it is engaged in intra-psychic dialogue.

We cannot know anything other than through the interpretation of signs. The time order itself is known through specific acts of semiosis in which the signs of the past become relevant to the present and the future. In a sense, Royce translated his post-Kantian theory of time consciousness into a semiotic of time configuration in which each moment of the time order is a sign or sign system. We cannot know the self without engaging in semiosis, whether internal or public. We cannot know anything of nature or the world, whether temporal or otherwise, except through semiosis.

Interpretation, on its most primitive level, involves acts of comparison whereby one sign is contrasted with another through a mediating 'third' sign. All knowledge starts from comparison and seeks the third idea. To know anything is to find the sign of mediation:

First, I repeat, the new or third idea shows us ourselves, as we are. Next, it also enriches our world of self-consciousness. It at once broadens our outlook and gives our mental realm definiteness and self-control. It teaches one of our ideas what another of our ideas means. It tells us how to know our right hand from the left; how to connect what comes to us in fragments; how to live as if life had some coherent aim. (1913: 305)

From simple acts of comparison to the most complex feats of categorial construction, the processes of semiosis are triadic and generative of mediating signs. Like Peirce, Royce ties the concept of self-control, which has both an ethical and a

cosmic dimension, directly to the life of interpretation. Insofar as we are sign-using organisms, we depend for our survival on the growth of self-control within semiotic life. Personal and communal sign systems are secured against diremption and decay only insofar as they manifest and enhance the self-control in the universe at large.

Royce links hermeneutics directly to semiotics, although he uses the Latin-derived term 'interpretation' rather than the Greek *hermeneia*. What is most striking is how Royce lifts interpretation theory outside of its historically narrow concern with texts or other linguistic artifacts. He decisively avoids what Thomas A. Sebeok calls 'glottocentrism', which emphasizes human language, written or spoken, to the detriment of extra-linguistic forms of interpretation and semiosis. Virtually anything that emerges out of the human process involves interpretation of signs, provided that some governing purpose animates the movement toward meaning:

A rendering of a text written in a foreign tongue; a judge's construction of a statute; a man's interpretation of himself and of his own life; our own philosophical interpretation of this or that religious idea; and the practical interpretation of our destiny, or of God, which a great historical religion itself seems to have taught to the faithful; or, finally, a metaphysical interpretation of the universe,—what—so you may ask—have all these things in common?... I reply that, beneath all this variety in the special motives which lead men to interpret objects, there exists a very definable unity of purpose. (1913: 275)

We can see echoes of his earlier conception of an absolute mind in his insistence that interpretive transparency will emerge for the individual and the community insofar as human purposes become linked to the ideal. However, the concrete realization of this ideal is now tied to the time process, and to specific forms of social semiosis. Anything whatsoever can be the subject of an interpretive act, and can thus generate meanings that in turn become public signs. Royce recognizes that hermeneutics is itself a dimension of the logic of signs, and that logic and the theory of knowledge are branches within semiotics. His own system Sigma, a unique notational and multi-valued system designed to make sense of ordered systems and sign series (open, closed, dense, and well-ordered), was created to augment and deepen his hermeneutic analyses of meaning. The universe as a

whole is an ordered system, a conception he had already articulated in *WI*, and is thus open to a full semiotic analysis.

Interpretation is asymmetrical in that it involves the time process and the consequent enhancement of meaning. A given interpreter confronts a sign and attempts to render the meaning of the sign to another interpreter, the interpretee. The given sign 'A' becomes transformed into the sign 'A1' by the unique interpretive act of the initial interpreter. The interpretee receives the now transformed sign 'A1' and must augment it further so that it can enter into larger orders of public communication. The same sign now becomes sign 'A2' and thus enhances its internal and external meanings. Royce makes it clear that this process is potentially endless in that any given sign will quickly become part of an ongoing semiotic series that has its own inner dynamism and movement toward hoped-for semiotic transparency.

All interpretation thus takes place within a specific type of community. Objectively, the community has a common body of signs, all forming into distinct and determinate (well-ordered and dense) systems. There is no first or last sign, and every specific act of interpretation plunges directly into living sign systems. Structurally, the community involves a minimum of three sign users:

If, then, I am worthy to be an interpreter at all, we three—you, my neighbor, whose mind I would fain interpret,—you, my kindly listener, to whom I am to address my interpretation—we three constitute a Community. Let us call it a Community of Interpretation. (1913: 315)

The community of interpreters is unrelenting in its desire to explore all possible meanings within a given sign situation. Royce's 1899 notion of the self-representative series (the actual infinite) is transformed into the conception of an open-ended community of interpretation in which no interpretation is final. Interpretation is real only if the community that sustains it is real. By the same token, the community can only be actualized through its endless series of finite interpretations.

All signs are minds or the expression of minds. As noted, Royce comes very close to a kind of panpsychism with his insistence that semiotic life is mental and co-extensive with the universe as a whole. He reiterates this point:

In its most abstract definition, therefore, a Sign, according to Peirce, is something that determines an interpretation. A sign may also be called an expression of a mind; and, in our ordinary social intercourse, it actually is such an expression. Or again, one may say that a sign is, in its essence, either a mind or a quasi-mind—an object that fulfills the function of a mind. (1913: 345)

Thus Royce's semiotic is far removed from a naturalism that would wish to locate the mental traits of signs within a much larger conception of nature. Historically, naturalists such as Santayana and Dewey have been far less inclined to develop a semiotic theory, or to equate philosophy with semiotics, than have idealists such as Peirce and Royce. The reason for this should be clear. Idealists have a ready paradigm for semiosis within the model of self-consciousness. The interpretation of signs throughout the innumerable orders of nature has its obvious analogue, at least for idealists, in the intra-psychic dialogue of the self. While Dewey does allow for a kind of social semiosis (that is, for the transformation of energies into meanings), he shies away from driving sign functions down into the heart of nature. For Santayana, of course, the realm of matter (nature) is fundamentally unknowable and cannot be encountered through any of the forms of intelligibility operative within the realm of spirit. Royce's deeply rooted metaphysical and epistemological optimism convinces him that the universe is fully knowable through its infinite wealth of signs.

It is one thing to talk of specific orders of the world as sign systems awaiting a community of interpreters; it is another to see the world itself as an infinite sign. Royce's position may be termed a 'pansemioticism' that sees all complexes as actual or potential signs. More importantly, he sees the universe as a whole as the ultimate sign awaiting its ideal interpreter:

If we consider the temporal world in its wholeness, it constitutes in itself an infinitely complex Sign. This sign is, as a whole, interpreted to an experience which itself includes a synoptic survey of the whole of time. (1913: 346)

Royce does not acknowledge any possible limits to semiotic transparency. His earlier absolute idealism continues to exert its influence even in his last stage of philosophical evolution. While he comes to recognize the time process and the

nature of individuation, he also maintains that the entire world is fully intelligible and can be grasped in one synoptic vision. In *PC* he does not use the specific language of his earlier work (e.g., the concept of the 'absolute'), but he continues to argue for the ultimate intelligibility of the world. The concept of the 'Spirit-interpreter' assumes center stage as the locus of total self-understanding. The Spirit-interpreter operates within the community of interpreters as well as within the universe as a whole. If the temporal world is indeed an 'infinitely complex sign', then its interpreter is already fully aware of this complexity and, it is implied, can aid human communities in coming closer to an understanding of the totality.

Yet even with this semiotic triumphalism, Royce preserves a place for individual differences. In expanding hermeneutics and semiotics beyond the sphere of language and textuality, Royce seems to run the risk of effacing genuine forms of difference or discontinuity. Yet he insists that his metaphysics is friendly to the notion that each sign and each interpreter is unique and must be preserved in the universal community that is both social and cosmic:

Our Doctrine of Signs extends to the whole world the same fundamental principle. The World is the Community. The world contains its own interpreter. Its processes are infinite in their temporal varieties. But their interpreter, the spirit of this universal community—never absorbing varieties or permitting them to blend—compares and, through a real life, interprets them all. (1913: 362)

Here we can see the fruits of his earlier attempts to move beyond monism and a simplistic conception of the atemporal absolute mind. The ultimate interpreter, the Spirit living within the heart of nature and world history, lives through and among each individual self insuring that no purpose and no sign system is denied its place in the evolving universe. The semiotic self receives its confirmation and seal when it participates in the growth of meaning within social orders.

Royce distinguishes among several senses of community. A mere 'natural community' is one that is opaque to its inner and outer meanings. It functions without an interpretive spirit and fails to intersect creatively with other communities. Opposed to the natural community is the 'community of interpretation', which, as noted, actively works on its past, present, and future signs to insure that all interpreters share in the common task of the discovery and creation of meaning. At the heart of the community of interpreters is the 'Beloved community', which emerges

whenever divine and spirit-filled grace enters into interpretive communities. For Royce, the community becomes beloved whenever it recognizes that it is the body of Christ. Finally, Royce refers to the 'universal community' that will emerge when all natural communities overcome their semiotic inertia and become grace-filled interpretive communities. The world of signs is itself moving toward universality and away from self-serving forms of imperial semiosis. The hoped-for universal community is envisioned as a global semiotic and interpretive structure that will animate and liberate all selves.

Allied to these four conceptions of community is a metaphysics asserting that reality is that which will be discovered by the universal community. If signs are in some sense mental, and if the mental is the real, it follows that the progressive discovery of sign meanings will be the discovery of reality. The universal community becomes the locus for truth. The real world will be disclosed when we overcome the tensions manifest in our opaque natural communities. Royce asserts:

We all of us believe that there is any real world at all, simply because we find ourselves in a situation in which, because of the fragmentary and dissatisfying conflicts, antitheses, and problems of our present ideas, an interpretation of this situation is needed, but is not now known by us. *By the 'real world' we mean simply the 'true interpretation' of this our problematic situation.* (1913: 337)

Not unlike Peirce, Royce asserts that the community of interpreters will converge on the true in the long run. However, Royce also insists that the realm of truth is to some degree already manifest to us whenever we become open to the presence of the ultimate Spirit-interpreter who lives within all cosmic and social orders. Our problematic situation will cease to be problematic whenever finite sign-users become one with the source of all meaning and power. Royce's idealism remains central to his mature semiotic theory, empowering his ontology and governing his sense of the historical triumph of the community of signs.

An Assessment

Royce advanced semiotic theory by exhibiting the structures of the community of interpreters. While his idealism compelled him to over-mentalize semiotic

processes and sign referents, it also enabled him to move beyond bare categorial description toward a normative conception of communal life. He early on recognized that interpretive acts were not bound to language and that natural history is fully semiotic. His eventual recognition of ontological pluralism, to some degree made possible by his exploration of mathematical theories of the actual infinite, brought him closer to more contemporary views that would emphasize difference and discontinuity.

Of particular importance is Royce's recognition that semiotic theory cannot be divorced from ethical and religious concerns. While his own understanding of Christianity may contain latent imperial elements, he nonetheless knew that no sign-using community could long flourish bereft of an animating spirit of interpretation. It is one thing to acknowledge the extent to which a community is governed by its publicly manipulated signs; it is another to show how interpreters can work together to overcome distortions within semiotic life. Royce argued throughout that a spirit of loyalty must permeate sign-users, thereby helping their respective communities toward the right kind of semiotic transparency.

The focus of Royce's semiotic theory is toward forms of communication rather than toward the minute analysis of the typology of signs. A typological analysis would not be incompatible with the communicative focus, but should be governed by the larger social matrix within which various types of signs function. For example, one could distinguish between the signs pertinent to the community of memory and those operative within the community of expectation (hope). The latter type might be seen to convey a greater degree of openness and radicalness to the sign-using community than the former. By the same token, these powerful social signs need to be distinguished from more mundane tokens that facilitate the transmission of information. Cultural codes need to be distinguished from random and free-floating sign systems. A post-Roycean semiotic theory would find a place for these various sign types and their representative tokens, but would insist that the normative and ethico-religious dimensions of these signs be examined and made available to the community of interpreters.

While Royce's particular form of idealism went decisively out of fashion before his death in 1916, it still contains elements that remain compelling. He sought to reinforce forms of communal life that would enhance and enrich meaning. His transformation of Peirce's early semiotic theory into his own social and communal theory brought new life to semiotic by showing that all sign functions are by and for a community in need of ethical transformation. Philosophic and semiotic natu-

realists could benefit from an encounter with Royce's normative and honorific structures. In this encounter the bare naturalistic descriptions of signs and their attendant codes and systems could be transformed into an emancipatory movement in which social semiosis serves the deeper needs of sign users.

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