

The World and the Individual

Lecture Notes

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The World and Individual

In the second unit of this course, we will read the first volume of Josiah Royce's *The World and the Individual* (WI).

0.1 Josiah Royce

Josiah Royce (1855-1916) was an American philosopher and proponent of absolute idealism (the view that reality depends upon the existence of an actual infinite individual that encompasses all past, present, and future experience and that all finite beings are mere parts of this absolute being).

Some key events in Royce's life include:

- 1855 Josiah Royce born on 20 Nov 1855 in Grass Valley, California
- 1875 Receives B.A. in classics from University of California in Oakland
- 1878 Receives PhD in Philosophy from John Hopkins, dissertation titled "Of the Interdependence of the Principles of Knowledge"
- 1885 Publishes *The Religious Aspect of Philosophy* and is appointed assistant professor at Harvard University
- 1888 Suffers nervous breakdown
- 1894 Becomes chair of the Department of Philosophy at Harvard
- 1899-1900** Delivers the Gifford Lectures at the University of Aberdeen (Scotland). These lectures would later be published in two volumes as *The World and the Individual* (1899-1901)
- 1907 Delivers his Lowell Lectures on ethics, later published as *The Philosophy of Loyalty* (1908)
- 1912 Publishes *The Sources of Religious Insight* (1912) and suffers a stroke
- 1913 Publishes *The Problem of Christianity*
- 1916 Dies on 14 Sept 1916

0.2 The World and the Individual

WI is one of Royce's most important philosophical works. He took the book to be a "very sacred task" and when reporting on the work he was doing, he wrote "I have no time to do more than breathe and work, and sleep between times." As he neared the end of the project, he even began suffering from nervous exhaustion.

The book itself is historically important because it is perhaps the first attempt by an American to approach the most fundamental philosophical issue in a comprehensive way. That is, the book aims to describe the relation between thought (ideas, representation) and being (reality).

The first volume of **WI** is subtitled "The Four Historical Conceptions of Being". This volume is devoted to critically analyzing four different conceptions. These conceptions are:

1. Realism
2. Mysticism
3. Critical Rationalism
4. Constructive Idealism

Royce will ultimately argue against the realist, mystical, and critical rationalist approaches for his **constructive idealist** account.¹

¹While the structure of the book is logical/argumentative in nature, Royce's biographer also noted that the book also contains an "emotional and psychological substratum". As his biographer puts it "The Gifford lectures involved a journey. Half of this journey was a merely physical excursion to Great Britain, but it is also perhaps significant that Royce's destination was both the center of Anglo-American philosophy and the origin of his family's history. In a symbolic sense, the trip to England was both a departure and a homecoming. We have seen repeatedly that Royce's earliest fantasies involved that same theme, suggesting a tension between leaving home and returning home. Royce expressed the philosophical purposes of his lectures in terms of the same imagery. The second half of the journey was an inner quest for ontological truth. Along the way he left his first home, the mysticism of his parents. The mystical conception of being, Royce said, leads to nothingness, but the path of the four conception of being leads one back to the abandoned home. Our faith, Royce insisted, is confirmed even when and especially because we doubt it. "In vain would we wander in the darkness; we are eternally at home in God.'"[Cle99]



1. Reality and Religion

1.1 Introduction

The introductory section starts with three different conceptions of “Natural Religion”.

1. natural religion as beginning with existence of natural facts and scientific methods and deriving the existence of God (e.g. Arguments from Design)
2. natural religion as a recognition of human beings as essentially religious: not a proof of God from external facts but a confession of our inner spirituality, e.g. religious experience or inner religious behavior of humankind
3. natural religion as metaphysical inquiry; foundational for our understanding of reality

Royce contends that each of these three different conceptions have a number of commonalities:

1. all concerned with religion
2. all can be pursued without reference to any specific religious creed
3. all concerned with the relation of the natural order to religious doctrine

Nevertheless, they differ in that the **scope of their investigation differs** (external reality, inner self, foundations).

Royce suggests at the end of the introduction that this book is a work on Natural Religion along the lines of a third conception. That is, he plans to investigate Natural Religion by considering the **fundamental problems of the metaphysics of Religion**. The specific metaphysical question he says that **WI** will investigate is the following:

the central problem of our discussion will be the question: What is Reality?

1.2 Religious questions

Section I has two key components.

First, Royce clarifies what he means when he says that the fundamental problems of the Metaphysics of Religion are "relatively neglected". He doesn't mean that people aren't interested in religion, or interested in talking about God or religion, or even that people aren't familiar with the religious metaphysics of various philosophers. None of this is said to be neglected. **What is neglected**, according to Royce, **is a personal or intimate working out of the issue for one's self**. Just as there is a difference between reading a scientific report about an experiment and actually doing the experiment, there is a difference between reading someone's philosophy of religion and grappling with religious ideas yourself.

Second, Royce raises and then addresses three objections. All three of these objections aim to support the claim that such an inquiry is extremely unpromising. Here are the three objections in Royce's words:

And now, in recognizing the fact of the comparative neglect of the Theory of Being in the discussions of Natural Religion, I recognize also the motives that tend to make such an inquiry seem, at the first glimpse, unpromising. These motives may be expressed in the forms of three objections, namely, first, that such undertakings are pretentious, by reason of the dignity and the mystery of the topic; secondly, that they are dreary, by reason of the subtle distinctions and the airy abstractions involved in every such research; and thirdly, that they are opposed, in spirit, to the sort of study for which in our day the sciences of experience have given the only worthy model.

Objection 1.2.1 — Religion is mysterious and its investigation is pretentious. To try to undertake to an inquiry into the foundation of religion, the relation between religion and the ultimate problems of the theory of Being is pretentious. God is so mysterious and magnificent that an understanding is beyond our power.

Objection 1.2.2 — Boring. This sort of inquiry has to be extremely boring, "dreary", involving "subtle distinctions" and "airy abstractions"

Objection 1.2.3 — Anti-scientific. This sort of inquiry is anti-scientific. It is opposed to a scientific view of the world.

Exercise 1.1 What are Royce's responses to each of these objections?

1.3 Religious answers through a study of ontology

Again, Royce says he plans on studying religion in an **ontological way**. What he seems to have in mind here is to do an investigation into **ontology** and then tie his results to religion. The goal of **WI** is to describe the nature of reality and these results are supposed to have implications for one's religion.

More specifically he plans to give an ontology of religion by giving accounts of:

1. "Being in general"
2. God,
3. the World
4. the Human Individual

In terms of "Being in General", Royce says he is trying to give an account of "the ontological predicate of the expression to be" or what it means "to be real" in terms of that thing existing.

The rest of the section seems to be interested in (i) again motivating the study and (ii) giving a general sense of the two volumes.

Concerning (i), Royce makes an interesting point concerning ontology. One complaint about ontology is its subtlety, dryness, and its detachment from everyday life. To this objection, Royce responds

with an analogical argument.

The argument is that just as when people gossip about others, there is an **ethical undercurrent**. That is, if Tek says Liz is doing such and such but she really shouldn't, she has an entire ethical system in the background. And so, to some extent, we are *always engaging in ethics*. Analogously, Royce asserts that we are always engaged in ontology. He writes

Well, as even the most frivolous or scandalous gossip really manifests an intense, if rude concern, for the primal questions of moral philosophy, so our children and all our most simple and devout souls constantly talk ontology, discourse of being, face the central issues of reality, but know it not. Yet on the face the true connection of abstract theory and daily life, and then one easily sees that life means theory, and that you deal constantly, and decisively, with the problems of the Theory of Being whenever you utter a serious word.

Exercise 1.2 Royce is trying to motivate his audience. While individuals may be interested in certain aspects of philosophy like ethics or political philosophy, his conception of Natural Religion involves an investigation into the most fundamental aspects of **ontology**. This part of philosophy is often thought to be boring, dry, filled with many abstract distinctions that are completely divorced from daily life.

To what extent does daily life depend upon certain ontological assumptions?

1.4 Ideas and their relation to reality

Royce contends there are two key questions for attacking the world-knot (the mixture of thought and reality):

1. What is an idea?
2. How can ideas stand in any true relation to reality?

In relation to these questions, Royce suggests *initially* that there are two general ways of answering these questions.

First, one could emphasize the *World as Fact* over the *World as Idea*. What he likely means by this is that we could approach our understanding of the world, ourselves, and God by **starting from brute natural facts** and trying to work our way up to a more and more **general theories**. He thinks, however, that this would lead to constant disappointment. Royce seems to suggest that were we to take this approach scientifically, it would involve the blind and chaotic gathering of data with the aim of formulating a theory.

The problem is that we constantly run into recalcitrant data and the general problem that our theories at best only approximate reality. If we try this in terms of values, we would only get fairy tales fit for a child that would be ruined by new encounters with reality. Royce summarizes this point when he states that “[t]he World as Fact is, then, for all of us, persistently baffling, unless we find somewhere else the key to it.”

Second, Royce also notes that there is a long history of trying to approach the nature of reality by treating the World as a set of ideas rather than as a set of facts. This would be to emphasize the *World as Idea* over the *World as Fact*. The general approach here is that **reality has to be, to some degree, conditioned by (or partially subject or determined by) our thought**. As Royce puts it, he thinks that by gaining a kind of higher consciousness, we get an insight both into reality and the religious ideal. He thinks that this is the approach taken by Plato, Plotinus, Scholastics, Spinoza, Kant.

With the above historical point made, Royce turns to an evaluation of three important topics:

1. the representative character of an idea
2. the purposive character of an idea
3. the internal meaning of an idea

Note

In looking at these three ideas, it is important that Royce will refer back to these ideas later in his lectures. He provides some clarification of these ideas later but sometimes he will refer back to this lecture and assume you remember what he said here.

1.4.1 The representative character of an idea

First, let's start with the **representative character of an idea**. Royce points out that traditionally people have laid "stress on upon the externally cognitive or "representative" value of an idea as its immediately obvious and its most essential aspect". The claim is that when we think about what makes an idea/sign important, we only think about what it **refers to** or what it **stands for**. This seems correct. If I pick up a book on modern philosophy (e.g. Locke, Hobbes, Leibniz, Descartes, et al.), talk about ideas in two ways. First, the empiricist talks about ideas as mental **images** (faded copies of sensations, the latter being impressions of things themselves). Ideas are thus copies of their objects. The rationalist typically says there is another class of ideas that represent things that are not simply derived from sensations and don't have the character of being images, e.g. the idea of infinity. In both cases, what is emphasized is the **representative character** of the idea, viz., its dyadic relation to the thing/object it stands for.

1.4.2 The purposive character of an idea

Royce thinks that the *representative character* of an idea is important but **secondary**. The more important aspect he contends is the **purposive aspect**. What Royce is saying here is that our understanding of ideas is *incomplete*. When we think about *what an idea is*, we ought to include its purpose aspect.

Royce contends that "your intelligent idea of things never consist of mere images of things, but always involve a consciousness of how you propose to act towards the things of which you have ideas" (p.11).

1. idea of a *sword* is of an object that can be used in ways x, y, and z
2. idea of a *pen* is of an object that can be used in ways a, b, c
3. idea of a *friend* as opposed to an *enemy* are of individuals that you act differently toward with different attitudes

In other words, one key aspect of an idea is its **purposive element**:

1. a set of rules of adjustment to an object
2. a active (or conditional) response to something
3. a consciousness of "how you propose to act" toward a certain thing
4. a plan of action
5. not as an act of the will but as having the same significance

Second, let's give Royce's preferred definition of an *idea*:

Definition 1.1 — idea. By the word "Idea," then, [...] I shall mean in the end any state of consciousness, whether simple or complex, which, when present, is then and there viewed as at least the partial expression or embodiment of a single conscious purpose."^a

^a Elsewhere Royce writes that "an idea is any state of mind, or complex of states, that, when present, is consciously viewed as the relatively completed embodiment, and therefore already as the partial fulfillment of a purpose. Or, to repeat, the state or complex of states called the idea, presents to consciousness the expressed although in general the incomplete fulfillment of a purpose." In Section VI, Royce writes "[a]n idea, in the present discussion, is first of all to be defined in terms of the internal purpose, or, if you choose, in terms of the Will, that

it expresses consciously, if imperfectly, at the instant when it comes to mind

- state of consciousness
- an idea is a kind of awareness
- it is something that embodies a conscious purpose

Note

One thing to note about the definition is that Royce contends that an idea is any state of consciousness that **at least partially expresses or embodies a purpose**. This presentation of the partial fulfillment of a purpose is what Royce calls the **primary character of an idea**. In other words, if we were to talk about the *primary character of an idea*, we would be referring to that idea's purpose. The primary character of an idea is "its inner characters as relatively fulfilling a purpose (that is, as presenting the partial fulfillment of the purpose), which is in the consciousness of the moment wherein the idea takes place"

Royce notion of an idea involves two key components

1. what makes something an idea is not its representative character (not the fact that it stands for or images something)
2. any conscious act is an idea provided it at least partially fulfills/embodies a conscious purpose¹

The first point is clear enough. What needs more clarification is the second point.

First, Royce says that when you perform a conscious act (e.g. sing melody or count to ten or write a paper), you are at least partially embodying your own conscious purpose.

■ **Example 1.1** my act of singing a song embodies my purpose of singing a song or wanting to amuse myself.

Second, Royce contends that these conscious acts are ideas.².

■ **Example 1.2** If I were to sing a melody or quietly listen to a melody, the melody is a musical idea. If I were to count to ten, I have an idea about numbers and sequences.

Third, you can regard ideas independent of their representative character.

■ **Example 1.3** if I sing a song for the first time, the musical idea does not represent or stand for some existent melody. It is not copying anything as I am making it up.

Therefore, what makes a conscious act an idea is not its capacity to represent something (stand for something) but its capacity to partially fulfill a conscious purpose. That is, the primary character of an idea but its purposive character.

Here is how Royce puts this same conclusion:

But the primary character, which makes it an idea, is not this its representative character, is not its vicarious assumption of the responsibility of standing for a being beyond itself, but is its inner character as relatively fulfilling the purpose (that is, as presenting the partial fulfillment of the purpose), which is in the consciousness of the moment wherein the idea takes place (p.12)

■ **Exercise 1.3** Try to create your own example of something Royce would call an idea. Hint: start by thinking of a purpose, then think of how a certain consciousness would be the partial fulfillment of that purpose.

¹One way of putting both points is to say that the *primary character* of an idea is not its representative character but its purposive character.

²"In the same sense, any conscious act, at the moment when you perform it, not merely expresses, but is, in my present sense, an idea" (p.12)

1.4.3 The internal meaning of an idea

This takes us to the third and final key point in Section IV: what Royce means by the “internal meaning of an idea”.

Definition 1.2 — internal meaning of an idea. The internal meaning of an idea is the (partial) fulfillment of a purpose through/in an idea. ^a

^aThe “internal meaning of the completed idea is the purpose viewed as so far embodied in the idea, the soul, as it were, which the idea gives body”

We can understand the conception of an **the internal meaning of an idea** in a step-by-step way:

First, we can think of a *purpose* as not being consciously thought. We can imagine various purposes that no one has ever consciously undertaken. No one has perhaps ever thought of a riding a ten-headed, ten-eared unicorn-pegasus hybrid around a planet with twenty suns. Let’s call this an **unembodied purpose**.

Second, we can think of a **purpose as embodied in an idea**. Royce says that the internal meaning of an idea is just the purpose as it is embodied in our present consciousness (in an idea). once a purpose is embodied.³

Exercise 1.4 While much of the work here is still preliminary (Royce indicates that he will argue for a number of these points in more detail), what do you think of Royce’s claims that:

1. what makes a conscious act an idea is its purposive character and not its power to represent?
2. the purposive character of an idea is not the easiest to understand; do you have a better way of expressing what Royce is trying to say?

1.5 The external meaning of ideas

Section V is also a difficult section, but it is more programmatic in nature. The section gives two different accounts of what Royce calls **external meaning** and then offers an answer of what it means for something *to be*.

First, in terms of the external meaning of an idea, it is worth noting that when we talk about the meaning of an idea, it is said to **mean more than its merely internal meaning**. As Royce puts it, the meaning of an idea “is not exhausted by this conscious internal meaning presented and relatively fulfilled at the moment when the idea is there for our finite view.” That is, the meaning of an idea isn’t exhausted by its immediate conscious purpose but has a **transcendent** aspect to it. This aspect of meaning is what Royce calls the **external meaning of an idea**. But how should this transcendent aspect be understood? How should we understand the external meaning of ideas?

Royce offers two accounts of what he calls the “external meaning of an idea”: the commonsense account and his idealistic account. Let’s begin with the commonsense account.

³In other words, The **purpose embodied in the idea** is just an aspect (or you can think of it as a part) of an idea. It can be thought of independently of any idea in that we can think of *unembodied purposes*, viz., purposes without anyone thinking them. It is just the purpose thought in abstraction from the idea. The **internal meaning of an idea** is the purpose *as* embodied in the idea. It is the purpose as it is fulfilled through the idea. It cannot be thought of in abstraction of the idea because the internal meaning is the purpose as it is fulfilled through the idea. As Royce puts it: “And our two terms, “purpose embodied in the idea,” and “internal meaning of the idea,” represent the same subject-matter viewed in two aspects. The purpose which the idea, when it comes, is to fulfil, may first be viewed apart from the fulfilment. Then it remains, so far, mere purpose. Or it may be viewed as expressed and so far partially accomplished by means of the complex state called the idea, and then, it is term “the present internal meaning of this state.”

1.5.1 The commonsense account of the external meaning of ideas

The commonsense account of the external meaning of an idea

1. refers to objects **completely external** to and separate from the idea, e.g. the referent of a proper name is the object that the name refers to.
2. attempts to correspond to the outer facts that the idea refers to, e.g. if I am humming a tune of Beethoven, my musical idea aims to imitate the tune by Beethoven.

Royce says that the commonsense external meaning is **sharply distinguished** from the internal meaning and that the task of our ideas is set by the external meaning. He writes that “our ideas seemed destined to perform a task which is externally set for them by the real world. I count, but I count, in ordinary life, what I take to be real objects, existent quite apart from my counting”. The idea here is that the external meaning of ideas are **completely independent and unaffected** by our internal meaning.

■ **Example 1.4** Suppose there are ships out at sea. The number of ships and the ships themselves exist independent of any idea about them. There is a fact or reality despite any idea of these realities.

From this sharp division of internal from external meanings, we get a clear account of **truth**. There are facts that are independent of my internal meaning. Insofar as I accurately represent these facts (successful correspondence), then my representation is *true*. If I inaccurately represent these facts (error-producing), then my representation is *false*. The truth and falsity of my ideas are thus **wholly determined** by the external meaning of the ideas.

Royce summarizes the commonsense view as follows:

That ideas have such external meanings, that they do refer to facts existent wholly apart from themselves, that their relation to these facts is one of successful correspondence or of error-producing non-correspondence, that the ideas in so far aim, not merely to embody, like the musical ideas just exemplified, an internal purpose, but also to imitate, in the form of their conscious structure and in the relationship of their own elements, the structure and relationship of a world of independent facts,— what could possibly seem, from such a common-sense point of view, more obvious than all this?

On the commonsense view, we also get an **account of Being** (real beings). That is, **the beings of the world, are simply those beings in the fact world, the external objects of our ideas, or the ideas that our ideas try to imitate.**

The commonsense view also entails the **methodological point** that it is *pointless* to study the structure of ideas if one wants to get an account of what exists. Royce writes that

“you cannot make out the truth about facts by studying your “mere ideas.” [...] Internal purposes cannot predetermine external conformity to truth. You cannot evolve facts out of your inner consciousness. Ideas about Being are not to be justified like melodies, by their internal conformity to the purpose of the moment when they consciously live. They must submit to standards that they themselves in no sense create.”

In other words, if I have a set of ideas in my head, there is nothing about the content or the structure of these ideas themselves that will reveal to me whether they are true or false. Their truth or falsity is completely determined by the external world.

■ **Example 1.5** The commonsense view would thus be skeptical about things like the ontological argument for the existence of God or arguments that derive the existence of objects from their denial, e.g. “Unicorns do not exist” entails the existence of unicorns and so unicorns do exist.

1.5.2 The Royce's account of the external meaning of ideas

In contrast to the commonsense view, Royce *sketches* his own account of the external meaning of ideas. The main difference between Royce's account and the commonsense view is that there is not such a sharp contrast between the internal and external meaning of ideas. He contends that **the truth or falsity of an idea is at least partially conditioned/determined by the internal meaning of ideas.**

Royce's claim is that an idea cannot be true or false (it would be *neither true nor false*) without ideas having a *selective function*. He writes

- “the counting of the ships is valid or invalid not alone because of the supposed independent being of the ships, but also because of the conscious act whereby just this collection of ships was first consciously selected for counting”
- that no idea is true or false except with reference to the object that the idea means to select as its object
- that there is an “ideal predetermination of the object on the part of the idea”,
- that there is a “free voluntary submission of the idea to its self-imposed task”

So, Royce seems to say that the commonsense view is wrong. Ideas are **not** true or false *simply* in virtue of the external world. What is left out by this account is that an idea can only be true or false in virtue of a kind of initial or antecedent act of selection. The faculty that is often said to perform this selective act is *The Will*.

Definition 1.3 — The Will. The power of the mind responsible for choice or selection.

■ **Example 1.6** If I am looking at in the sea, and I have an idea of ten ships, this idea is partly determined by the fact that there are ten ships in the external world, but also partly determined by **my Will**, namely the fact that I *chose* to count those and only those ships.

1.5.3 Royce's account of the external meaning of ideas and how it relates to Being

Recall that Royce's task is to give a fundamental account of **Being** (what exists, what it means to be) before proceeding to give an account of the World, the Individual, and God. Recall that the commonsense view of Being are those objects in the external world, objects completely divorced from the internal meaning of ideas.

For Royce, the commonsense view of Being is mistaken and this mistake stems out of the strong separation of internal meaning from external meaning. In Section V, he makes the bold (and sketchy) statement that **while the external meaning goes beyond the internal meaning of an idea, it is nevertheless continuous with it.** He writes that the “external meaning must itself be interpreted, not primarily in the sense of mere dependence upon the brute facts, but in terms of the inner purpose of the idea itself.” The claim here is that an idea can only represent something (a being) truly only to the extent that it is the **development** of the internal meaning of the idea itself.

This claim is pretty sketchy. Let's try to break down Royce's claims:

First, Royce seems to be asserting that the idea of a reality / an external world / a world of facts, completely divorced from consciousness is mistaken (he thinks it is meaningless). He thinks the commonsense view of external meaning is wrong.

Second, recall that an “idea” is any state of consciousness, whether simple or complex, which, when present, is then and there viewed as at least the partial expression or embodiment of a single conscious purpose, and that “the internal meaning of an idea” is the (partial) fulfillment of a purpose through/in an idea. So, an idea embodies a purpose, and the internal meaning of an idea is the partial fulfillment of that purpose through the idea.

Third, Royce claims that the external meaning of an idea is at least **partially conditioned by ideas**, namely in terms of the fact that ideas have a selective function.

Fourth, Royce claims that the **external meaning** of an idea is nothing more than “the completely embodied internal meaning of the idea”. That is, the external meaning of an idea is **nothing more than a developed or true internal meaning**. Its externality is only “apparently external”. In other words,

- the **internal meaning of an idea** is the *partial fulfillment* of a purpose through an idea. It is a purpose partially fulfilled
- the **completed internal meaning of an idea** is the *complete fulfillment* of a purpose through an idea. It is a purpose completely fulfilled.

From this, Royce asserts what it means *to be*. He contends that it means “simply to express, to embody the complete internal meaning of a certain absolute system of ideas,—a system, moreover, which is genuinely implied in the true internal meaning or purpose of every finite idea, however fragmentary.”

Note

The idea that the external meaning of an idea is nothing more than the completely developed internal meaning is a key point that Royce will use to distinguish his theory for other theories of reality. He will use this general idea to show how an idea can both (i) determine its object yet (ii) maintain that the object of an idea can be *other than* the idea itself.

Exercise 1.5 Royce’s account here is very brief and cryptic (he acknowledges this). What should be clear is what he is claiming in general. He asserts (i) that the external meaning isn’t completely divorced from the internal meaning of ideas (as the commonsense realist says), (ii) that truth is partially determined by conscious selection, (iii) that the external meaning of an idea is nothing more than a completely developed internal meaning (very mysterious), and (iv) that *to be* is nothing more than to embody a complete system of ideas (you are nothing more than the expression of an idea).

Try to reconstruct Royce’s position yourself? Does it make sense in outline? What parts need more clarification?

1.6 Conclusion

Royce concludes the introduction with three points:

- a clarification of the notion of a limit
- an explanation of how Royce’s theory links ignorance to meaning
- an indication of how Royce’s idealism differs from earlier forms of idealism

We will skip all of this.



2. Realism and Mysticism

2.1 Language and the three popular conceptions of reality

2.1.1 The what and the that

In the first part of Lecture 2, Royce gives an account of the language in which metaphysics is expressed. The basic distinction he makes is between expressing that **what** an object is and expressing **that** an object is.

When we talk about the *what* of an object, we are referring to the qualities or properties of that thing apart from whether it exists or does not exist. We are talking about an object's conceptual content or what it means. The *what* of a thing is often referred to as its *essence*.

When we talk about the **that** of an object, we are affirming whether it exists or not, whether it is real, or whether it has being.¹

■ **Example 2.1** We can talk about *what a fairy is* by describing the properties of a fairy (e.g. it has wings, it is small, it has buglike-humanlike features, etc.) but when we talk about the *that of a fairy*, we are talking about whether or not it exists or is real.

2.1.2 The abstraction of the what from the that

Royce contends that philosophers have separated the *what* from the *that*. On the one hand, merely saying **what an object is** does not imply **that it is**. In other words, a thing's essence does not imply its existence. My mere telling you about what a fairy is does not imply that fairies exist.

¹To say **that something is**, we can say it exists, that it is real, that it is so, that it fulfills a plan, that outer facts confirm it. While to say **something is not**, we can say it does not exist, that it is a mere idea, that it is a rumor, that it is fantasy, that it is not, that it isn't so.

2.1.3 Three popular conceptions of reality

However, this separation of the *what* from the *that* is not universally true, e.g. Anselm's argument for the existence of God or the argument from names. And, Royce points out that there are three different kinds of *what language* that implies *that* an object is real.

Royce contends that the three different ways that individuals use *ordinary what language* to imply *that an object is real* is reflective of **three different popular conceptions of reality**.

The first conception is expressed by the **language of immediacy**. This is language expresses that an object is given or immediate or directly experienced or there without the need of discourse or reflection.

The second conception is expressed by the **language of well-foundedness**. This is language that expresses that an object is underneath, foundational, or at the core of something else.

The third conception is expressed by the **language of truth**. This is language that expresses that an object is true or genuine as opposed to being false or illegitimate.

Conception	Example language
real as immediate	to be seen, at hand, can be found, is marked, is plain, stands out, is there, not standing, not at hand, not to be found, not there, accidental
real as well-founded	deeper, foundational, solidity, permanence, interior constitution, profound, rind and husk vs. core and kernel, breathe, dwell, lives
real as genuine/true	genuine, that which you can depend upon, no mere imitation, true, appearance, delusion, sham, myth, fraud, phantasm, fiction illusory, lie

Table 2.1: three conceptions of the real as reflected by ordinary *what* language

2.2 The practical problem of Being

Royce contends that there is a **practical problem of Being** (reality).

First, he contends that we have the **brute facts of experience**. This is the light and the shade, the sound and the silence, the pleasure and the pain. In short, he contends that we are faced with a wide variety of experiential facts beyond our control and that these facts are often chaotic, unintelligible, blind, and blunt.

On the other hand, we have what he calls **idealized experience**. This is experience that has some sort of meaning in it. This is experience that is somehow organized by meaning. It is experience with some sort of ideational component to it.

■ **Example 2.2 — Chaos and a fork on a table.** Suppose you are staring into space without any way of organizing your experience (without any ideas). In staring into space, you see colors and contrasts of colors, light and dark, etc. It is a confusing mess of experience. These are the brute facts of experiences.

Now suppose you are staring into that same space but this time you are equipped with a set of ideas. What was before a set of random objects with different properties is now organized in different ways. You see a fork on the table in a room. This is idealized experience (experience that has meaning).

Royce contends then that the **practical problem of Being** (or the problem of reality) is how to deal with the inner conflict between our immediate experience and the ideal experience. How to reconcile brute facts with our ideas. Such a conflict exists because the brute experience resists our ideas, it disappoints our expectations, it stubbornly ignores our will, and fights against our control.

Definition 2.1 — practical problem of being. The practical problem of Being is the effort of **Thought** to comprehend **Being** (reality).

To get a clearer sense of what this practical problem involves, Royce says it is necessary to get clearer about what we mean by **Thought** and **Being**.

2.2.1 Thought and Being

Royce defines thought as follows.

Definition 2.2 — Thought. Thought is the sum total of ideas (inner meanings) in so far as they are trying to interpret the brute/immediate facts of experience. Thought is an active process of struggle to adapt ideas to facts or facts to ideas.

When it comes to defining **Being**, Royce says that there are a number of different conceptions.

1. the idea of Being is suggested to us because we make mistakes (errors), viz., because our ideas often conflict with brute facts.
2. he takes Being to be the Other of our thinking. Being is the thing that is in conflict with the incompleteness of our thought
3. Being is that, which if we had it, our thought would cease and the conflict between our immediate experience and idealized experience would end.
4. Being is thus something we either (i) desire or is desirable as it would end the conflict or (ii) that which would set our thought right and/or decide the war between brute experience and idealized experience

2.3 Metaphysical realism

At the end of Section 2, Royce outlines four different philosophical conceptions of Being. The remainder of Lecture 2 is directed at providing a preliminary articulation of two of these conceptions in particular: metaphysical realism and philosophical mysticism.²

2.3.1 What is metaphysical realism

The first conception of Being is the metaphysical realist view. Royce defines this view as follows:

For the first conception, that is real which is simply *Independent* of the mere ideas that relate or that may relate to it. For this view, what is, is not only external to our ideas of it, but absolutely and independently decides as to the validity of such ideas. it controls or determines the worth of ideas, and that wholly apart from their or our desire or will. What we “merely think” makes “no difference” to fact.” (p.33)

Royce offers several clarificatory points on the metaphysical realist’s definition of the real.

First, he contends that it most sharply distinguishes the *what* from the *that*.

Second, it implies a sharp division between fictional objects and real objects. Fictional objects are those objects whose characters depend upon what we think about them, while real objects have absolutely no dependence on how or what we think concerning them.

Third, Royce indicates that realism is metaphysically neutral concerning materialism and idealism. That is, since the real is independent of what we think, it is equally possible to be a realist and

²It is worthwhile to note that Royce will relate both the realist conception and the mystical conception to his earlier accounts of the popular views of reality as expressed by ordinary language.

materialist *or* a realist and an idealist. One could imagine that the world is composed simply of minds or souls. Or, one could imagine that the world is entirely composed of invisible material atoms.

Fourth, Royce points out that metaphysical realist provides an answer to the practical problem of Being. Recall that the practical problem is our inner conflict between our ideas and brute facts. To obtain the other/real to which our ideas are striving (to resolve the conflict) we would need to escape the limits of our consciousness. In other words, the metaphysical realist contends that the origin of the problem is found in the inadequacy of our ideas to end the conflict with the real.

Fifth, Royce provides a clarification of the type of independence the real has from our thought. Royce contends that our thought has absolutely no effect on the nature of the real.

■ **Example 2.3** If you know P, and your knowledge of P disappears, this doesn't change the fact that P is real. That is, suppose you are looking at a tree, and then close your eyes, the tree does not disappear. Similarly, if you know that a tree on a mountain is twenty feet tall, and then you or your knowledge is destroyed, this does not change the fact that the tree is real, the mountain is real, and the tree is twenty feet tall.

In other words, the real is defined as that which is independent of *any* knowing process. Our knowledge of X or how we know X has absolutely no effect on the reality of X.

Sixth, Royce contends that realism is a specific sort of **synthesis** of the three ordinary conceptions of reality.

- **First conception (immediacy):** The real has an immediacy in that it is **given**, not in the sense that we immediately experience it, or can see it, or directly know it. Rather, it is given as a brute fact, it is there in its entirety and unaffected by any knowing process.
- **Second conception (well-founded):** The real has a deeper basis than the immediacy of experience. It is beneath the surface of experience, it is what is beyond what we see, taste, feel, think, and even know.
- **Third conception (truth):** The real is what makes an idea/belief true or false. It determines if what we believe is correct or incorrect.

Royce, however, thinks that the metaphysical realist is a type of synthesis of the three popular conceptions that most heavily emphasizes the second conception.

2.4 The historical fortune of metaphysical realism

In this section, Royce considers the historical fortunes of metaphysical realism.

2.4.1 Half-hearted adoption

The first point he makes is that no first-rate thinker has ever held this position consistently or in its entirety. That is, he notes that this conception is only held to a kind of limited or restricted or ambiguous way.

■ **Example 2.4 — Aristotle's God.** One example that Royce gives where an object is held to be real in the metaphysical realist's sense is that of **God**. God might be considered real. But this creates an immediate problem.

- Assume that God is perfect and therefore knows everything.
- If God is real, then God cannot know for certain that God is real because the real is independent of any knowing process. It is that which stands behind any experience or idea or process of knowing.
- If God doesn't know that God is real, then God is not perfect because there is something that

God doesn't know.

- Therefore, either God is not perfect or the reality must somehow not be completely independent of the knowing process.

Royce's point here is simply to illustrate that realistic systems often tend to be ambiguous or half-hearted about their use of the term real. That is, in some cases they insist upon the metaphysical realist's conception and take the real to be independent of the knowing process, but other times treat the real as somehow tied to the knowing process.

2.4.2 Adoption is reflective of a practical attitude

Royce notes that the acceptance of realism is often the result of a **practical attitude** toward the problem of Being.

First, the realist's solution is simple and straightforward solution to the problem.

Second, Royce notes that the solution is socially convenient. He provides three illustrations (we will consider only two).

■ **Example 2.5 — knowledge of other minds.** The first example is that Royce contends it is socially convenient to regard the reality of your mind to be independent of my knowledge of you. Royce writes "It is socially convenient, for purely practical reasons, to regard my fellow as a being whose mind shall be wholly independent, as to its inner being, of my own knowledge about my fellow. This view of the social relation is indeed suggested by well-known experiences, but in its ideally extreme forms, it is warranted by no experience, and is actually contradicted by every case of the communication of mind with mind." (p.39)

Exercise 2.1 What is Royce talking about? How is the independent reality of your mind from my knowledge simply a matter of social convenience? How does one mind communicate with another?

Royce's second example is more understandable.

■ **Example 2.6** We have a motive to regard the things that we separately experience and know (the common objects) as independent of us both. In other words, it is socially convenient to regard reality as **being the same** (common) for all people and so this motivates us to say that it is **independent of our thought** (independent).

2.4.3 Realism and conservatism

On pp.40, Royce discusses the relation of metaphysical realism to conservatism. We won't discuss this.

2.4.4 An evaluation of realism

In evaluating metaphysical realism, Royce makes a number of preliminary remarks. Since he analyzes realism in greater detail later, we won't look at his critical evaluation here. In short, he contends that the very definition or conception of the metaphysical realism leads to inconsistency. In other words, he does not criticize the realist for making say empirical knowledge impossible; instead, he contends that the very formulation of the doctrine leads to contradiction.

2.5 Philosophical mysticism

The next conception of reality that Royce considers is philosophical mysticism. Royce writes:

For the second conception, that is real which is absolutely and finally *Immediate*, so that when it is found, i.e. felt, it altogether ends any effort at ideal definition, and in this sense *satisfies* ideas as well as constitutes the fact. For this view, therefore, Being is the longed-for goal of our desire.

Royce makes a number of preliminary remarks about philosophical mysticism.

First, it is the the ancient foe of realism. That is, while idealists and realists might be thought to be in opposition, Royce contends the true foe is mysticism.

Second, Royce notes that mysticism itself is a “doctrine of edification” (set of instructions or practices for the obtainment of intellectual, ethical, or spiritual self-improvement or enlightenment) but a philosophy has been built upon it. In other words, if mysticism is a practice, then philosophical mysticism is the theory of reality built upon the practice. For convenience, we will use the term “mysticism” and “philosophical mysticism” to refer to philosophical mysticism.

Third, he notes that mysticism has had a long history in India, Europe, Plato, Aristotle, Neo-Platonism, early Christianity, Aquinas, Meister Eckhart, German mysticism, various devotional texts, and even in Schopenhauer.

Fourth, Royce notes that philosophical mysticism is often one misunderstood and unfairly criticized. Royce characterizes the mistaken view as follows:

A student often, after a brief study of this or that mystical treatise, accordingly comes away displeased. “Mere sentimentality,” such a student often says. “This mystical view seems to hold that the only real object is some voiceless and incomprehensible Absolute, and further, that when you feel uncommonly entranced or enraptured, you get some strange revelation as to the nature of the real, and so become one with the Absolute. Now it is plain,” he continues, “that such views have nothing to do with common sense, or with the physical world, or with matter, or with the facts of daily life. For can one say that this wall, and yonder stars, and my neighbors, and even my own daily self, are the Atmân of the Hindoos, or are the Mystic Absolute, or are anything else that you feel when you are in a trance? Now these objects yonder are well known to be real. Reality means for everybody a character that they possess. Hence the mystic needs no further notice. He substitutes his feelings for the solid facts. He is simply a man who prefers not to think about reality, but merely to revel in his own feelings.” (p.43)

Exercise 2.2 Try to reconstruct the unfavorable view of mysticism above in your own words.

Royce’s criticism of the student’s characterization of mysticism is that it takes the viewpoint of the metaphysical realist. It does not characterize it as the mystic would. In characterizing the mystic’s position, Royce contends that what is important is how the mystic understands the meaning of *to be* or *the real*.

Fifth, this brings us to the definition of mysticism. According to Royce, the mystic also provides us with a kind of **synthesis of the three popular conceptions of reality**. However, unlike the metaphysical realist that emphasizes the second conception, the mystic emphasizes the first conception.

- **First conception (immediacy):** The mystical interpretation of *to be* is to be purely immediate.
- **Second conception (well-founded):** There is something deeper than what we usually see, hear, taste, or feel. Our conceptions of pure color, pure sound, pure emotion are imperfectly immediate in comparison to a kind of absolute immediacy of being. Our ideas get in the way of experiencing this pure immediacy.
- **Third conception (truth):** The real truth is found in the immediate experience, not in the false abstractions of ideas

As Royce puts it:

Now the essence of this view of the mystic is that to be real means to be felt as the absolute goal and consequent quietus of all thinking, and so of all striving. Or, in other words, Reality is that which you immediately feel when, thought satisfied, you cease to think. (p.45)

A **sixth** point is that Royce characterizes mysticism not as a naive position but as highlighted by a kind of **skepticism** of abstractions along with a commitment to **pure empiricism**.

The skeptical portion of the doctrine is articulated in how mystics become mystics along. The general story he tells is that the great representatives of mysticism start off as realists but this realism is undercut by a kind of **inner skepticism** that is typically brought on by “painful complications of life” (p.44). In short, mystics may initially invoke a kind of hyper skeptical method with respect to the validity of any ideas about experience. The result is a hard won empiricism that never looks beyond pure experiences to ideas. The mystic’s pure empiricism is contrasted with ordinary empiricism. Ordinary empiricism takes the facts of experience and then tries to explain the world using ideas/hypotheses. In contrast, pure empiricism takes reality simply to be the pure experiences themselves.

Exercise 2.3 In this lecture, Royce has outlined two different conceptions of Being/Reality. Lecture 3 and Lecture 4 will further define each theory and critically evaluate both theories.

1. However, what do you make of each theory of being?
2. If you had to pick one, which would it be?

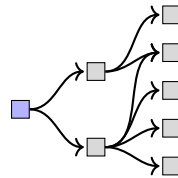


Figure 2.1: Garden of forking paths



3. Metaphysical Realism

3.1 Introduction

In this lecture, Royce undertakes three principal tasks. The first is to provide a more precise account of metaphysical realism than he did in the second lecture. The second is to situate metaphysical realism in the history of philosophy. The third is to evaluate metaphysical realism as a theory of reality.

Ultimately, Royce will contend that metaphysical realism is internally inconsistent. The criticism is not that metaphysical realism, in its sundering of knowing processes from reality, makes knowledge of the real impossible, but the realist cannot even formulate the theory without contradiction.

Our task will be to:

1. define metaphysical realism by outlining its core features
2. interpret and evaluate Royce's arguments against metaphysical realism

3.2 Metaphysical realism loosely defined

Royce makes a number of points concerning metaphysical realism throughout Lecture 3. Here is a quick summary:

1. Realism asserts that to be real means to be independent of ideas yet those ideas nevertheless relate to real beings
2. The world of fact is said to be independent of the world of thought or knowledge
3. If our knowledge of real objects were to be removed the real objects would remain
4. The real is like an immovable object to our ideas, our ideas cannot move, alter, change, or effect them in any way
5. the real can be thought of that which has complete indifference, independent, is unaffected, is unchanged, is undetermined by thought or any knowing process

3.3 Metaphysical realism precisely defined

Royce provides his precise definition of metaphysical realism on pp.64-65 (end of Section IV).

His definition of metaphysical realism can be stated as follows:

Definition 3.1 — metaphysical realism. Metaphysical realism is the theory of reality that asserts that the real (Being) is **absolutely independent** of any idea. This theory asserts:

1. there are least two objects: a real object o and an idea of at least one real object $i(o)$ (the idea can be true or false)
2. a relation R of **absolute independence** between $i(o)$ and o such that if $i(o)$ changes in any way, then there is no entailed change in o

Let's consider the two parts of the definition.

3.3.1 The two objects

First, Royce contends that the metaphysical realism position requires at least two objects.

The first are real objects (o). It is important to note that Royce tries to stay as neutral as possible:

1. **the kind of thing** this real object might be. He notes that the real objects might be material, immaterial, and abstract, ideal, etc. The realist is only committed to the fact that there is at least one thing that is real.
2. the **number of real objects** there are. He notes that there might be many real objects or a single real object

The second object that the realist is committed to are ideas of those real objects $i(o)$. It is important to note that we don't necessarily grasp the *what* of those real objects. That is, our ideas of real chairs, real lakes, real people might all be mistaken. What is important, however, is that we have at least the idea of something that is real since if we did not it seems as though it would be impossible to formulate the position of metaphysical realism in the first place. This is because the real is defined as that which is independent of $i(o)$.

3.3.2 Absolute independence of o from $i(o)$

Royce characterizes the relation between o and $i(o)$ as one of **absolute independence** and he uses this relation to define what it means for an object o to be real.¹ In other places he calls the relation **total independence**.

The typical way that Royce characterizes this relation is as follows:

- Take any idea of a real object $i(o)$ that you want (besides yourself).
- Next, suppose it to change in any way you wish, e.g. to become true, then false, to be clear, to be vague, or to have it destroyed from your mind altogether.
- If, no matter what the change in the idea of $i(o)$, this change will have absolutely no effect on o , then o is real.

3.3.3 Mutual independence of o from $i(o)$

Royce extends this total independence of o from $i(o)$ to what he calls a **mutual independence** of o and $i(o)$. That is, not only is o independent of $i(o)$, but $i(o)$ is independent of o . That is, no change in o has any effect on $i(o)$. No change in o would influence $i(o)$.

¹I interpret the relation as being symmetric. That is, if a is in R to b , then b is in R to a .

Royce's argument for this is somewhat unclear (and it isn't clear how essential it is for his criticism of metaphysical realism).

The **first** argument he gives is that if a change in o resulted in a change in $i(o)$, then "by merely examining the idea, taken by itself, you could prove something about the existence of its object. But, if so, then the *that* would follow from the *what*, and the independent existence of a thing from the presence of some mere idea of the thing. That, however, is forbidden by the whole spirit of realism" (p.65).

On the surface, this argument doesn't seem terribly convincing. Suppose a variety of changes in o and suppose only some of these result in changes to our $i(o)$. If this is the case, then we might not ever be able to tell whether changes in $i(o)$ are due to changes in o or arbitrary changes in $i(o)$ unrelated to changes in o . In which case, we cannot prove anything about o .

However, Royce might reply that we can prove something about o from $i(o)$, namely that the effect of o on $i(o)$ is confusing to human beings (a relational fact).

The **second** (and more common) argument that Royce offers is that an $i(o)$ must be independent from o because o could be destroyed but $i(o)$ would remain. That is, suppose I have an idea of a mountain in a far away land. Now suppose that this mountain is destroyed. My idea of that mountain remains even though the object no longer exists.

Exercise 3.1 Give your own precise definition of metaphysical realism.

3.4 Metaphysical realism evaluated

Royce contends that the most fundamental problem for the realist is whether "any realistic definition whatever can be self-consistent" (p.58). What he means is that the problem for the realist is not the problem of telling us what **kinds of things** are real or whether ghosts or space and time is real or whether God is real, but simply whether it can formulate its own theory without contradiction.

As we will see, while realism looks, at first glance, to be "the very voice of common sense", Royce contends is, on deeper inspection "the breeding place of a wholly marvellous race of metaphysical paradoxes" (p.59).

Royce's criticism of metaphysical realism begins in a sort of indirect way. It begins with the question of whether there are **many real beings** or **one real being**. Royce raises this question as follows:

And so next I ask the formal question: In the realistic world whose Being is thus defined, could there exist Many different beings? [...] Or again, could a realistic world contain only One sole Being, to the exclusion of many beings? (pp.65-66).

To get clearer on this question, Royce clarifies the difference between calling Being **One** as opposed to saying there are **Many**.

3.4.1 The clarification of the Many and the One

Royce clarifies the idea that there are **many real objects** by considering the possibility that there are two real objects. That is, to say that there are two real objects a and b is to say that they are mutually independent of each other. For Royce, this implies the following:

- if either a or b were to be changed in any way, then it would not entail, imply, or cause any change in the other.
- that is, any alteration to a would never involve an alteration to b
- thus: if a were to be destroyed, it would not mean that b was destroyed; similarly, if b were to be destroyed, then a would be destroyed

Meanwhile, to say that there is **one real object** is to say that *a* and *b* are not real objects but simply parts of a single, more complex real object *c*.

Less formally, Royce defines what it would mean for there to be two real beings as follows:

I shall only say that if, in the realistic world, we were to find two objects that were as independent of each other as, in our definition of the general realistic conception of what it is to be, *the object of knowledge* was independent of *any knowledge of that object*, then, and then only, we should call those objects two real beings, really different from each other (p.66, my emphasis).

With what it means to say that there is **one real being** as opposed to **many real beings** clarified, Royce then proceeds to consider two questions:

1. For the realist, does the world consist of many mutually independent beings (that is, multiple real beings)?
2. For the realist, does the world consist of one real being whose structure (if complex) involves no mutual independence of its parts?

3.4.2 Answer 1: there are multiple real beings

Royce first considers the position that there are multiple real objects. First, Royce restates the position that there are multiple real objects:

His world shall now contain various mutually independent beings—beings such that, as they at first are defined, the existence and the nature of any one of them is essentially indifferent to the presence, or absence, or alteration of any of the others. So far as the primary definition of any one of them goes, no change in that one need correspond to any change in the others (p.67).

Royce then argues for three positions:

- experience does not suggest that there are multiple real beings
- thesis 1: if we suppose multiple real beings, these beings cannot be conceived as having real relations (linkages) between them (it is though they live in different worlds)
- thesis 2: if we suppose multiple real beings, these beings cannot have any common characters (they are wholly different from each other)

In what follows, we will look at each of these theses.

3.4.2.1 Metaphysical realism: Multiplicity and experience

At first glance, the realist position might be suggested to us by experience. That is, we can imagine a number of different so-called real beings that change in them has no influence on other so-called real beings. Royce offers the following examples:

- The drops of water in the ocean have no effect on my desk
- a meteor in interplanetary space has no effect on me here on earth
- human beings in China or Lapland (Finland's northernmost region) have no influence on me

The idea here is that the mutual independence of real objects is suggested to us by the common experience of objects intuitively to be taken as real.

However, Royce contends that this is not clearly entailed by experience. For, considering the same examples, we can show how a change in one object can result in a change in another.

- The drops of water in the ocean can evaporate and ultimately cause my desk to warp
- a meteor in interplanetary space may be seen by us or lead to some sort of event that is noticed by us

- human beings in China or Lapland (Finland's northernmost region) may ultimately become our business partners

Royce thus concludes that

I distinctly decline to admit that, in our concrete experience, you can ever show me any two physically real objects which are so independent of each other that no change in one of them need correspond to any change of the other (p.68).

And, at most, all that our experience can show is that we often do not recognize the *mutual dependence* of one object on another.

3.4.2.2 Royce's first thesis: if metaphysical realism, then no real relations

Royce provides an explicit statement of his first thesis as follows:

The many different real beings once thus defined can never come to acquire or later to be conceived as possessing any possible real linkages or connections, binding these different beings together; and so these beings will remain forever wholly sundered, as if in different worlds (p.69).

The argument is as follows:

- P1: Suppose for the sake of argument that there are two real objects: a and b
- P2: Per the realist theory, since a and b are both real, they are mutually independent.
- P3: Now suppose there is some real relation R between a and b , e.g. causal, temporal, spatial, spiritual, etc.
- P4: If there is such a relation R and R is a real relation, then R is mutually independent of both a and b .
- P5: However, if R is mutually independent of both a and b , then the destruction of a would have no influence on the destruction of either R or b .
- P6: But, if the nature of R is such that it relates a to b and b no longer exists, then R no longer relates a to b and so R no longer exists.
- IC: Therefore, R is not mutually independent of a and b
- C: Therefore, there are no real relations.

Exercise 3.2 Royce is trying to argue that if we accept the metaphysical realist position then there can be no real relations. Is the above an accurate reconstruction of his proof on pp. 69-70? What do you think of the proof?

3.4.2.3 Royce's second thesis: if metaphysical realism, then no commonalities

Royce provides an explicit statement of his second thesis in at least two places:

The many real beings thus defined can have no common characters; they are wholly different from one another. Only nominally can any common characters be asserted of them (p.69).

And again:

Take any two such independent beings. Then, as I observe, these two beings can have no real quality or feature whatever that is actually common to both of them, or that is, apart from name and from seeming, the same in both of them, beyond the mere fact that each exists (p.70).

Exercise 3.3 Royce's argument is extremely short (see pp.70-71). Can you reconstruct it? I can't.

With the conclusions of both of the arguments combined, Royce contends that if we accept the metaphysical realist's position that real beings are mutually independent of each other, then it follows

that they also have no linkages / relations (first thesis) or commonalities (second thesis) between them. Royce writes that they are “sundered from one another by absolutely impassable chasms; they can never come to get either ties or community of nature; they are not in the same space, nor in the same time, nor in the same natural or spiritual order” (p.71).

3.4.3 Answer 2: there is one real being

However, contending that there are multiple real beings is not the only option available to the metaphysical realist. The other alternative is simply to say that there is one and only one real being.

The realist can say, as Royce puts it,

My world is One Being, a single, real, but perhaps an internally complex, yes an infinitely wealthy Being, whose various aspects and functions are not logically independent, but are linked in a system, so that fully to define one part or region would be to define something of the essence of all, and so that no portion can indefinitely alter or wholly vanish without some implied change, however minute, in all the other parts. Diversity there is in my world, but no sundering of entities (p.72).

Royce’s objection to this position begins by pointing out what he calls the “Forgotten Thesis” or most realistic systems. This thesis is simply that if reality means independence then ideas are real beings as well. That is,

- P1: Suppose the metaphysical realist position is true and there is one real being (call it o).
- P2: If metaphysical realism is true, then o is defined as that which is independent of any idea of o (let’s refer to any idea of o as $i(o)$).
- P3: If $i(o)$ is mutually independent of o , then $i(o)$ is real (it is a psychological fact).
- P4: Furthermore, if $i(o)$ were not real, then the metaphysical realist would not have any real idea of metaphysical realism. It could not even define o since o is defined as that which is independent of any i of o .
- C: Thus, if metaphysical realism is an intelligible doctrine, then there must be at least two things.

Exercise 3.4 I’m not completely sure I’ve reconstructed this argument correctly. Take a look at pp.72-73 and see if you can clarify it further.

3.4.4 Metaphysical realism: evaluated

Recall that Royce began his analysis of metaphysical realism by asking whether there were multiple or one real thing. With respect to the hypothesis that there are multiple real objects, he argued that there could be no relation between these multiple real objects. With respect to the hypothesis that there is a single real object, he argued that the definition of metaphysical realism requires at least two objects to be intelligible.

The requirement then that metaphysical realism be pluralistic and that no linkages can occur between the real objects is, according to Royce, disastrous. At the point where he establishes both of the above theses, Royce writes:

The crisis of the realist’s destiny is reached. The doom of his world is at hand (p.73).

What exactly is this doom that Royce speaks?

First, recall that metaphysical realism requires at least two real objects: a real object o and an idea of a real object $i(o)$.

Second, recall that Royce has argued that there can be no relation between the real objects that exists in the metaphysical realist’s universe.

Third, this implies that there can be no real relation between $i(o)$ and o . As Royce puts it:

These two are not in the same space, nor in the same time, nor in the same natural order, nor in the same spiritual order. They have nothing in common, neither quality nor worth, neither form nor content, neither truth nor meaning. No causality links them (p.73).

Fourth, Royce notes that we cannot even say we have an idea of a real object because this would assume that there is a relation between an $i(o)$ (a real entity) and o another real entity.

To speak of any being not o itself as if it were really an idea of o , is as if you spoke of the square root of an odor, or of the logarithm of an angel. For idea and object are two real beings. Their irrevocable sundering no new definition of their essence can now join again. For reality, in this doctrine, is independent of all definitions that could be made after the fact (p.74).

Thus, as Royce concludes, the realist theory has absolutely no relation to reality.

Royce offers a more condensed and targeted version of the above argument as follows:

- P1: If metaphysical realism is true, then o and $i(o)$ are real and (ii) there must be a real relation between o and $i(o)$.
- P2: Per the argument from no real relations, o cannot be really related to $i(o)$.
- C: Therefore, metaphysical realism is false.

Exercise 3.5 The above is supposed to be a death blow for metaphysical realism. Is it? Do you follow Royce's argument?

After concluding that realism offers an inconsistent account of reality, Royce waxes poetic about an alternative.

But what then is left us, if the realistic definition of Being simply and rigidly applied, destroys its own entire realm, denies its own presuppositions, and shows us as its one unquestionable domain the meaningless wilderness of absolute Nothingness. Where, then, is our real world?

There is left us, I reply, just this world of our daily experience, with precisely its stars and milky ways, with its human life and its linkages—this world, only given already a deeper meaning by this very study. For now we already begin to see, as from afar, the realm of truth that is not independent of, but the very heart and life of this fragmentary finite experience of ours. We begin to see what later we shall view nearer by,—the realm of truth where indeed nothing, not the least idea, not the most transient event, is absolutely independent of the knowledge that relates to it, or of any other fact in the entire universe. In this realm it does, then, in the long run, make a difference to all objects, divine or material, whether they are known or not, by any being. That a relative independence, and that both individuality and freedom have their concrete meaning in this truer realm, we shall indeed in due season learn. But what we now learn is that any definition of absolutely independent beings, beings that could change or vanish without any result whatever for their fellows, is, in all regions of the universe, natural or spiritual, a hopeless contradiction. There are no such mutually indifferent beings. But this other realm, where no fact, however slight, transient, fleeting, is absolutely independent of any of its fellow facts, this is the realm where when one member suffers others suffer also, where no sparrow falls to the ground without the insight of One who knows, and where the vine and the branches eternally flourish in a sacred unity. That is the city which hath foundations, and thither our argument already, amidst these very storms of negation, is carrying us over the waves of doubt.



4. Lecture 4: Philosophical Mysticism

We will divide lecture 4 into two parts:

1. what is the philosophical mystic's conception of reality?
2. a critical evaluation of philosophical mysticism

4.1 What is the philosophical mystic's conception of reality?

In understanding the philosophical mystic's conception of reality, it is helpful to remember that Royce thinks metaphysical realism and philosophical mysticism are polar opposites. Royce's characterization of philosophical mysticism is often done in a way as though the position is a reaction to the principal failure of metaphysical realism. Thus, if the failure of metaphysical realism was that it put forward the position that the real is absolutely independent of our idea of the real, then philosophical mysticism aims to be sensitive to the fact reality cannot be totally independent of our thought. That is, the real cannot be completely undetermined by, unaltered by, or unchanged by thought. In other words, the philosophical mystic recognizes the failed dualism of thought and object.

4.1.1 A preliminary definition and objections

Royce makes a number of preliminary remarks about the philosophical mystic's conception of reality.

Definition 4.1 — philosophical mysticism. Philosophical mysticism is the position that asserts:

1. the real is the immediate
2. the real is *that* which would cause all thought to cease as it would resolve its search for the real.^a
3. the real is **one** or a **unity** for if it were a multiplicity, then we would aim to characterize it and explain how the different parts relate^b

^a“to be real means to be in such wise Immediate that, in the presence of this immediacy, all thought and all ideas, absolutely satisfied, are quenched, so that the finite search ceases, and the Other is no longer another, but is absolutely found” (p.79); “in seeking Being, we seek what is to end our disquietude” (p.85);

^b“What is, is at all events somehow One” (p.86)

With these preliminary remarks in place, Royce recognizes that this conception of reality is likely to be met with antecedent criticism and so he addresses several objections to it.

Objection 4.1.1 — From the pluralistic realist. The realist might object that this view that makes reality one ‘ignores “the manifold realities of the finite world”

Objection 4.1.2 — From the monistic realist. The monistic realist might object that reality can be defined as that one thing independent of thought and so philosophical mysticism is no special theory.¹

Objection 4.1.3 — From the worldly critic. The worldly critic might object that it is pretentious to think that you could ever get into some sort of immediate relation with reality, especially within yourself.

Objection 4.1.4 — From the Protagorean skeptic. The Protagorean skeptic might object that realism is false and what is real is what is felt at a given moment but what is felt at a given moment is *many* and not *one*.

Objection 4.1.5 — From the worldly critic, again. The worldly critic might again object that why does the philosophical mystic act *as if* there are multiple real things if there is only one: “why then, since you believe in no variety of experiences or points of view as genuinely real, you still argue with your critics *as if* they were real, disagree with other points of view *as if* they existed, thoughtfully maintain your own case as if thoughts were valuable aids, and confess your own experiences *as if* you, too, the private finite self, were a fact in a genuine world, then for this objection also you are prepared” (p.80).

Exercise 4.1 Take a minute to review these objections. What are the philosophical mystic's responses (according to Royce)? See pp.79-81.

Note

The philosophical mystic asserts that the real is the **immediate**, *that* which would cause all thought to cease as it would resolve its search for the real. In order to get clearer on this theory, it is necessary to clarify what the mystic means by *immediate*. Royce contends that there are two items of our experience that are, according to the philosophical mystic, not *purely immediate* but *relatively immediate*. These are: (i) data of experience (e.g. experience of a color, sound, pain, passion, feeling) and (ii) ideas.²

4.1.2 Some more remarks on the mystic's definition

In this section, a number of additional remarks on provided on the mystic's definition of the real.

First, Royce notes that the mystic overcomes the struggle to attain the real *not by simply attending to our fickle or momentary impulses* but a “transformation of these impulses”. Royce writes:

One wins the truth not through a cultivation of what we ordinarily call Reason, but through a quenching of Reason in the very presence of the absolute goal of all finite

¹since the real is a Unity (One) it cannot be other than the one that knows it (otherwise it would be a multiplicity) and so it has to be searched for “from within” and not “without and beyond” (p.79)

²With respect to feeling, Royce notes that so-called immediate feeling is not satisfying, perplexing, and even tragic and this stimulates us to act, inquiry, or think. That is, it stimulates a separation between the knower and the known and so cannot be regarded as purely immediate. With respect to ideas, Royce notes that ideas themselves tend to only be partial (finite meanings and so their full meaning is incompletely present) and our sensations often conflict with our ideas and this shows that they are incompletely present.

thought. And, finally, peace is attained not through a lapse into the ordinary, but always imperfect immediacy of the brute data of sense, but through a finding of a final and ideally perfect Immediate Fact (p.86)

Second, knowledge of the unity of Being is not said to be known by way of argument but by **intuition**.

Third, the mystic's conception of the One is distinct from the monistic realist's account of reality. What is being observed is **not some independent being** but **one's self**. There is thus **no division between subject and object**. There is no division between **the object that is known and the knower**.³ As Royce writes, "an immediate sense of the unity of all things runs parallel with an equally strong sense that this unity is wholly in myself who know truth,—in my heart, just because what for me is, is precisely what I know."

Fourth, since knowledge of reality is knowledge of one's self and since what is real is absolutely immediate, knowledge of the real is knowledge of a unity.

- P1: The real is that which is absolutely immediate.
- P2: If there is an absolute immediate, there cannot be an independence between the knower and the known.
- C: Therefore, what is known can only be a unity (the Self).

Fifth, since knowledge of reality is knowledge of the One, the mystical position implies that knowledge of multiplicity is an illusion.

- P1: The real is that which is absolutely immediate.
- P2: If there is an absolute immediate, there cannot be an independence between the knower and the known.
- IC: Therefore, what is known can only be a unity (the Self).
- C: Therefore, knowledge of a multiplicity is an illusion.

Sixth, given the mystic's conception of reality, the finite world and our inquiry within it is nothing more than a process of or search for self-knowledge. That is, since the Self is the real, the finite world is a search for the Self.

Seventh, Royce provides the following definition of the self:

Definition 4.2 — Self. The Self is the knower "not as a thing that first is real and then knows, but as the very act of seeing, hearing, thinking, in so far as the mediating presence of some Other, of some object that is known, seen, heard, thought, is simply removed, and in so far as the very diversity of the acts of knowing, seeing, hearing, thinking is also removed" (p.92)

In other words, the mystic defines the self not as a thing but as an activity. The self is a kind of pure or singular knowing, seeing, hearing, thinking without the presence of some object that is known, seen, heard, or thought. The mystic characterizes it as a kind of pure consciousness that is void of any sort of search or restless. An awareness that is totally at peace.

Exercise 4.2 Thus far, we've given an overview of the mystic's position. Royce does not provide as precise a definition of this view as metaphysical realism. Nevertheless, it appears as though he aims to give as charitable characterization as possible.

1. How might you clarify the theory further?
2. Is there any part from Sections I-VI that he leaves out?
3. What part do you think is left vague or confusing?

³The world is One—why? *Because I feel it as one.* What then is its oneness? *My own oneness?* And who am I? I am Brahman; I myself, in my inmost heart, in my Soul, am the world-principle, the All (p.87).

4.2 Evaluating philosophical mysticism

Much like the case against the metaphysical realist, Royce will insist that the case against the mystic will turn on the consistency of philosophical mysticism itself. He writes:

The case of the mystic must not stand or fall with his personal perfection, or with his winning of the Other, but with the inner consistency of his definition, and its adequacy to express the constitution of our search for truth (p.81-82)

We will examine two issues Royce raises with philosophical mysticism.

4.2.1 The immediate is nothing

The first issue concerns the positive characterization of the Absolute.

- P1: If mysticism is true, then absolute being (reality) must be something.
- P2: If mysticism is true, however, then the absolute being does not differ from nothing.
- C: Therefore, mysticism is false.

P1 is taken as part of the theory itself.⁴

The key premise then is **P2**. At least according to Royce, attempts to characterize an experience or awareness of *the real* suffer from a dilemma: either the characterization is only of something that is relatively immediate or the characterization is of nothing. For consider the following characterizations of experiencing total unity:

1. when we are sleeping but not dreaming or when we are unconscious
2. when we are sleeping but dreaming

First, in the case of sleeping but not dreaming or when we are unconscious, the awareness of the immediate seems no different than being aware of nothing at all. Second, in the case of dreaming, we are partially conscious and so have ideas (which are only a kind of relative immediacy).

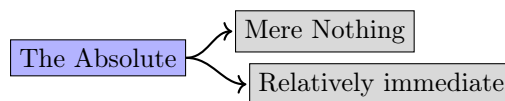


Figure 4.1: The difficulty with characterizing the absolute is that every attempt to characterize it positively is inaccurate and so it seems to be no different than nothing at all.

The mystic's response then is to try characterize the Absolute in terms of what Royce calls a "Contrast-Effect":

It is by contrast with our finite seeking that the goal which quenches desires and ideas at once appears as all truth and all life. But to attribute to the goal a concrete life and a definite ideal content would be, for this view, to ruin this very contrast. For concreteness means variety and finitude, and consequently ignorance and imperfection (p.94)

The real then is characterized as having no definite characters but as that which is perfect. That is, it is **in contrast** to our finite consciousness with its relatively immediate feelings and ideas.

Royce thus characterizes the mystic's conception of reality as the limit of a finite series. That is, if our ideas of things (with their definable characteristics) are defined by the terms of the series, and the direction of the series involves a decrease in such dissatisfaction, then the limit of the series (a state of total purification) is the mystic's conception of the Absolute.

⁴"The Absolute is the very Opposite of a mere Nothing. For it is fulfillment, attainment, peace, the goal of life, the object of desire, the end of knowledge" (p.94).

In other words, if metaphysical realism involves an absolute separation of knower and known, and various stages in the series are steps towards undoing this separation, then the philosophical mystic's conception of reality is the total undoing of any sort of separation.

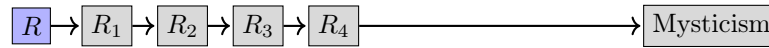


Figure 4.2: The mystic's conception of reality is the total undoing of the separation of knowing and unknown. It can be understood as the limit of a series where each term involves a loss of expressible qualities.

Exercise 4.3 Royce contends that the mystic is committed to the idea that the Absolute is something rather than nothing. If this idea is to be workable, Royce contends that the mystic is committed to defining it as a “Contrast-Effect”. The Absolute is what is in contrast to our finite thought, to our finite search, to our dissatisfaction with life. Does this seem like a plausible move for the mystic to make?

4.2.2 The immediate is defined relative to nothing

The first issue raised against the mystic requires defining the Absolute as in contrast to any finite idea about the Absolute. The Absolute is thus defined as the limit of a process where the finite / definable aspects of an awareness are removed.

At the end of Lecture 4 and in the beginning of Lecture 5, Royce contends that this characterization of the Absolute puts the mystic in a bind. If the finite aspects of our awareness are an illusion (a mere nothing), and the Absolute is a something known by *contrast* with this finite awareness, then the Absolute is nothing. That is, if *a* is that which is in contrast to *b*, but *b* does not exist, then *a* is nothing. As Royce puts it at the end of Lecture 4:

one rightly replies to the mystic that what makes his Absolute appear thus glorious is precisely its presented contrast with our imperfection. But a zero that is contrasted with nothing at all, has so far not even any contrasting character, and remains thus a genuine and absolute nothing. Hence, if the Absolute of the Mystic is really different from nothing, it is so by virtue of the fact that it stands in real contrast with our own real but imperfect Being (p.101).

Another way to put this is as follows:

- P1: If mysticism is true, then the Absolute (the real) is not nothing.
- P2: The real is defined as that which is in contrast to our finite thought (it is the goal of our thought)
- P3: Our finite thought is nothing (the finite search is nothing).
- C: Therefore, the real is nothing, and mysticism is false.

In short, Royce thinks that the mystic cannot assert the non-reality of finite ideas. The mystic cannot define the real as the limit of a finite series while denying the reality of the finite series itself. Mysticism must be amended in that:

It follows that if Mysticism is to escape from its own finitude, and really is to mean by its absolute Being anything but a Mere Nothing, its account of Being must be so amended as to involve the assertion that our finite life is not mere illusion, that our ideas are not merely false, and that we are already, even as finite, in touch with Reality.

Exercise 4.4 Evaluate Royce's argument against the mystic. Is Royce's correct in thinking that the mystic's mistake is trying to define the Absolute (a something) by contrasting it against

something that is regarded as nothing?

4.3 Consequence of rejecting philosophical mysticism

Recall that the end of Lecture 3, Royce indicated that the rejection of metaphysical realism pointed to a conception of reality where the idea of the real and the real were **not absolutely independent** but **related**.

At the beginning of Lecture 5, Royce points to a consequence of rejecting philosophical mysticism. He writes the following:

As a fact, however, it is not only the goal, but the whole series of stages on the way to this goal that is the Reality. It is the sum, then, or some other function of the terms of the series, that has Being. And, as a fact, Being must be attributed to both the principal members of the relation of contrast, both to the seeking and to the attainment. Else is the attainment the fulfilment of nothing. The finite then also is, even if imperfect. Its imperfection is not the same as any mere failure to be real in any degree. It is real in its own way, if the Absolute is real. And unless the imperfect has Reality, the Absolute has none. We must then abandon the mystic's mere series of gradually vanishing terms for some view that unites these terms into a more connected whole. What is, is not then *merely* immediate, is not merely the limit of the finite series, is not merely the zero of consciousness. The result therefore is that Immediacy is but one aspect of Being. We must afresh begin our effort to define the ontological predicate, by taking account both of finite ideas, and of the sense in which they can be true.



5. Lecture 5: Critical Rationalism

Royce begins the first part of Lecture 5 with a summary of his arguments against both the metaphysical realism and philosophical mysticism. The most concise version of this summary is the following:

And herewith we indeed abandon the abstractions of both Realism and Mysticism. What we have learned from those abstractions is that our finite consciousness indeed seeks a meaning that it does not now find presented. We have learned too that this meaning is neither a merely independent Being, nor a merely immediate Datum. What else can it be?

Here is my attempt to summarize Royce's core argument thus far:

- P1: Either metaphysical realism or philosophical mysticism or some other theory of reality is the case.
- P2: If metaphysical realism is true, then (i) there is at least one real object o , (ii) o is that which is absolutely independent of $i(o)$.
- P3: There must be at least two real objects: If $i(o)$ is mutually independent of o , then $i(o)$ is real (it is a psychological fact); because if $i(o)$ were not real, then there would be no way to define the reality of o .
- P4: If metaphysical realism is true, then there are no real relations between real objects since if there is such a relation R and R is a real relation, then R is mutually independent of both a and b . But this cannot be the case since the destruction of a would entail the destruction of b and so R is not real per the metaphysical realist's definition.
- P5: If there are no real relations, then o cannot be really related to $i(o)$.
- P6: Metaphysical realism assumes that we have some idea of the real, viz., there is some relation between $i(o)$ (a real entity) and o another real entity.
- IC: Therefore, metaphysical realists is false.
- P7: If mysticism is true, then the Absolute (the real) is not nothing.
- P8: If the mystic's conception of the real is something, then it is that which is in *contrast* to any definable idea (finite thought).
- P9: But every definable idea (according to the mystic) is nothing.

- P10: It is impossible to say what something is by contrasting it to nothing.
- IC2: Therefore, the mystic's conception of the real is nothing.
- C: Therefore, some other theory of reality is the case.

5.1 Modified realism

After the summary of his argument against mysticism and realism, Royce suggests that the realist might consider modifying or *weakening* the realist position. That is, he suggests that the realist might identify the primary error in realism as the insistence on the **absolute independence** of the real from any knowing process. Instead, a modified realism might contend:

1. the real is not *totally independent* from any knowing process
2. the real is not *completely indifferent* to the process of knowing
3. the real is only *relatively independent* or *practically independent*

Royce contends that the modified realist wants to assert two propositions:

1. the real objects are apart from, external to, relatively independent of, practically independent of experience and ideas
2. yet real objects are the source of, cause of, the possible cause of any knowledge

One way that he purposes to modify metaphysical realism is to say that the real has a two-part structure. Real objects consist of (i) properties (or aspects) that are independent of any idea and (ii) properties that depend upon our ideas.

The former properties are **primary qualities**. These include mass, extension, etc. They are said to be real even if no one is there to experience them or think about them.

■ **Example 5.1** a meteor moving through space does so regardless of (independent of) any idea of that meteor.

The latter properties are **secondary qualities**. These are the properties that only occur as a result of our interaction with those things. They are the perceptual or phenomenal aspects of the object.

■ **Example 5.2** the color and visible light of a meteor depend upon the existence of beings that have the capacity to see color or light. If our ideas of color were destroyed (or we were destroyed) there would be no more color. The meteor has color but only insofar as there are beings with perceptual ideas.

In short, Royce proposes the idea of a **modified metaphysical realism** or **weakened metaphysical realism** where “Being has two parts, an independent part, and a dependent part” (p.111).

Royce, however, rejects any form of modified metaphysical realism for the same reason he rejects metaphysical realism. As he puts it:

But our former analysis of pure Realism, by virtue of the very abstractness and one-sidedness that made it at the time so austere, gives us, as it were, a “razor” wherewith to cut away just the “independent” part of this now divided realistic universe. If the Real were wholly independent of knowledge, it would be self-contradictory. Well, just so, if *any part* of the Reality, if any division of it, if any group of substances or characters in it, were real in entire independence of knowledge, or were the same whether known by anybody or not, all of our former analysis would apply to just that portion of the real universe. Thus it would be vain to say that the Real is independent of knowledge when or in so far as it causes no knowledge of itself to exist, or is not a possible cause of knowledge; and that only when it is an actual or possible cause of knowledge it is in essential relation to the latter. Any such view would be destroyed by our former attack upon the Independent Beings. If no Reality can have entirely independent Being, no part

of reality can win such Being. And this consideration ends at once every effort to divide off one section of Being as the independent part (pp.111-112).

In short, the earlier argument against metaphysical realism would apply to any sort of modified (or partial) realism. And thus, for realism, and attempt to save realism must sever its claim to the absolute independent of any part from the idea itself. Royce signals this when he writes “the Real must be through and through, to its very last quality, to its very inmost core, *such as to be fitted to be known.*” (P.112).

Note

Despite signalling that no such modified realism is possible, Royce nevertheless asserts that metaphysical realism will never die: “[t]rue metaphysical Realism, in all its abstractness, still survives amongst us, and will no doubt, as an opinion, last as long as our race. For man might be defined as an animal who ought to reflect, but who very generally cannot” (p.114).

Exercise 5.1 Royce will now pivot away from the discussion of metaphysical realism and philosophical mysticism to his conception of critical rationalism (Lectures 5 and 6). Any parting thoughts?

5.2 Critical rationalism

Because there can be no modified realism, Royce contends that realism must be “transformed” (p.112). In Royce’s typical style, he works up to a definition of what will be his **third conception of reality**, the conception he will refer to as **critical rationalism**.

Definition 5.1 — critical rationalism (preliminary). An object is real if and only if (i) it is the standard outside of an idea to which the idea must correspond yet (ii) that standard cannot be entirely outside knowledge itself (see p.112).^a

^a“whenever we talk of Being we mean a definitely Possible Fact of experience, viewed just as something possible for us” (p.113). “To be is precisely to fulfil or to give warrant to ideas by making possible the experience that the ideas define” (p.113). “I look to see how they are related to Being. [...] Is it not what renders my ideas *Valid or Invalid?*” (p.113).

First, some preliminary remarks on the conception:

- an empirical conception but not mere empiricism
- critical rationalists are students of science, ethics, and religion, but are critical of realism (there are no things in themselves and there is no world completely independent of our ideas)
- the conception is guided by the spirit of modern science
- it involves a commitment to an *impersonal truth*: moral law, natural law, social law
- it takes virtual entities (social constructions) to be real, e.g. debts, stock prices, contracts, currency, etc.
- it is said to begin with the German philosopher Immanuel Kant
- the view is said to dominate the thought of the 19th century

Second, the critical rationalist conception of reality is said to be rooted in the third popular conception of reality:

- what is real is what does not deceive
- it is what can be counted on (dependable)
- it is what will confirm our ideas
- it is what supports or gives credence to our ideas
- it is what make an idea true or valid

To better illustrate this conception, Royce asks us to consider various objects that are real but not real independent of any possible idea about them. He contends that these objects are those objects that individuals would accept **as real** but not in the metaphysical realist’s sense. These are objects that their being renders ideas about them true but these objects are not independent of what anyone thinks concerning them. Such objects include:

- credit of a commercial house
- debts that a person owes
- the present price of a stock
- the rank of an official
- the social status of a person in a community
- a grade given to a student
- a commercial partnership
- an international treaty,
- a country’s constitution

There are two points to make about these **social objects** (social constructions, objects of the social law, objects of convention).

First, the above objects are real in the sense that our ideas about them have a **standard** outside the ideas themselves which the ideas can either correctly or incorrectly correspond. This means that

merely having the reality of the object is not exhausted by the idea itself, but instead the idea points to some object that is independent of my personal judgment that would make it real.

■ **Example 5.3 — stock price.** I have an idea about the stock price of \$AMD. My idea is that \$AMD is trading at \$19.34 this morning. There is something outside of my idea itself that would confirm or disconfirm this idea. There is a possible experience I could have that would show my idea to be true or false. I check the listing on the NASDAQ and see that it is trading at \$17.34 this morning instead of \$19.34 this morning. While I was wrong, there was something outside my idea itself that confirmed or disconfirmed it being true or false.

Second, while the above objects are real in that they have standards outside of the ideas themselves that make them true or false, these standards are **not outside of knowledge itself** (that is, they are not entirely independent of our ideas altogether) or any possible empirical verification. As Royce writes:

none of these objects would continue to exist, as they are now supposed to exist, unless somebody frequently thought of them, recognized them, and agreed with his fellows about them. [...] [I]f ideas vanished from the world, they would vanish also. (p.117)

■ **Example 5.4 — stock price.** Suppose no one has any ideas of stock prices anymore. The exchanges have been dismantled, humanity has been erased. There is no independent reality in the metaphysical realist's sense to the stock price of \$AMD.

Royce's articulation then of the critical rationalist's conception of reality is that **real objects are those that give warrant or support** (or what he calls "validity") **to the ideas people have about them**. These real objects are not objects independent of all sensation or experience but are characterized as *possible experiences* that would confirm our judgments.

■ **Example 5.5 — People on the moon.** Suppose I believe there are people on the moon.

- The metaphysical realist will say that this belief is true but it is true regardless of what I think or experience. There is an independent reality beyond any possible knowing process.
- The critical rationalist will say that this belief is true if and only if there is a possible experience that could confirm this belief. People on the moon are real if and only if there is an experience that would confirm the idea that there are people on the moon.

Exercise 5.2 Royce takes critical rationalism to be a kind of transformed realism. It preserves the idea that what makes something real is relatively independent of the idea itself yet this independence is not independent of knowledge altogether. The critical rationalist, however, contends that objects depend upon our ideas such that if our ideas were destroyed, so would the real objects. How intelligible is this theory at first glance?

5.2.1 Mathematical objects

Royce asserts that mathematical objects (both geometrical and non-geometrical ones) are real in the critical rationalist's sense. His discussion of mathematical objects is instructive for it helps to clarify what the critical rationalist means by *reality*.

First, Royce notes that mathematical objects are created by humans. They are "products of purely arbitrary definitions"; they are "ideal objects"; they are "only in [the mathematician's] head"; they are just like a "child's fairyland" (p.119).

Second, despite being mere creations, once they objects are created, it isn't the case that we can say whatever we want about them. Rather, once these objects are invented, their very being imposes limitations on what we can and cannot say about them. As Royce puts it, once these objects are created, they are "as stubborn as the rebellious spirits that a magician might have called out of the

deep” (p.119).

Third, not only are there limitations about what is true or false, but our understanding of mathematical objects is often problematic. That is, we can be unsure about the various properties of mathematical objects. That is, the mere construction of a mathematical object does not imply that we have immediate knowledge of that object or how it relates to other mathematical entities.

Royce’s point in discussing mathematical objects is that the critical rationalist is not simply saying that the only real objects are those that so-called “natural” experiences or experiences in the “physical world”. As Royce points out, we can prove the reality of various mathematical objects in the same way we can prove the reality of natural objects. As Royce puts it:

To prove the existence of an object whose *what* is already stated, but whose *that* is in question, the mathematician may simply produce, as it were, before your eyes, an object of the desired type, and may then let you observe that it meets the requirement. In such cases he works somewhat as a naturalist might do. He shows you the object and says: “See, it exists.” (p.122)

The mere presentation of the object (an experiential showing) is also not the only way that we might show that an object is real. Drawing again on the parallel between mathematics and natural science, Royce continues the above remark when he writes:

Or again, he may be unable to do this [show you the object]; but instead he may try a sort of experiment with his already accessible ideal objects, and the result of this experiment may give an indirect but infallible sign that a being of the precise sort here in question must exist, even if it cannot be directly produced. This more indirect method of showing that a being of a given type exists, may roughly be compared to the devices by which the spectroscope reveals the existence of an element in a star, by showing the characteristic lines of the element (p.122)

Exercise 5.3 The discussion of mathematical objects seems to serve two purposes. First, it seems to me that Royce wants to illustrate the two core theses of the critical rationalist position: (i) real objects depend upon our ideas (constructions) and (ii) they nevertheless have truths about them that are independent of what we think (a relative independence).

1. At one point, Royce seems to suggest that this same discussion could apply to fictional objects. That is, writers or children can make up various fictional objects in their imaginations but once these objects are created, they have a reality to them (a kind of relative independence). To what extent is this true?
2. Royce notes again and again that the realities of the critical rationalist are eternal. He writes “[t]he world of validity is indeed, in its ultimate constitution, the eternal world” (p.123)? Is he simply talking about mathematical truths not being transitory or is there some greater significance?

5.3 Further clarification of critical rationalism

Let's redefine critical rationalism a bit more rigorously.

Definition 5.2 — critical rationalism, preliminary. Critical rationalism is a theory of reality that asserts that O is real if and only if O is determinately possible (that is to say, an object of possible knowledge).

What does it mean to say that P is determinately possible?

Definition 5.3 — determinately possible. O is determinately possible if and only if O “would be observed or verified under exactly stateable, even if physically inaccessible, conditions” (p.134).

This gives us the following:

Definition 5.4 — critical rationalism. Critical rationalism is a theory of reality that asserts that O is real if and only if O “would be observed or verified under exactly stateable, even if physically inaccessible, conditions” (p.134).

First, with the above definition in place, we can make sense of what Royce means when he says an **idea is valid or invalid**.¹ That is, we can make sense of **truth** and **error** concerning judgments. When Royce says an idea is **valid** what he means is that there is some *definite possible experience* that would make the idea true. Or, an *idea of an object* is valid (true) if and only if the object is determinately possible, viz., it would be observed or verified under exactly stateable conditions.

Second, in saying that O is real iff and only if O “would be observed or verified under exactly stateable, even if physically inaccessible, conditions”, the critical rationalist asserts that **real objects** are **phenomenal objects** and **real laws** are **laws that govern the experience of things**.

This point is in contrast to the metaphysical realist who asserts that real objects are independent of experience itself. And, in contrast to the mystic who would assert that these phenomenal objects are not real.

Third, despite asserting that real objects are phenomenal objects (rather than things in themselves), critical rationalists contend that this phenomenal reality is not equivalent to our private experience of things. In other words, there can be **objective knowledge** (although the knowledge is about phenomenal facts).

Presumably, this is because the critical rationalist will assert that the **categories** that govern the construction of our experience (phenomenal objects) are fixed and universal. That is, the categories for how phenomenal objects are constructed (intuited) (i) do not undergo random alteration, do not evolve, and are not in our control and (ii) they apply to everyone.

■ **Example 5.6 — space and time.** Kant argued that space and time cannot be independently real, viz., things in themselves, and space and time are not *outside us*. Rather, space and time can be viewed as *inside us* as they are simply the categories we use to perceive the world. That is, they are **forms** of sense perception. In *The Spirit of Modern Philosophy* (p.124-125), Royce characterizes this point in Royce as follows: “Space and time appear to us to belong outside us, merely because they are conditions in us of our seeing and feeling things, forms of our sense. It is with them as with colored spectacles. if one always wore green goggles, all his world would seem green to him.”

Note If you were interested in writing on Royce's account of the third conception of being (and maybe

¹This is pretty sloppy language. As Peirce notes, “We wish that in place of the vague word “idea,” he had substituted judgment or virtual judgment; for since he is considering cognition in its truth or falsity, and only judgments have truth or falsity, he would thus have made himself more explicit and clear.”

learning a little about Kant without reading Kant), it would be worthwhile to read Royce's chapter on Kant in *The Spirit of Modern Philosophy: An essay in the form of lectures*. 1892. Boston and New York: Houghton Mifflin Company.

Despite his use of Kant to illustrate the critical rationalist position, Royce is not concerned with the exact categories (e.g. space and time) that (i) constitute our experience and (ii) are the same for everyone. Instead, what is important is the conception of reality that emerges from having said categories. To help clarify the notion contrastively, he considers what the realist and critical rationalist would say about whether there are “inhabitants in the moon”. He writes:

We have no concern here with the manner in which Kant undertook to define how experience won this, its constitution. Enough, the universality is for him there. And as a result, if you ask whether there are inhabitants in the moon, Kant holds that you are not rightly inquiring about any sort of absolutely independent real beings, for in science you have no business with realistic beings of any sort. The things in themselves exist, but you can never win any sort of idea about them. On the other hand, in thus questioning, you are indeed asking a perfectly fair scientific question, and one in no wise relating to mere states of your own private mind. You are asking, as Kant expresses it, just this, viz., whether, “In the progress of possible experience, you would come to perceive the presence of such inhabitants?” An answer to that question is even now true or false. **And the objects of the one boundless realm of possible experience,—a realm which the sciences of nature study, are real, precisely in so far as all such propositions, quite apart from your present empirical observation or mine, but not independently of the predetermined constitution of all experience, are even now true or false** (p.131, my emphasis).

Exercise 5.4 Explain the above passage in your own words.

5.4 Evaluating critical rationalism

In evaluating critical rationalism in Lecture 6, Royce has two main points to make. The **first** is that the theory is “peculiarly fortified against attacked” (p.135). By this he means that any coherent attempt to formulate metaphysical realism involves a commitment to critical rationalism. The **second** involves showing (in a preliminary way) how critical rationalism is substantially correct but insufficient.

5.4.1 Critical rationalism and realism

Recall that Royce has argued that metaphysical realism is incoherent.² In Lecture 6, however, he argues that various attempts to object to critical rationalism from a realistic point of view only lead to accepting critical rationalism.

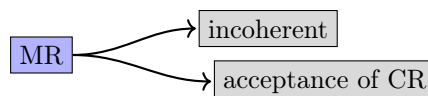


Figure 5.1: MR = metaphysical realism; CR = critical rationalism

Let's consider the realist's objections:

²As Royce puts it in Lecture 6, “Realism needs no such external refutation. Merely left to itself, it rends its own world to fragments in the very act of creating that world. [...] We explored its empire under its own guidance and found absolutely Nothing there” (p.139)

Objection 5.4.1 — Demonstration of real objects. The independent objects are in front of us. They are the table or the stars.

Objection 5.4.2 — Material objects. The independent objects are material. The physical objects are independent of our ideas.

Objection 5.4.3 — The cause of our ideas. Critical rationalism is false since some independent object acting as a cause of our ideas must be assumed. This independent is what is real.

Objection 5.4.4 — The world is. Critical rationalism is false since the claim that the *the world is* can only be understood realistically. That is, there must be an object independent of our ideas that is real.

Objection 5.4.5 — Critical rationalists are insane. Reality is greater than the whole context of the realm of possible experience. This is a truth that no one can doubt. Were you to doubt this, you would be insane.

Exercise 5.5 Take a look at pp.135-139 and try to articulate Royce's responses to some of these objections.

Royce takes his responses to these objections to show that the various beings asserted by the metaphysical realist to be real (e.g. cause, matter, the existence of the world, etc.) are, when made coherent, amount to nothing more than an account of how ideas about them are valid. That is, they would amount to nothing more than how particular experiences would be possible under certain conditions.³

³In Lecture 7, Royce writes that "all the entities of even a metaphysical Realism proved to be such that when one tries not to leave them unintelligibly independent, but to tell what they are, there is no means to define their character which does not first of all declare that their reality involves the validity of certain of our ideas, and the truth of the assertion that, under definable conditions, particular experiences would be possible" (p.148).

5.4.2 Critical rationalism: insufficient

5.4.2.1 Two types of realities

After putting aside the objection to critical rationalism from the metaphysical realist, Royce considers an objection he says comes from Scholastic philosophy:

Validity or truth may be [...] an essential aspect of true Being, without on that account furnishing the final definition of what constitutes the *whole* Being of things. And here is it indeed a fair matter for question. That the Third Conception, as far as it goes, has some degree of validity, is indeed obvious enough. But is it adequate and final? Can the realm of validity remain *merely* a realm of validity? Here is indeed the place where we begin the final stage of our journey towards an adequate view of the meaning of the ontological predicate (p.139).

Royce signals that the major problem with critical rationalism then concerns the reality of **merely possible beings**, viz., not beings that are objects of a possible experience and are verified but **objects of a possible experience and remain unverified**.

First, Royce asserts that many of our ideas are true / valid and so their objects “would be observed or verified under exactly stateable, even if physically inaccessible, conditions” (p.134), but these objects are (i) not present to us and / or (ii) never will be present to any human being.

The manner in which he attempts to show that this is the case begins with a discussion of mathematics. He notes that reasoning is an empirical process even in mathematics (we construct diagrams or use notation and then experiment with that notation). From there, we can prove various assertions about ideal objects and some of these proofs are about infinity. For Royce, (i) no one has (or ever will) have an experience of an infinite collection and (ii) these are eternal truths (they are eternally valid).

Second, Royce notes that what this shows is that we can have **knowledge of eternal truths** even if with **limited experience**: “[t]he valid, then, even the eternally valid, enters our human consciousness through the narrow portals of the instant’s experience. [...] One who observes the nature of a realm of abstractly possible experience, does so by reading off the structure of a presented experience” (p.142). We have knowledge of various mathematical objects that have an infinity of properties but we don’t ever experience them in their entirety.

Third, Royce shifts the discussion from mathematics to common experience and empirical science. In doing this, he extends the first point (that we can have valid ideas that (i) no one has any direct experience of and (ii) no one will ever have a direct experience of) from **abstract, mathematical ideas** to **empirical truths**. The idea here is that the realm of possible experience (the real) seems to be divided into two different categories:⁴

1. *Real*₁ : empirically verified facts (truths that are concretely verified in our own experience)
2. *Real*₂ : facts that are empirically verifiable but will never or can never be empirically verified

Our conception of this first type of reality (*Real*₁) is relatively straightforward. We have an judgment that X, what you are saying is that a certain set of consequences will be experienced if you do Y. You then can, do Y and test if you experience X.

■ **Example 5.7 — From Peirce’s draft of a review of *The World and the Individual* (CP8.112).** “Suppose a man to go out of his house at night and see the light of a distant fire in the sky. He meets a neighbor and remarks, “There is a fire.” [...] But in saying “There is a fire,” he refers to the common

⁴Royce asserts that there is a parallel between what the mathematician does and what we do in our daily lives. The mathematician proves various eternal truths by way of experimentation “upon the transient facts of his inner and ideal experience of this instant’s contents” (p.143). The everyday person (or the empirical scientist) does the same (in a way) by believing to deal with a set of eternal truths (or at least a world of validity far beyond his/her personal experience) through “the very fragmentary observation of what happens in his inner life from instant to instant” (p.143).

experience of that very place and time, and virtually says that if the second person will raise his eyes and look about him, he will find the common experience of that place and time to connect itself with the experience of a light as of a fire, the mode of connection being the familiar one that the speaker indicated.”

The second type of reality (*Real*₂) is not as straightforward. Royce says that this reality is “attributed to the valid truths that we do not get concretely verified in our own experience” (p.144). But this is vague for Royce could mean that *Real*₂ could refer to any of the following:

1. possible experiences that I never personally verify
2. possible experiences that are not concretely verified by the community of inquirers at a given moment in history
3. possible experiences that *will* never be concretely verified by the human race
4. possible experiences that *will* never be concretely verified by the human race or any living species
5. possible experiences that *can* never be concretely verified by any finite being

Nevertheless, Royce asserts that there are such realities and that we are committed to them both in the empirical sciences and in our everyday life. Royce notes that there are “are countless possible experiences that you never test, and that you still view as belonging to the realm of physical and of social validity”. Some of these include:

1. the validity of a ship: we attribute to it a whole host of properties that we never test⁵
2. the validity of a friend, neighbor, loved one, the people in this class, etc. (e.g. you assume that they go to other classes, go home, eat like you do, have minds, sleep like you do, etc. but you never test these things)
3. “The prices and credits of the commercial world involve far more numerous types of valid possible experience than any prudent merchant cares to test; for, if these facts are valid as they are conceived, their very Being includes possibilities of unwise investment and of bankruptcy, which the prudent business man recognizes only to avoid.”

Royce asserts that recognition of this reality is a natural part of life since what we choose to concretely verify is a conscious decision.⁶

To tease out the difference between *Real*₁ and *Real*₂ further, Royce considers our answers to a set of questions:

1. *How do you test the validity of your idea (that a given experience is possible)?* Answer: By actual experience, an actual test.
2. *What do you mean when you say a given idea is certainly valid?* Answer: A given idea is fulfilled in actual present experience.
3. *What is the range of the realm of possible experience (the realm of validity, the realm of truth)?* Answer: infinitely more extended than my actual human experience.

Royce thus concludes that the realm of possible experience (reality) has a **twofold character**:

We prove that it is there by testing empirically, from moment to moment, the validity of our ideas about it; but our very belief in its Being means that we recognize its possession of far more validity than, in our private capacity, we shall ever test (p.143).

On the one hand, reality has this concretely verifiable aspect to it, but on the other hand, there is a realm of possible experiences that are a part of reality that are never concretely verified.

⁵“The ship has for you, even as a merely valid object in the context of Kant’s *Mögliche Erfahrung*, more Being than you have ever directly verified. If it had not, you would indeed call it a figment of imagination” (p.143).

⁶“In fact, since our whole voluntary life is selective, we all the time recognize possibilities of experience only to shun the testing of them” (p.143).

Exercise 5.6 What do you make of Royce's differentiation of the two conceptions of reality in critical rationalism? Can you construct your own example that illustrates the distinction? Do you agree with Royce that we are committed to a whole host of determinately possible experiences that go untested?

5.4.2.2 The charge of insufficiency

Given the difference between *Real*₁ and *Real*₂, Royce levels the following argument against the critical rationalist position:

- P1: If critical rationalism is a complete theory, it should explain the difference between *Real*₁ and *Real*₂.⁷
- P2: It does not explain the difference between *Real*₁ and *Real*₂.
- C: Therefore, critical rationalism is incomplete.

First, with respect to **P1**, Royce is simply asserting that the use of term “real” should not be ambiguous. That is, the use of the term “real” by the critical rationalist should not say, for example,

1. *O* is real if and only if it is verified in concrete experience
2. *O* is real if and if it is an object of possible experience yet will never (or perhaps can never) be verified

Second, with respect to **P2**, Royce notes that the critical rationalist does not explain the difference between *Real*₁ and *Real*₂. He contends that the term “valid” is used ambiguous between *Real*₁ and *Real*₂.⁸

For Royce, there is an ontological difference for the critical rationalist concerning *Real*₁ and *Real*₂. In the case of *Real*₁, he contends that the status of *Real*₁ is an **concrete individual**. It is something that we have concretely, actually experienced. In the case of *Real*₂, however, the status of *Real*₂ is **universal or formal / ideal**. It is something that we have an idea of but no direct actual experience with.⁹

Exercise 5.7 Do you agree with Royce's argument against the critical rationalist? That is, do you agree that it does not tell us what is truly real: (i) is it the objects that we test in our experience or (ii) the whole realm of possible experience?

5.5 Notes

5.5.1 Peirce on the third conception

Peirce reviewed the first volume of *The World and the Individual*. In an unpublished draft of the review, he offers a summary of the third conception of being (for the full review, see CP8):

⁷“what our Third Conception so far fails to explain to us is precisely the difference between the reality that is to be attributed to the valid truths that we do not get concretely verified in our own experience, and the reality observed by us when we do verify ideas” (p.144)

⁸“Validity, so far as it has yet appeared in our account, is an ambiguous term” (p.144).

⁹Kelly Parker writes the following concerning Royce's third conception of reality, “The real is that which, in conforming to given universal structures or categories of experience, is capable of validating certain ideas. The connection between my ideas and an objectively existing sphere of being is clearly established: my ideas and that sphere both conform to the same categories of experience. The independence of objective reality, and hence the possibility of error, is likewise preserved: I may form an idea of a definite possible experience (e.g., that my keys are on the table) but then discover that reality does not validate my idea (I can in fact check the table surface and discover that my keys are not there). The critical rationalist conception is inadequate, in Royce's view, because it is restricted to describing the universal forms and possibilities of experienced reality. It cannot in Royce's view account for the concrete, actual individual facts that impose themselves in experience. These are simply and mysteriously “given” in the critical rationalist theory.” Parker, Kelly A., “Josiah Royce”, The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (Summer 2014 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), URL = <<https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum2014/entries/royce/>>.

[CP8.111] The main purpose of this volume is to show the inadequacy of the doctrine that whatever we know is either a direct experience or a possibility of experience, – a doctrine that Berkeley, more than any other person, introduced into philosophy and upon which Kant built his system of critic, – and further to propose in place of this doctrine a substitute [which], while Dr. Royce would certainly not claim it to be altogether novel, is undoubtedly a distinct improvement upon previous conceptions. Everybody who has reflected deeply upon the Berkeleian principle must have seen that it leaves something to be desired. It will aid the reader to understand precisely what Dr. Royce's work is designed to effect, and how far it does actually effect it, if we state that doctrine of Possible Experience in one of its more modern forms.

[CP8.112] Remembering, then, that philosophy is a science based upon everyday experience, we must not fall into the absurdity of setting down as a datum and starting-point of philosophy any abstract and simple idea, as Hegel did when he began his logic with pure Being; but we must set out from ideas familiar and complex, as Hegel began his greater masterpiece by considering a man sitting under a tree in a garden in the afternoon. We must not begin by talking of pure ideas, – vagabond thoughts that tramp the public roads without any human habitation, – but must begin with men and their conversation. We are familiar with the phenomenon of a man's expressing an opinion, sometimes decidedly, often otherwise. Perhaps it will be a mere suggestion, a mere question. Any such suggestion that may be expressed and understood relates to some common experience of the interlocutors, or, if there is a misunderstanding, they may think they refer to some common experience when, in fact, they refer to quite different experiences. A man reasoning with himself is liable to just such a misunderstanding. About this common experience the speaker has something to suggest which is supposed to be new to his auditor. Now this suggestion will be found inductively, by the examination of instances, to consist invariably in this, that if the auditor or any other man will act in a certain way, more or less vaguely described, he will find that common experience to connect itself with a new experience after a fashion analogous to other connections of experiences, which have made this mode of connection familiar to both parties. For example, if example be needed, suppose a man to go out of his house at night and see the light of a distant fire in the sky. He meets a neighbor and remarks, "There is a fire."†5 If he had only said "a fire exists," he would have conveyed next to no meaning at all. Not quite no meaning, since the remark would even so refer to that universe that is familiarly known to both men. But in saying "There is a fire," he refers to the common experience of that very place and time, and virtually says that if the second person will raise his eyes and look about him, he will find the common experience of that place and time to connect itself with the experience of a light as of a fire, the mode of connection being the familiar one that the speaker indicated. Let us take another example. Let the second man, having seen the fire, ask "Would you say, now, that that fire was about three miles away?" This virtually suggests that if the first man or any other man will fill his purse, and take ship, and go to Westminster, and break into the houses of parliament, and bring away the standard yard, and lay it down repeatedly on the ground from where the two stand to where the fire is, and utter the cardinal numbers in their order as the successive layings down proceed, or if he will perform any other experiment virtually amounting to that, then the last number uttered might be 5280, and if it should prove to be a number near to that, he might not be surprised. Extensive experience leads us to expect that if an experiment virtually amounting to that were tried a hundred times, different numbers would be obtained which would cluster about one of them, and that among a million trials the clustering would be still more marked, according to a law well-known to mathematicians. It is possible, no doubt, that if our experience were still more extensive, we should find that if the experiment were tried, say, more than a billion times, then a new phenomenon

would emerge and the oftener it was tried the less marked might grow the clustering. Our hope, however, in endeavoring to make a measurement extremely precise, is that there is a certain value toward which the resultant of all the experiments would approximate more and more, without limitation. Having that hope, the Berkeleyan theory is, that whenever we endeavor to state the distance, all that we aim at is to state as nearly as possible what that ultimate result of experience would be. We do not aim at anything quite beyond experience, but only at the limiting result toward which all experience will approximate, – or, at any rate, would approximate, were the inquiry to be prosecuted without cessation. And the theory is that so it is with all attempts at knowing anything more than what we immediately experience. This might be called the doctrine of the Non-relativity of Knowledge, since it eliminates any non-notional correlate of knowledge.

[CP8.13] Prof. Royce seems to think that this doctrine is unsatisfactory because it talks about what would be,^{†6} although the event may never come to pass. It may be he is right in this criticism; yet to our apprehension this "would be" is readily resolved into a hope for will be. For what we mean by saying that any event, B, would happen under conditions, A, that are never fulfilled, is that the ultimate opinion which will, as we hope, actually be attained concerning any given question (though not in any finite time concerning all questions), will accept certain general laws from which a formal logical consequence will be that conditions, A, in any other world in which they may be fulfilled will, those laws still obtaining, involve the happening of the event, B. In short, we have only to conceive that the ultimate opinion about those general laws is attained before the attainment of the ultimate opinion that the condition, A, is never anywhere fulfilled. Let us not, then, too hastily accede to that criticism. On the other hand, it would be difficult to resist the criticism that the theory is unsatisfactory because it talks too exclusively of what will be. It is obvious that this will be is the very heart of the theory. The familiar notion of the flow of time is one of the most important data of metaphysical experience. In the special sciences facts are set over against theories, because it is the business of those sciences to connect the special phenomena which they discover with the general experience they derive from other sources. But philosophy embraces all experience. Its direct data are the familiar phenomena found everywhere which, from the point of view of psychology are quasi-theories, that is, are supposed to be worked up by the mind from simple elements that are not at all familiar to us, or even for the most part observable by themselves. It is of no consequence to the metaphysician whether psychology may teach that our sensations actually have a flow in time or whether we are only conscious in a series of detached instants, like the separate pictures of a zoëtrope. Whether Prof. Royce be right or wrong in asserting that we have an immediate consciousness of a finite span of time is equally unimportant.^{†7} The only important thing here is our metaphysical phenomenon, or familiar notion, that the past is a matter for knowledge but not for endeavor, that the future is an object that we may hope to influence, but which cannot affect us except through our anticipations, and that the present is a moment immeasurably small through which, as their limit, past and future can alone act upon one another. Whether this be an illusion or not, it is the phenomenon of which the metaphysician has to give an account. Now the Berkeleyan idea, when we come to reflect upon it, amounts to this, that past experience is in some sense, my ego, that future experience is my sole non-ego, continually being assimilated by the ego through the present, and that that in this future non-ego which is destined at last to remain unrevoked in the ego is the only exemplar to which we desire that our ideas should conform.

[CP8.114] Prof. Royce admits, as we think justly, that this doctrine of Possible Experience is true as far as it goes. But still he holds it to be unsatisfactory; and so it is, inasmuch as it regards time as a mere order of succession and fails to do justice to the continuity of the flow, which makes of all time an individual object. That time is not a mere order

of succession among a multitude of instants is shown by the following considerations. Any multitude of instants, however great, will find room for their succession in any lapse of time; so that if time were the mere order among a multitude of instants, that multitude would have to be a maximum than which no multitude could be greater. But it can be proved that there is no such maximum multitude. Consequently, there is more in time than any or all multitudes.†8 Time is such, says Kant, that every part of it has similar parts, – a proposition very different from merely saying that time is infinitely divisible, though Kant himself did not perceive the distinction. This continuity, or similarity of parts in respect to having parts, necessarily makes time an individual whole (though precisely how we lack space to explain); and thus it is that we shall never have a satisfactory account of what we virtually aim at in seeking to know, until we recognize the individual character of the object of search.

[CP8.115] This individual character is what Prof. Royce desires to bring out by his new definition of the object.†9 He reaches this aspect of the matter through the conception of Purpose. Every idea he says has its purpose, which he calls its "internal meaning." We wish that in place of the vague word "idea," he had substituted judgment or virtual judgment; for since he is considering cognition in its truth or falsity, and only judgments have truth or falsity, he would thus have made himself more explicit and clear. Reality belongs primarily to facts, and attaches to things only as elements of facts. A judgment asserts that certain consequences would result from more or less vaguely indicated lines of action, which would be so many experiments. Now by the internal meaning or purpose of an idea Prof. Royce, if we rightly gather his intention, understands all the experiments which would verify it. We can hardly believe that he is so entirely won over to the extreme pragmatism of his colleague, James, as to hold that Doing is the ultimate purpose of life. Nor is this necessary; for the purpose of an experiment is to learn, and the performance of it is only a means to that end. This internal meaning calls, then, for more and more definiteness without cessation; and the limit toward which it thus tends but never fully attains is the knowledge of an individual, in short, of God. All this part of the discussion is susceptible of much improvement, which will come when the idea of continuity has been more fully analyzed. But, as it stands, it is a very notable contribution to the *prima philosophia*; and we need not say that in the book itself the thought shines out far more brightly and vivifyingly than it can shine through the cranny of our poor notice of it



6. The Internal and External Meaning of Ideas

Royce contends that there are two key points to make concerning the definition of Truth.

1. Truth with respect to the object of our judgment
2. Truth with respect to a type of correspondence of our ideas with their objects

Let's begin with the former and then move to the latter.

6.1 Truth and the object of our judgment

In Sections II and III, Royce argues for three key points.

First, Royce criticizes the Third Conception of Reality through an analysis of the various forms of judgments (categorical, hypothetical, disjunctive). The critical rationalist's conception of *the real* is synonymous with what would make a judgment *true* and so the theory can be analyzed by *that* which would make various judgments true. But Royce finds that the judgments of the critical rationalist only characterize the real *negatively* and *indeterminately*. This means that its object (its real) is of an indeterminate or general nature. The positive takeaway from this, however, is that it shows the process of thought or inquiry is one involved in getting *increasingly determinate ideas* about the world through a process of **negation** (judgments about what is not the case). Royce uses the Latin phrase "Omnis Determinatio est Negatio" or "All determination is [by] negation".

Second, not only does thought have a serious limitation but so does experience for the critical rationalist. First, no experience can ever conclusively prove any of our hypotheses. Second, no experience can determinately show a hypothesis is false. At most, experience can only provide partial support and / or refutation for hypotheses. Third, we never have an experience of something that is individual (something that is completely unique).

Third, Royce lays out a preliminary definition of his fourth conception of reality (although the full definition won't appear until the end of the lecture). This theory contends that an object is real only if it is the **ideal limit** toward which our ideas endlessly aim. He distinguishes two different notions

of the concept of a limit and defines the real as the determinate (individual) object “which all our ideas and experiences try to decide upon, and to bring within the range of our internal meanings; while, by the very nature of our fragmentary hypotheses and of our particular experiences, it always lies Beyond” (p.165).

6.1.1 First claim: all determination is by negation

Royce argues that **all of our judgments are about reality**. He writes that “never can you judge without some sort of conscious intention to be in significant relation to the Real” (p.151). He contends that whenever we utter a judgment, we make some reference to reality itself (he argues for this claim but we won’t spend any time on it).

If all of our judgments are about the real, how do judgments refer to reality or real objects. To answer this question, Royce considers three different types of judgments:

1. hypothetical judgments: if A then B
2. categorical (universal) judgments: All As are B.
3. disjunctive judgments: A is either B or C.
4. categorical (particular) judgments: Some A is B.

Royce contends that when we make hypothetical, universal, or disjunctive judgments, we are **denying that reality a set of possibilities**. We are characterizing *how things are* by saying *how they are not*. That is, these judgments do not assert that something is the case but instead that some possible experiences are not the case.

1. Hypotheticals: “If A then B” says that **you will not find a scenario where A is the case and B is not the case** (“if you work hard, I will reward you” says that you will not find a case where you work hard but where you are not rewarded)
2. Universals: “All As are B” says that **you will not find objects that are A that are not also B** (“all swans are white” says that you will not find an object that is both a swan and not white”).¹
3. Disjunctives: “A is B or C” says that **you will not find A as some third option (e.g. D) as opposed to B or C**.²

The result of saying *how things are* by *how they are not* amounts to **denying** a set of possible and definable ways that the world could be and leaving another set of possible and definable ways that the world could be. And this process of determination by negation proceeds endlessly. As Royce puts it:

For every step of the process is a cutting-off indeed of false possibilities, and an assertion of what therefore seems the more precisely and determinately limited range of the valid possibilities. But at every step, also, the range beyond is simply inexhaustible, so far as you take your object as merely external. Unless some other principle than that of mere negation determines the realm of valid Being, then it has no final determination at all (p.155).

What Royce means here can be illustrated as follows:

■ **Example 6.1** Suppose we have an object *O* that is individual. It is unique. If judgment is solely by denying various properties of *O*, then we would be saying the following about *O*:

1. *O* is not A
2. *O* is not B
3. *O* is not C

¹Royce’s example is “to know that universally $2 + 2 = 4$, is to know that there nowhere exists, in all the realm of external validity, a two and a two that, when added, fail to give, as the result, four.”

²I’m not actually clear what Royce says about disjunctives. See p.154)

4. O is not D
5. O is not E , etc.

Here, we never say what O is nor do we ever give a complete description of the properties of O to distinguish it from every other possible object.

Concerning, categorical (particular) judgments (e.g. “Some A s are B ” or “Some A s are not B ”), Royce says that while these judgments assert the existence of some being A , such judgments are “unsatisfactorily indeterminate” (p.157). As Royce writes:

The defect of these judgments is that they never tell us, by themselves, precisely what object this existent instance of an A that B really is. In other words, they are particular, but are not individual judgments.

The idea here, I think, is that if we say “Some cat is on the mat”, what makes such a sentence true is that there exists at least one cat that is on the mat. It does not require a singular (individual) unique object but one or another cat to make it true.

The general point then that Royce raises then is that an analysis of the critical rationalist’s conception of judgments (both universal and particular) leaves our ideas about reality *indeterminate*. That is, the Third Conception of Being leaves us with a conception of reality that is not individual but only indeterminate.

6.1.2 Second claim: The limitation of experience on thought

The second key point that Royce makes is that not only does *thought* have a serious limitation but so does experience. First, no experience can ever conclusively prove any of our hypotheses. Second, no experience can determinately show a hypothesis is false. At most, experience can only provide partial support and / or refutation for hypotheses. Third, we never have an experience of something that is individual (something that is completely unique).

Note We will skip this discussion and get to the most interesting part of our reading for the day.

6.1.3 Third claim: the role of individuality in defining Being

In Section III, Royce raises two questions:

1. do our ideas *ever* express (represent) their objects as individuals?
2. does external experience ever present to us individuals as individuals?

Royce answers **NO** to both questions.

Definition 6.1 — individual. An object O is an individual if and only if O is **unique**, viz., if there is a kind K that contains one and only one member O .^a

^a“For an individual is unique. There is no other of its individual kind. If Socrates is an individual, then there is only one Socrates in the universe. If you are an individual, then in Reality there is no other precisely capable of taking your place. If God is an individual, then, as ethical monotheism began by saying, There is no Other” (p.162).

With respect to the **first question** whether our ideas ever represent an individual, Royce addresses this question in two parts.

First, he contends that individuals often say that children have knowledge of individual facts. They know their mothers, fathers, teddy bears, etc. To this, Royce responds that the child only knows those things *through* their characters. The child knows her mother through her feel, her touch, her smell, her look, and how she carries her but has no knowledge that her mother is unlike any other being in the universe. The child may believe that her mother is unique but she has no idea of a

description of qualities that would satisfy her and only her.

Second, Royce addresses the issue more abstractly. He contends that you can try to define an idea of an individual object. For instance, you say that Socrates is short, was a certain weight, lived at a certain time, etc., etc. but Royce says is that all you have done is defined a “type of man” and “you can never tell what, about that kind of man called Socrates, forbids him to get repeated expression in the universe” (p.162).

■ **Example 6.2** Another test would be as follows:

1. suppose a loved one (e.g. your mom)
2. now suppose you were to list off all of the characteristics of your mom - this is your *idea of your mom*
3. now can you suppose a person (who is not your mom) but has all of the characteristics on your list is possible?

With respect to the **second question** whether our external experience ever presents to us individuals as individuals, Royce contends that we never have an experience of an individual. He contends that when you encounter objects that you presuppose to be individuals, what you are actually experiencing are confirmations (particular cases) of your general idea of a person. Royce writes:

You have an idea of your friend. You go to meet him; and lo, the idea is verified. Yes; but what is verified? I answer, this, that you have met a certain type of empirical object. “But my friend is unique. There is no other who has his voice, manner, behavior.” “Yes; but how should your personal experience verify that? Have you seen all beings in heaven and earth?” [...]

In fact, How should any one individual Being present himself, in this external experience of yours, or of all men taken together, in such wise as to show not only that he is of this or this aspect, but that no other is like him in the whole realm of Being. (p.163)

Exercise 6.1 Read the above quote. Do you agree with Royce that experience only presents to us particular experiences that confirm our ideas of our friends and families and never presents to us the being as an individual (as unique)?

6.1.4 Individuality and the Fourth Conception of Reality

Royce contends that since we can neither define nor experience an individual, this poses a problem for the critical rationalist. The critical rationalist, in defining the real in terms of what would make our judgments true or our experiences, defines reality as a kind of indeterminate entity (a non-individual).³ For Royce, this is wrong for he contends that “there can be no doubt that our whole interest in Being, is an interest in individuality” (p.164).

But what is the nature of this individual? For Royce, we can summarize the preceding as follows:

1. our judgments and reasoning process is one where we move away from vague possibilities toward determinateness by negation
2. our experience plays a role in revealing what is real although it can (i) never fully confirm or deny any of our hypotheses nor (ii) present us with an individual as an individual

Given (1) and (2) Royce contends that the real is individual and the individual is “the Limit toward which we endlessly aim” (p.165).

³“this difficulty gives one further reason why our Third Conception of Being, in conflict with common sense, does, indeed, abandon the concept that Being is individual, and confines itself to forming internal meanings, and to confirming them by experience. It tries to rest content with abstract universals, more or less determined by particular observations” (p.164)

Definition 6.2 — Real (preliminary, constructive idealism). The constructive idealist's definition of the real is the determinate (individual) object that all of our judgments and reasoning aim to represent *but* which is always beyond said judgments (hypotheses) and experiences.^{ab}

^a“the Real, as our judgments and empirical investigations seek it, is that determinate object which all our ideas and experiences try to decide upon, and to bring within the range of our internal meanings; while, by the very nature of our fragmentary hypotheses and of our particular experiences, it always lies Beyond” (p.165)

^b“that which is *immediately beyond* the whole series of possible efforts to bring, by any process of finite experience and of merely general conception, our own internal meaning to a complete determination” (p.166)

Exercise 6.2 Royce provides two accounts of a limit on p.165. Which account is he using in the definition of the real?

6.2 Truth: Two relations

Truth is sometimes defined as a **correspondence** between any idea and its object. Royce breaks this statement into two relations:

1. **The correspondence relation:** what it means for an idea to *correspond* to an object
2. **The having (selection) relation:** What it means for an idea to *have an* object. The object meant by the idea

Royce states that these two relations are **not the same**. With respect to the *having relation*, Royce contends that it must be the case that an idea can *have* an object without corresponding to that object. The reason is that if an idea cannot *have* an object without corresponding to it then error (falsity) would be impossible. Thus not every instance where an idea has an object is an instance of correspondence.

6.2.1 Relation 1: Correspondence

One of the main issues associated with correspondence is precisely stating what it means for an idea to correspond to an object. First, we might think of the relation as some sort of **similarity relation**.

Definition 6.3 — correspondence as similarity. an idea i corresponds to o if and only if i is similar to o .

There are several examples of such correspondence as similarity.

■ **Example 6.3** Some examples include:

1. photograph of a man corresponds to the man
2. very realistic painting of Donald Trump corresponds to Donald Trump
3. a map corresponds to a location that is mapped

Royce contends that an idea and its object can correspond when the idea resembles the object, but he rejects that some degree of similarity or likeness is required for two things to correspond.

■ **Example 6.4 — series of letters to series of numbers.** Take an series of letters $\{a, b, c, d\}$ and a series of numbers $\{1, 2, 3, 4\}$. Royce contends that the series of letters can be put into correspondence with the series of numbers. That is, they can be put into a one-to-one correspondence where the first item of the series of letters corresponds to the first item of the series of numbers, the second with the second, the third with the third, and so on.

■ **Example 6.5 — verbal description of a dog and a dog.** A verbal description of your puppy is very

different than your actual puppy. Your actual puppy may be brown, furry, bark, eat, soft, etc., but the written words used to describe your puppy in precise detail are black, textureless, silent, not require food, neither soft nor hard, etc. The description of your dog can correspond to your dog without resembling your dog.

■ **Example 6.6 — My daughter's idea of me.** My daughter knows what I look like. She could pick me out of a lineup with a number of relatively similar looking people. She may have a *sensible idea* of me that corresponds with me (the object). Her sensible idea of me might be represented as a mass of pictures. But she also has *other ideas* about me that correspond to me but these ideas (representations) don't resemble me. Suppose she asks me for a box of raisins and I tell her (in a very angry tone and with a closed hand) "no, you cannot". She will see my closed hand and open it because her idea of me involves not only what I look like but various *functional descriptions*, e.g. she knows I likely have a box of raisins in my hand.

Royce contends that a correspondence thus **does not imply a similarity relation between the corresponding objects**. The letters need not share any of the same characters as the numbers. He writes that "[t]here is, then, no degree of unlikeness in appearance between two objects which excludes a correspondence." Not only this, he also asserts that for some correspondences C_1 and C_2 where C_1 is a correspondence involving a high degree of similarity, there are cases where C_2 is actually a much more exact or comprehensive of a correspondence.

But you cannot photograph the solar system nor yet the constitution of a molecule. Yet you may have symbolically expressed ideas that correspond much more exactly to certain special truths about the solar system and the molecule than any ordinary photographs ever correspond to even the most important visible features of certain of their objects. [...] [A] trained student of anatomy of the brain has largely symbolic ideas of its structure which far exceed, in value of their correspondence to their object, all that can ever be hoped for from the X-ray photographs of a brain. In general, the photograph gives us at its best very one-sided ideas of visible objects (p.169).

Exercise 6.3 Do you agree with Royce that some ideas *correspond* with their objects despite not looking like their objects? And, do you agree with his point that some representations offer a better correspondence with their objects when they don't resemble their objects (e.g. the map of State College is less of a correspondence than an aerial photograph but the map might better correspond to the object than the photograph)?

What then is involved in a correspondence? Royce asks "what, then, is the test of the truthful correspondence of an idea to its object, if object and idea can differ so widely" (p.170)? Royce contends that the only answer possible involves the notion of **purpose**, writing that a correspondence "always fulfils one definite purpose" (p.168).

Royce's point here seems to be that

1. a representation i does not correspond to an object O if and only if i resembles O
2. a representation i corresponds to an object O if and only if there is an identity⁴ between i and o but where the members of o **fulfill the purpose of the individual** with respect to i ⁵

Royce's basic point here is that an idea **corresponds** to an object if and only if it fulfills the **purpose** of the agent with the idea. For Royce, this means that

1. there is no completely external standard of truth, and
2. because agent sets the terms (or the standards) under which an idea corresponds to an object

⁴Later on he says that there needs to be a commonality rather than identity

⁵"What is involved in correspondence is the possession, on the part of the corresponding objects, of some system of ideally definable characters that is common to both of them, that is, for the purposes of our thought, the same in both of them, and that is such as to meet the systematic purpose for which the particular correspondence is established" (p.169)

The agent plays a role in setting the conditions under which an idea corresponds with an object. Royce often makes this point (I think) figuratively when he says that there is correspondence between an idea and object if and only if it is “the precise correspondence that **the idea itself intended**” (p.170).⁶ If they fulfill their goal, then they correspond. If they fail to fulfill their goal, then they do not correspond.

Royce clarifies the volitional-aspect of truth by way of an analogy with ideas. For Royce, ideas are like tools.

- The quality of a tool is not determined independent of its purpose (you can only determine the quality of a tool by determining what the agent is using the tool to accomplish, the agent’s purpose)
- The correspondence of an idea to its object is not determined independent of its purpose (you can only determine the correspondence of an idea by determining what the agent is using the idea to accomplish, the agent’s purpose)

To illustrate:

- Do you want your idea to *look like* your object? That is, is the purpose of your idea to resemble the object in terms of its visual qualities? If the answer is yes, then you have correspondence if your idea *resembles* your object, e.g. photograph, accurate drawing, etc.⁷
- Do you want your idea to allow you to navigate your object quickly? That is, is the purpose of your idea to help you or others find relevant locations, e.g. restaurants, hospitals. If the answer is yes, then you have correspondence if your idea *allows for you to fulfill this end*.
- Do you want your idea of a person to allow you to interact with them successfully? If yes, then you have correspondence if your idea gives you these directions, e.g. you know what they like, what they dislike, what they care about, what they will do in such and such situations

Exercise 6.4 Royce puts forward his analogy between tools and ideas on p.171. The basic point he wants to get across is that whether an *idea* corresponds to its *object* depends in large part on the goal of the individual (as Royce puts it, he is saying that the our conscious ideas have an **essentially teleological inner structure** and that ideas are just as much a *volitional aspect* (aspect having to do with the will) as an intellectual aspect). Does the analogy support his case?

Exercise 6.5 Royce writes “The desired identity may, as in a case of a photograph, involve visible similarities. So the visual image of your absent friend may, indeed, resemble him in seeming, and the desired identity may, as in the ideas that accompany the actions of people who sign or who play in concert, involve musically interesting agreements and harmonies. Or, again, your idea may be one that, like the sympathetic ideas with which two friends accompany each other’s sentiments, intends to involve an identity in emotional attitudes” (p.170). What does Royce mean when he is talking about sympathetic ideas of friends? What is the correspondence or identity of emotional attitudes?

Note

It is important to keep in mind that Royce thinks that, for Royce, an idea is a partial embodiment of a purpose (Royce call this aspect of an idea its internal meaning). The *quality* of an idea is determined by how well it accomplishes its purpose. This is one reason he can liken ideas to tools and why he thinks that the relation of similarity is not terribly important.

⁶Royce says that the purpose of the idea is determined by the idea itself. He writes that an idea is “true if it possess the sort of correspondence to its object that the idea itself wants to possess” (p.170).

⁷“Do you want the image to look like its object? If so, your mental image is a true idea when, like the photograph, it looks like its object; and it is a false representative of its object if, like a poor visual image, it is dim, blurred, and for its representative purpose, consequently deceitful” (p.170)

6.2.2 Relation 2: Having an object

Recall that Royce asserts that the notion of truth involves two relations. The first is correspondence and with respect to correspondence we saw that Royce takes correspondence always to depend upon the purpose of the idea. An idea i corresponds to its object O depending upon the purpose the agent has in putting constructing (or thinking, or being aware of) the i .

The second relation involves what makes an object O the O of an idea. Royce will sometimes call this relation between O and i , the *intention* or *meaning* of the idea.

First, Royce considers the position that object of any idea is always set by the object itself insofar as the object **causes** (awakens or generates) the idea. Let's call this the **causal theory of ideas**.

Definition 6.4 — causal theory of ideas. The causal theory of ideas is the view “that in order to be object of a given idea, the object must be the cause of the idea, or that ideas have to look to their own causes as their object” (p.174).

■ **Example 6.7 — sun.** Tek looks up at the sun. The object (the sun) causes him to have an idea of the sun. What makes the sun the object of his idea of the sun is the object itself.

■ **Example 6.8 — circle.** Tek smells bacon cooking on a pan. He now has an idea of the smell of bacon. What makes the smell of bacon the object of Tek's idea of the smell of bacon is the smell produced by the cooking of bacon.

If we understand Royce's claim about the meaning of representations, then we might take this first approach to take a **naturalistic approach to the meaning of representations**. That is, words and representations get the meaning they do in virtue of the fact that some natural object caused them to take on that meaning.

Second, Royce rejects the causal theory of ideas. He cites four different counterexamples (he only discusses the first three):

1. ideas about objects in the future
2. ideas about hypothetical objects
3. the idea that a past object is irrevocable
4. our idea of mathematical objects that we construct

In the case of **ideas about objects in the future**, we may have an idea about our own death, a future eclipse, or a future election. If the causal theory is true, then the future object of our idea is causing us to have these ideas. But, backward causation is generally not accepted (future events causing past events) and so the causal theory is flawed. The idea of my own death is not caused by my own death since my own death has not yet happened and so cannot cause my idea of my death.

In the case of **ideas about hypothetical scenarios**, we may have an idea about counterfactual states or about conditional (or futural) contracts. For example, I may have an *idea* about what would happen if my high school football coach played me as quarterback during a playoff game. But this is not caused by any **existent object**. I never played quarterback and so there is no actual object that could cause this idea. Or, I may have an idea about a contract that says on such and such future date if the share price of \$AMD is below \$10, then I agree to sell 100 shares of \$AMD. But this idea is not caused by the hypothetical future event of \$AMD.

Objection 6.2.1 One might simply object to Royce's claim by saying that future and hypothetical objects are **not real**. Since these objects are not real, they do not cause our ideas about them. One might argue from here that either (i) what causes our ideas about future and hypothetical objects are *imagined objects* and so we encounter imagined future objects and these imagined future objects cause our ideas or (ii) we do not have sensible ideas about future or hypothetical objects.

Finally, Royce considers our ideas about the **irrevocability of the past**. Royce does not mean the idea that of past objects in general. He acknowledges that past experiences of Napoleon may have caused our idea of Napoleon. Rather, he means *our idea that the past events can never occur again*. That is, our idea that Napoleon can never be Emperor of France again or that a particular wave that breaks over a beach can never break over the beach again. In short, he contends that our idea of the truth that *a past event can never occur again* cannot be caused by any object. It is an idea of a universal truth governing all events.

Exercise 6.6 Given the above counterexamples, Royce concludes that “[i]t is hopeless, then, to persist in the hypothesis that the object of idea is as such the cause of the idea” (p.175). Do you agree with Royce’s assessment that an *O* of an idea is not the idea’s *O* simply because *O* caused that idea?

6.2.2.1 Selecting its object

If an idea gets its object not through the object causing the idea, then how else does an idea get its object?

Royce contends that an idea “selects its object” through an **act of conscious attention**, viz., through a kind of **attentive interest** on the part of the agent. That is, an individual stipulates an object that s/he wills the idea to be judged by.

Note Just as Royce made the correspondence between the idea and the object involve a volitional aspect (an act of will), he is also making the meaning of an idea in terms of an object volitional (also an act of will).

■ **Example 6.9 — Caesar.** Royce contends that if I make a judgment about *Caesar*, then the individual has selected an object s/he takes to be Caesar and not Napoleon or George Washington or some other individual. The judgment about Caesar is to be evaluated by (judged by) the object Caesar and not some other object. The idea gets its object Caesar not by Caesar causing the idea but by *the agent selecting an object*.

Royce notes that many of our ideas are about objects of sensation (e.g. visible chairs, people, buildings, etc.). The reason for this is, again, not because these objects cause our ideas but instead that they are relatively stable and vivid objects and so they are easy to consciously attend to.

■ **Example 6.10 — chair.** If there is a chair in front of me, I can form an idea of a chair and the idea of the object that I am viewing. It is easy for me to attend to this object because the chair is a relatively stable and vivid object of my sensation.

Exercise 6.7 Royce summarizes the results of his analysis as follows (explain this passage): “Plain, so far, are two considerations: First, the object of an idea is in somewise predetermined, is selected from all other objects, through the sort of attentive interest in just that object which the internal meaning of the idea involves. Unless the idea is thus selective, it can never come to be either true or false. For if it means to be true, it intends a sort of correspondence with an object. What correspondence it intends is determined, as we saw, solely by the purpose which the idea embodies, *i.e.* by the internal meaning of the idea. Furthermore, the idea intends to attain this correspondence to some particular object,—not to any object you please, not to whatever happens to correspond to the ideal construction in question, but to a determined object. The determination of what object is meant, is, therefore, certainly again due, in one aspect, to the internal meaning of the idea. Nobody else can determine for me what object I mean by my idea.”

6.2.3 The dilemma for truth

Royce contends that there is a central dilemma for the nature of truth. He presents this dilemma as an **antinomy** involving a thesis and antithesis.

Definition 6.5 — antinomy. An antinomy is a pair of statements consisting of a thesis and an antithesis that seemingly contradict each other.

Royce's antinomy for truth is as follows:

- **Thesis:** the object of an idea is determined by the idea itself (the will determines the intended object of an idea as well as what it would mean for an idea to correspond to its object)
- **Antithesis:** the object of an idea must be *other than* the idea itself

We will examine the thesis and antithesis below.

6.2.3.1 The thesis

Royce states the **thesis** of the antinomy as follows:

There seems to be, in the object of an idea, just in so far as it is the object of that specific idea, no essential character which is not predetermined by the purpose, the internal meaning, the conscious intent, of that idea itself (p.178).

The thesis states that **the object is *entirely* determined by the intent of the idea (the will of the agent)** and this occurs with respect to both relations involved in the nature of truth.

1. with respect to the object meant by the idea, we saw that the object of the idea is not **caused by** the object itself; instead, we said that the object of the idea is determined by the idea itself (the agent)
2. with respect to the correspondence between the object and the idea, we saw that the correspondence does not depend upon a resemblance between the object and the idea; instead we said that the correspondence depends upon the purpose of the idea (the agent)

Royce thus concludes that the object of the idea and **the correspondence of the idea with its object cannot be determined from without** (externally) but is instead **determined from within** (by the idea itself, by the conscious attention of an agent, by the will, by a conscious selection, by a choice). In sum, the thesis insists on a kind of *double predetermination* of the object by the idea itself (the will, the conscious selection, etc.)

1. the idea selects its object
2. the idea selects how it is to correspond to its object

6.2.3.2 The antithesis

The antithesis reads as follows:

No finite idea predetermines, in its object, exactly the character which, when present in the object, gives the idea the desired truth (p.179)

The antithesis says **the object of the idea cannot be determined by wholly determined by the idea itself (the will of the agent)**. The object of the idea must **other than** the idea itself. As Royce puts it, it must be a *true other*.

Royce's proof of the antithesis begins with a proof of the possibility of error.

- P1: If error is impossible, then the judgment "ideas can err" would not be in error.
- P2: If the judgment "ideas can err" is not an error, then error is not impossible.
- C: Therefore, error is possible.

Next, Royce argues that the possibility of error entails that “some objects contain what is opposed to the intent of the very ideas that refer to these objects”. I don’t know if I fully understand what Royce is saying here. What I take him to be saying (at minimum) is that if error is possible, then the object of an idea must somehow be **other than** the idea itself. But he seems to be making a stronger claim. He seems to be asserting that contrary to the thesis, that **since error is possible, the idea itself cannot fully determine its object** (the object must contain certain aspects that are not intended by or determined by the purpose of the idea).

- P1: Error is possible (see previous argument)
- P2: If error is possible, then some ideas give a false account of their objects.
- P3: If some ideas give a false account of their objects, then an idea cannot fully predetermine their objects (contrary to the thesis)
- C: Therefore, the object of an idea must be something *other than* the object that the idea intends or aims to correspond with.

Exercise 6.8 In Section VIII and Section IX, Royce will give his resolution to the antinomy and state his Fourth Conception of Reality, respectively (we will address both of these next time). However, it is important to get clear on the antinomy that Royce is about to try to resolve. How do you understand it?

6.3 The resolution of the antinomy

In the rest of the lecture, Royce has two goals: (i) solve the antinomy and (ii) provide an initial statement concerning the fourth conception of reality.

Recall the antinomy:

- Thesis: the object of an idea is determined by the idea itself (both with respect to the intended object and the correspondence)
- Antithesis: the object of an idea must be *other than* the idea itself

Royce argues that the following claim solves the antinomy: **The object of an idea is nothing more than the idea of the object in a more determinate form.** We will consider three different examples of this but first a preliminary statement about how this claim solves the antinomy. Royce contends that this claim reconciles the antinomy since it:

1. makes the object O of an idea i **other than** the i itself and so this allows for the possibility of error
2. makes every O of an i the *ultimate meaning* of the i itself and so O is at least initially determined by the idea itself

Royce clarifies the above proposition with three different examples:

1. an example involve the clarification of one’s own will
2. a mathematical example
3. an empirical example

6.3.1 Example 1: the object of one’s purpose

Royce contends that we can understand the claim about the object of an idea by analogy. He contends that we can think of the idea of our purpose in life. At the outset, our idea of our purpose is extremely vague and the process (or method) of finding our *true purpose* is often chaotic

we begin with perhaps a very indefinite sort of restlessness, which arouses the question, “What is it that I want? What do I desire? What is my real purpose?” To answer this question may take a long time and much care; and may involve many errors by the way,

errors, namely, in understanding our own purpose. Such search for one's own will often occupies, in the practical life of youth, some very anxious years. Idleness, defective modes of conduct, self-defeating struggles without number, fickle loves that soon die out, may long accompany what the youth himself all the while regards as the search for his own will, for the very soul of his own inner and conscious purposes. In such cases one may surely err as to one's intent. The false or fickle love is a sort of transient dream of the coming true love itself. The transient choice is a shadow of the coming true choice.

Royce then asks what is the relation of the **object** of our purpose to our **idea** of our purpose, viz., the relation of our true will to our restless will. Royce's answer is that the object of our will is nothing more than our present will but **in more determinate form**.

I answer, one's true will, one's genuine purpose, one's object here sought for, can be nothing whatever but one's present imperfect conscious will in some more determinate form. [...] I answer, nothing whatever in heaven or in earth but this present imperfect internal meaning rendered more determinate, less ambiguous in its form, less a general longing, more a precisely united and determinate life.

With respect to the antinomy, there are two key points to note:

First, Royce is clear that the *object* of our purpose is not a new purpose but the **same** purpose but in a more determinate form. He contends that our idea of our purpose **determines** the object of our purpose, viz., that is, the object of our purpose is nothing more than our current purpose in a more determinate form.

Second, the more determinate purpose is **other than** the vague purpose in that it is not something that we are consciously aware of (we might have a vague sense of what to do in life but don't know precisely what we ought to do). See [Figure 6.1](#).

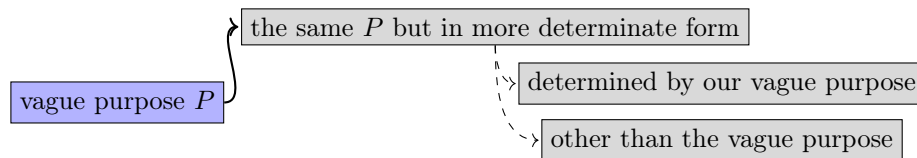


Figure 6.1: Royce contends that the object of our current purpose is nothing more than our current purpose in a moral determinate (less ambiguous) form.

6.3.2 Example 2: illustration from mathematics

The second example that Royce provides of his solution to the antinomy involves mathematics. Consider the idea of a circle. We might define a circle as a closed plane curve whose points whose every point is equidistant from a fixed point within the curve. Or, we might simply draw a circle on a piece of paper and abstract away certain imperfections, then treat this abstract idea as our idea of a circle.

- What then is the object of these ideas? According to Royce, **the object of an idea is nothing more than the idea of the object in a more determinate form**. This object is *other than* our initial idea yet determined by our idea in that it is our idea in more determinate form.
- How then do we acquire the object of our idea? For Royce, we get an increasingly determinate form of the circle **through inquiry** (mathematical experimentation and proof).
- Will we ever get the object of our idea (that is, will we ever obtain the idea but in more determinate form)? Royce contends that it is possible, but the idea would appear to us as a highly developed, highly expressive system of ideas: "So far as our narrow human consciousness does permit this result of mathematical inquiry ever to appear to us in its complete expression,

it is finally observed, however, as a fact of experience, or complex of facts of experience, as a series of properties and relations, embodied in diagrams, symbols, and symbols of symbols (p.183)

Returning to the antinomy, Royce notes that

1. the object (the circle in more determinate form) is determined by our initial definition (idea) of the circle
2. yet the object is a true other since the idea of the circle in a more determinate form is not consciously present to us at the outset.

Exercise 6.9 Royce contends that we can solve the antinomy if we take the object of the idea to be the idea in a determinate form (developed, precise, non-ambiguous). Royce contends that when we do this, we can show how the thesis and antithesis are both true (and the way they are false). The *thesis is true* in that the idea predetermines its object (since the object of the idea of a circle is nothing but the idea of the circle in a more determinate form) and the antithesis is true (since the object is other than the idea itself for we are not consciously aware of the ultimate determination of the idea).

Before we turn to Royce's analysis of empirical objects, what do you think of Royce's solution to the antinomy?

6.3.3 Example 3: illustration from empirical objects

Royce contends that empirical objects are far more complex and numerous than mathematical ones. Nevertheless, he insists that "*Whatever the object, it is still the object for a given idea solely because that idea wills it to be such*" (p.184). He contends that with respect to our ideas of empirical objects (e.g. chairs, bodies, stars), the manner in which our ideas become more determinate is through experience. Royce contends that this is the case for **all finite ideas**.

■ **Example 6.11 — idea of the distance between two stars.** For suppose that I have an idea involving the distance between two stars. Royce contends that the object of my idea is nothing more than the distance between two stars in more determinate form. The process of making this idea more determinate, less ambiguous, more precise is one that relies upon **experience**. That is, I engage in various sorts of measurements, observations, calculations, studies into vision and various telescopes and these play the role of making my idea more determinate.

6.4 The object of an idea and the truth of an idea

The last key point in Lecture VII involves the initial formulation of the fourth conception of reality. In order to formulate his position, he makes two preliminary points:

1. the object of an idea is an **individual**
2. an idea is **true** if it corresponds (in some vague way) to **its individual expression**

In what follows, we will look at Royce's claim that the object of an idea is an **individual** and that the idea is true if and only if it corresponds to its complete (individual) determination.

6.4.1 The object of an idea is an individual

The first point Royce makes is that the object of an idea is an **individual**. For Royce, our ideas are finite and imperfect (they are indeterminate, vague, general, or "abstractly universal"). These ideas are expressed in general (universal) terms. We talk of the table, the chair, the person next door as though they are singular, but, according to Royce, our ideas of these things are imperfect. As Royce puts it, our ideas are "known to us as *that of which there might be another instance*" (p.186). Royce

offers the following example.

First, Suppose you think of your own life. That is, you have an idea of your own life. This idea is imperfect (vague, universal, abstract) because your life “could be and will be embodied in other moments than this one” (p.187). What is needed to express the idea of your life are an assortment of missing ingredients (what you will do in 2020, what you might have done in 2017, etc.).

Next, now suppose you were to receive some addition to your idea of your life (e.g. a conscious awareness of what you will do in 2019). Royce contends with this additional awareness “*You would experience at once a greater fulfilment of your purpose, and a more determinate idea*” (p.187). For Royce, this increased determination of our ideas is something we seek. That is, we seek to render our ideas of things **more determinate** and the process by which we make our ideas more precise involves further *experience*. See Figure 6.2

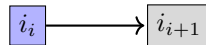


Figure 6.2: Royce contends that if we had an imperfect idea of our life supplemented with additional awareness of what we would do in the future, our idea would become more determinate.

Finally, consider that if **all possible instances** of your life were added to your conscious idea of your life, we would have two things:

1. a complete correspondence of our present idea with its object (the completely determined idea)
2. an individual realization of our idea (that is, we would have an idea that only applied to a single object)

If we thus seek the greater determination of our own ideas through experience, Royce contends that the idea that we seek is the one that is at the “*desired limit of determination*”. In other words, we wish our ideas to be so precise that they apply to one and only one individual. For Royce, this is the notion of an **individual**. The fully determined idea of our life would apply to one and only one object, which would be a single individual. It would not be a general or vague idea that could potentially apply to a number of different objects. See Figure 6.3.

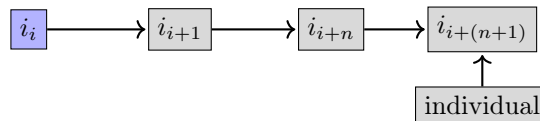


Figure 6.3: The complete determination of an idea would not only involve a correspondence between the idea and the object but involve an individual realization of the idea

6.4.2 The truth of an idea

The second key claim Royce makes before articulating the fourth conception of being concerns when an idea is true. Royce devotes only a single paragraph to this statement. He writes:

Now this final embodiment is the ultimate object, and the only genuine object, that any present idea seeks as its Other. But if this be so, when is the idea true? It is true—this instant’s idea—if, in its own measure, and on its own plan, it corresponds, even in its vagueness, to its own final and completely individual expression. Its expression would be the very life of fulfilment of purpose which this present idea already fragmentarily begins, as it were, to express. It is with a finite idea as it is with any form of will. Any of its transient expressions may be at any instant more or less abortive. But no finite idea is wholly out of correspondence to its object, as no will is wholly false to itself.

In terms of truth, Royce says that an idea is true (at this instant, here and now in undeveloped, vague form) if and only if it corresponds to the final and completely individual expression of the idea. The idea here then is that vague ideas can be true provided they can correspond in some way shape or form to their ultimate determination or expression.

■ **Example 6.12 — fire burns wood.** Take the judgment “fire burns wood”. Such an expression is vague in that it does not explain what it means to burn, what types of woods will burn, how hot the fire needs to be, how dry the wood needs to be, etc. Nevertheless, provided the judgment aims to correspond to its object by stating the conditions under which a fire would burn wood, then the idea (even if vague) is true provided it corresponds to its ultimate determination in some way.

6.5 The fourth conception of reality

Royce first articulates his fourth conception of reality on p.188 when he writes:

Definition 6.6 — fourth conception of reality. “We are ready, now that we have defined both object and truth, to assert, as our Fourth and final Conception of Being, this, that *What is, or what is real, is as such the complete embodiment, in individual form and in final fulfilment, of the internal meaning of finite ideas*”

He states that later lectures will be devoted to clarifying this fourth conception. In the remainder of Lecture 7, he makes a number of preliminary remarks

- reality is taken to be something **other than** ideas themselves
- reality is taken to be what our finite ideas seek
- if reality was present to our ideas, we would have no more doubts (it satisfies our inquiry, quenches our doubt)
- Being is not (as the realist asserts) independent of our finite ideas, nor is it (as the mystic asserts) some immediate fact (some datum of experience that “quenches” ideas), nor does it involve the mere validity of experience (as the critical rationalist asserts)

More positively, Royce characterizes the **real** as having three different components:

1. it is the complete expression of our finite ideas (the ultimate determination of those ideas)
2. it is the complete fulfillment of the purpose embodied in the idea
3. it is an individual (a singular entity that is unique)

Royce has already discussed (1) and (3) and indirectly (2). Recall that Royce contends that both the correspondence of an idea to its object and the relation of an idea to its object contains a volitional aspect (an aspect of our will or purpose). That is, our will plays a role in the type of correspondence between an idea i and an object o as well as a role in determining the o of an i . That is, the idea i has a purpose. On Royce’s account of reality then, o amounts to the fulfillment of the purpose of the i .

Exercise 6.10 What do you think of Royce’s solution to the antinomy along with his preliminary statement concerning the fourth conception of being?



7. The Fourth Conception of Being

7.1 Introduction

Lecture 8 aims to further articulate and defend the fourth conception of reality. We will look at three key points from Lecture 8:

- The restatement of the fourth conception of reality
- That the fourth conception of reality is a **synthesis** of the prior three conceptions of reality
- Royce's further clarification of the fourth conception of being in response to two principal objections: (i) that the fourth conception is too complex and obscure and (ii) the fourth conception is too simple for the complexities of the world

Before considering these three points, it is worthwhile to institute some terminology with respect to this fourth conception of being. Namely, we will use “fourth conception of being”, “fourth conception of reality”, “Royce’s constructive idealism”, and more simply “constructive idealism interchangeably.

7.2 The restatement of the fourth conception of reality

At the beginning of Lecture 8, Royce restates the fourth conception of being.

Exercise 7.1 Royce attempts to restate the fourth conception (and the argument for the fourth conception) in Section I of Lecture 8. This passage is very dense. Reread it and try to explain what it means.

Royce contends that this statement concerning the fourth conception should not be accepted lightly. He writes that it is

a definition so paradoxical in seeming, so remote from the limits which common sense usually sets to speculation, and so opposed to many dignified historical traditions; and indeed I wish nobody to accept it lightly. The whole matter is one for the closest scrutiny

In what follows, we more fully articulate the fourth conception by considering Royce's point that this conception of reality is a synthesis of the three prior conceptions of reality and resistant to criticism.

7.3 The development of the three prior conceptions of reality

Royce asserts that constructive idealism is a synthesis of the prior conceptions of reality in that it achieves the goal of each of these prior conceptions. This is one reason he refers to his fourth conception as the **Synthetic**. However, before making this point, Royce restates his critical argument against prior conceptions of reality.

The first part of the argument criticizes grounding a theory of reality using the notion of correspondence as understood as a relation of resemblance.

- P1: An idea i and its object o must have some characters in common.
- P2: The mere commonality (or resemblance) of characters between i and o is insufficient for defining the fact that i has o as the object of i and for the type of correspondence required between i and o .
- C: In short, mere resemblance between i and o is insufficient for determining the truth of i or the reality of o or i .

The claim that mere resemblance (or correspondence in characteristics) is insufficient for determining the truth of i or the reality (being) of o or i is said to apply not only to metaphysical realism and mysticism, but also at critical rationalism. The second part of the argument is a restatement about how this argument applies to critical rationalism.

- P1: Suppose i is valid.
- P2: If i is valid, then there is further possible experience that would confirm i .
- P3: This further possible experience that would confirm i is *other than* i . It is what would make i true.
- P4: This further possible experience that would confirm i is the object o that i aims to define.
- P5: If this further possible experience is *merely possible*, then this experience is nothing more than that which is *in agreement* with i . The experience or object o of i is nothing more than that which **corresponds** to i in virtue of having **shared characteristics** (mere resemblance) with the i itself.
- P6: Per the previous argument, the mere fact that i and o have common characteristics is insufficient for determining (i) the truth of i and (ii) the reality of both o and i .

Royce thus contends that the property of **mere correspondence** is insufficient. Correspondence is only one of the two important relations between an object and an ideas. The other relation that Royce thinks is critical is the **intentional selection of the object of the idea and the type of correspondence that the idea is to have with its object**. Royce contends that this other relation is what determines the **object** of an idea and the conditions under which **an idea is true or false**. And, for Royce, this intentional selection is nothing more than the idea more completely (determinately) expressed.

Note

In other words, Royce thinks that prior conceptions of reality have neglected the volitional aspect of the idea-object relation. They have ignored that *correspondence* is not as foundational for defining reality and truth as the volitional or intentional relation.

With the above in place, Royce contends that once you accept the fourth conception of reality, "you will accomplish the end which all the various prior definitions of Being actually sought" (p.196). Royce thus views the fourth conception as a more determinate form of the very idea of reality. Much like a development of any idea, the fourth conception is simply a development of the earlier conceptions. If ideas are like tools and so have purposes, and the purpose of the three conceptions of

reality are to represent the *what is*, then the fourth conception is simply an improvement on these tools. It achieves what they do but in more perfect form (see Figure 7.1).

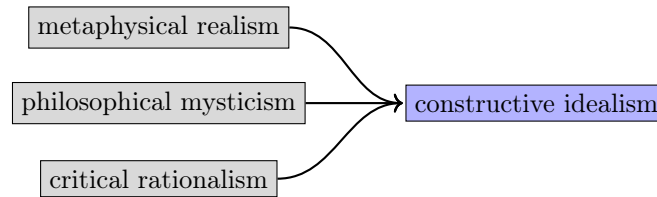


Figure 7.1: Royce views the fourth conception of being (constructive idealism) as the further development of our prior idea of reality

To see this point more clearly, let's briefly examine how the fourth conception accomplishes the goal of each of the prior theories of reality.

7.3.1 The fourth conception in light of realism

Recall that the metaphysical realist asserts that the real is **authoritative**. It is distinct from our finite ideas and also determines whether they are true or false. The problem with the realist position was that its understanding of the authoritative role of reality was too abstract and too divorced from ideas. The real was totally independent of our ideas and our experience and this led to a refutation of metaphysical realism.

The fourth conception of reality accomplishes the goal of the realist in making the real **authoritative** without succumbing to the total independence of ideas from objects that led to the refutation of realism. For the constructive idealist, however,

- the object of an idea is determined by the idea itself (and so is in *relation to* rather than *independent from* the idea), and
- *other than and authoritative on* the idea in that it is (i) the complete determination of the idea and (ii) what makes the present idea true or false.

As Royce puts this same point:

So you will all agree with the realist that whether or no the idea just now embodies its own object of search as nearly with present truth as the narrow limits of our consciousness permit, it must still seek other fulfilment than is now present, and must submissively accept this fulfilment as its own authoritative truth. But you will reject the realistic isolation of the idea from the object, and of the object from the idea (p.196).

In short, the constructive idealist rejects the total independence of the real and our ideas about the real but achieves the goal of the realist in making the real *other than and authoritative upon* our present finite ideas. See Figure 7.2.

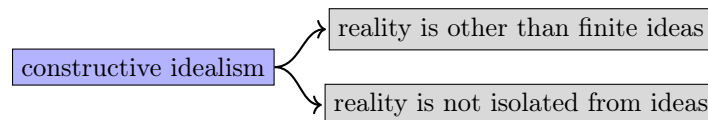


Figure 7.2: Royce contends that the realist is correct in asserting that the real is other than (and authoritative upon) our ideas but denies the idea that the real is isolated from our ideas. In saying that the real is the ultimate determination of our present finite idea, the real is other than the present finite idea yet not the real object is determined by this finite idea

7.3.2 The fourth conception in light of mysticism

For Royce, the primary goal of the mystic is to **connect reality with the fulfillment of one's purpose**. For the mystic, however, the fulfillment of one's purpose is not found in the imperfect self nor in our finite ideas. It is instead found in a sort of identification of an identity between the world and the self. That is, it is found in a perception of oneness, immediacy, or unity.

The primary problem for the mystic was that (i) the theory defines reality in contrast to our finite ideas, (ii) it takes these finite ideas to be a mere nothing, and so (iii) it attempts to define *what is* in contrast to *what is not*, but (iv) this entails that the mystic's notion of reality is also a mere nothing. Thus, the mystic has not given a positive account of reality.

The fourth conception of reality **agrees** with mysticism in that the real is that which would fulfill our purpose and **agrees** with mysticism insofar as it acknowledges the inadequacy of our present finite ideas. Royce writes “[o]ur final object, the *urbs Sion unica, mansio mystica*, is for us, as for the mystic, the unique Being wherein this our finite will is fulfilled” (p.197).

However, constructive idealism **disagrees** with the mystic in that the inadequacy of our present ideas does not reflect some essential fact about reality in general. Our finite ideas are not a mere nothing. Instead, the inadequacy of our ideas is only reflective of the fact that they are merely partial fulfillments of their ultimate purpose. They are only partial determinations of a more complete determination.

Royce thus asserts that constructive idealism ties the ultimate determination of an idea to the fulfillment of the purpose of our ideas. However, constructive idealism differs in that it contends that our present finite ideas have, in some degree, already fulfilled this purpose (**partial fulfilment**); our ideas are not mere illusory or nothing but partially partake in the unity of reality. As Royce puts it:

Its will is done on earth, not yet in this temporal instant wholly as it is in heaven, but is still really done, in these ideas that already consciously attain a fragment of their own meaning. [...] The sadness of the mystical longing is now for us lighted by glimpses of the genuine and eternally present truth of the one real world. It is not merely in the mystic trance, but in every rational idea, in so far as it is already a partially embodied purpose, that we now shall in our own way and measure come upon that which is, and catch the deep pulsations of the world.

In short, Royce contends that in contrast to the mystic, we, in a fragmentary way, know the real. See [Figure 7.3](#).

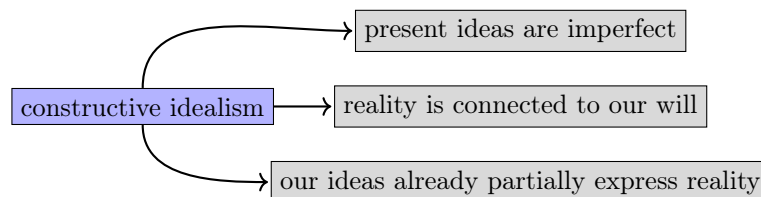


Figure 7.3: Royce contends that mysticism is partially correct in its assertion that ideas do not constitute the whole of reality, that the real is tied to our selves, and that the reality would satisfy our purpose or will. However, constructive idealism asserts that (i) the imperfection of ideas does not mean they are a mere nothing, (ii) that while reality is not the self, the real depends in part on our will, and (iii) our ideas insofar as they are partial embodiments of our purpose and partially determinate already (in a fragmentary way) embody reality.

7.3.3 The fourth conception in light of critical rationalism

Exercise 7.2 Briefly review the bottom of pp.197-199 (the end of section III). How does the fourth conception of reality fulfill the goals of critical rationalism? Royce says that reality is an individual life, the complete life of divine fulfilment of whatever finite ideas seek. What does he mean by this?

Note

I think Royce's refutation of critical rationalism is a bit unclear. This would be a good topic for an expository paper.

7.4 Objections to the fourth conception of being

Royce considers two different types of objections to constructive idealism. He contends that these objections are not convincing but ultimately helpful in clarifying constructive idealism. The two objections are (i) constructive idealism is too complex and abstruse, it is an affront to empiricism and our common-sense beliefs and (ii) constructive idealism is too simple to account for the complexities of the universe. See Figure 7.4.

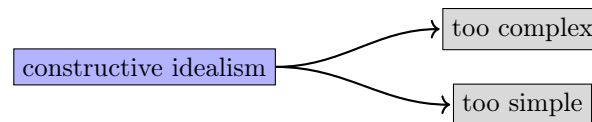


Figure 7.4: Royce considers two general objections to the fourth conception of being: the theory is too complex and the theory is too simple

Royce offers several versions of these objections throughout Lecture 8. We won't consider all the variations of these objections.

7.4.1 The fourth conception is too obscure: objection 1

The fourth conception of reality may be criticized for being overly obscure. One form of this objection might take the following form:

- P1: Constructive idealism contends that (i) the real consists of the final fulfillment of ideas and (ii) human experience is a fragment of this final fulfillment.
- P2: Common sense tells us that something is real if and only if it is confirmed by human experience and so the fourth conception *transcends* human experience.
- P3: Common sense tells us that since our experience is only fragmentary, we have no experience of the final fulfillment of our ideas.
- C: Therefore, the fourth conception of reality is false.

Royce highlights this objection when he writes:

the question about Being always is, Does experience confirm the ideas? That idea expresses Being which is found to be confirmed by experience. Upon this view of Being all sane science is founded. [...] Constructions of ideas about possibilities of experience are often allowable enough in science, as mere hypotheses, or as assertions about what is probable. But the test is the concrete, present, immediate experience of this or that observer. What has been seen, felt, or otherwise empirically encountered by some body, is in so far real. Nothing else is for us men knowable about the constitution of Being. Now when you talk about Being as a final fulfilment of ideas, and of human experience as a mere fragment of such a final fulfilment, you transcend human experience. Your view is too abstruse and artificial for plain men. We no longer seek, in these days, for any absolute or final Being. We believe what we find. Nothing final is experienced by

men. The realm of the empirical is always, as you say, fragmentary. But then this is the only realm known to men. This alone is for us real. Ideas furnish us the *what*. Concrete experience alone can supply the *that*. I conceive in idea a horse. In experience I thereupon see, touch, drive, or buy and sell horses. Other men do the same. Hence horses are real. But I conceive of a fairy. My idea is perhaps vivid. But still I never see fairies, and I find that none but children and ignorant people fancy that they have seen fairies. So fairies remain unobserved, and so far appear to be unreal. The same rule holds in science. Neptune was first ideally conceived, but this idea was verified by astronomical observation; for the predicted planet was later observed. So Neptune is a reality. But the heavenly spheres of an older astronomy proved to be mere ideas, since advancing experience proved to be inconsistent with the ideas in question. So in science and in life, it is experience which decides that any supposed Being, whose *what* an idea defines, exists. Away, then, with your hope of finality. Experience is fragmentary, growing, and finite. And Being is only known through experience.” (p.199-200)

There are two parts to this objection. The first part involves an evaluation of **P2** and the second part deals with **P3**.

7.4.1.1 Experience and transcendence (P2)

First, Royce’s remarks that he wholeheartedly agrees that experience is decisive of truth, writing that “I know of no truth that is not an empirical truth” (p.200).

Second, from the point of view of the objector, only individual experience is real. That is, we have no experience of *experience in general*.

Third, the objector asserts that experience is real. Our ideas determine the *what* while our present individual experience determines the *that*. However, Royce asks in what sense these ideas are considered *real*? If experience is real in the sense that it is **wholly independent** of our ideas, then the realist is positing an entity whose reality transcends our individual experience. That is, the realist posits something about experience of which we can have no experience of. In short, Royce contends that this realist explanation of experience leads to contradiction.

Fourth, Royce contends that **the objector cannot contend that the experience of humanity (either or other individuals or of my past self) is a real fact**. For consider the following two instance:

- Suppose I have the idea *i* that you have an experience of *o*. If I am a realist, then the only thing that can confirm *i* is an experience of your experience of *o*. But, since I am a finite being confined to this moment, I can have no experience of your experience of *o*. Therefore, my *i* that you have an experience transcends my experience. And, this refutes the objector’s hypothesis that the experience of humanity is a real fact.
- Suppose I have the idea *i* that I have had past experiences. If I am a realist, then the only thing that can confirm *i* is an experience of my past experience. But, since I am a finite being confined to this moment, I can have no experience of my past experience. Therefore, my *i* that I have had a past experience transcends my experience. And this refutes the objector’s hypothesis that the experience of humanity is a real fact.

Finally, Royce contends that *human experience* as an object *o* other than our ideas *i* about it is either:

- something that exists independently of our ideas about it (as the realist asserts), or
- something that is consciously meant by our ideas (as the constructive idealist asserts)

If one adopts the realist hypothesis, then one is led to (i) an inability to refer to the experience of others, of humanity in general, and to one’s past experiences and (ii) the contradictions associated with realism positing an object (in this case *experience*) independent of our ideas about it.

If one adopts the alternative hypothesis, then one simply finds one's self accepting the fourth conception of reality. On this account, *experience* is our idea of experience in more determinate form. And for Royce, this means "a life expressing in fulness what every transient moment of human consciousness fragmentarily embodies, and ideally seeks" (p.203).

7.4.1.2 Experience and finality (P3)

7.4.2 The fourth conception is too obscure: objection 2

Royce considers a more skeptical version of the objection from experience. The previous objection asserted that the sphere of the real is the same as the sphere of human experience. In response, we showed that any attempt to define the real in terms of an experience that transcends our own personal experience leads to the fourth conception or to inconsistency. However, this left open the possibility of defining reality in even more narrow terms, namely what is real is what is experienced at the present instant in time.

Royce provides a response to this objection in Section IV of Lecture 8. We won't discuss it here.

Note

This is a really foundational challenge that Royce raises. Again, if you were looking for a paper topic, giving a clear and detailed articulation of this section in the context of the rest of the chapter would be an interesting read.

7.4.3 The fourth conception is too simple: objection 1

Before stating the second of the two objections that Royce raises in Lecture 8, it is worthwhile to briefly summarize (i) the three conceptions of being and their principal objections along with (ii) Royce's fourth conception of reality.

theory	description	objection
metaphysical realism	real is totally independent of our ideas	internally inconsistent
philosophical mysticism	real is immediate (pure experience)	if all finite ideas are imperfect (illusions, mere nothings), while a pure experience is possible, we can no positive idea of this conception of reality
critical rationalism	real is what makes our ideas true (real as valid), the experience that would confirm our ideas	true but insufficient as it (i) cannot explain merely possible experiences and (ii) has no conception of the individual (all knowledge is general)

Table 7.1: A summary of the three conceptions of being and the principal objections against them

With respect to the fourth conception of reality (constructive idealism, the synthetic account of reality), Royce contends that the real is:

- *other than* the mere idea itself (not because the object is external to the idea) because it is the complete expression in individual form (the ultimate determination of the idea) of the very meaning that the idea itself expresses if only in a general (imprecise) way
- *the ultimate fulfillment of our purpose* (Royce takes *ideas* to be a partial embodiment of a purpose (or plan of action); the purpose is the idea's internal meaning, the external meaning of an idea then is the ultimate fulfillment of a purpose, the full development of the internal meaning)
- *an individual life of experience* (all finite ideas are mere fragments (parts) of an entire life of the development of an idea).

One principal consequence of Royce's theory is that the real world in its entirety consists of the **completed purposes**, the full development of the meaning of ideas, an entire life of experience of which our finite ideas are only a part. This implies that any idea you have of yourself at this moment is already complete, already experienced, and if you have a purpose, that purpose is fulfilled.

This brings us to the second objection considered in Lecture 8, namely that the fourth conception is "too simple for this our complex real world" (p.207).

Objection 7.4.1 The fourth conception of reality is overly simplistic, naively optimistic, and entirely ignorant of aspects of experience and reality that are in conflict with the fulfillment of a purpose. *What is* is not the complete determination of our ideas in some individual expression since experience shows us that many of our ideas will never be made fully determinate. *What is* is not the fulfillment of our purpose because our lives are replete with countless realities that have the opposite effect. Part of *what is* are various ideas that go undetermined, various purposes that are destroyed, various wills that are dashed.

As Royce puts this same objection:

Your view is too simple for this our complex real world. What is, does not in any essential way fulfil ideas. What is real, is once more whatever experience shows to exist. And experience contains all sorts of non-fulfillments and irrationalities. Chaos or order, joy or defeat, tears of despair and shouts of victory, mysteries, storms, north winds, wars, the wreck of hearts, the might of evil, the meteors that wander in interplanetary darkness, the suns that waste their radiant energy in the chill depths of lifeless space,—these all are facts,—these are Beings. Why talk of Being? What Being in itself is, may well remain unknowable. But what is consistent with the existence of facts, you experience whenever you observe just such wretchedly irrational facts as these. Whatever they mean, they involve not fulfilment, but defeat, of purpose (p.207).

And, such an objection is supported by our experience of loss, grief, death, suffering, and a variety of other experiences where our ideas go undeveloped and our purposes are destroyed. Royce writes

Chaos or order, joy or defeat, tears of despair and shouts of victory, mysteries, storms, north winds, wars, the wreck of hearts, the might of evil, the meteors that wander in interplanetary darkness, the suns that waste their radiant energy in the chill depths of lifeless space,—these are all facts,—these are Beings (p.207).

To summarize this objection:

- P1: Assume I have a purpose X (the internal meaning of an idea).
- P2: If the fourth conception of reality is true, then the real is the ultimate fulfillment of X (it is the full development of the meaning of the idea).
- P3: There are a number of empirical facts that are not the embodiment of any purpose X, e.g. earthquakes, chaos, other types of natural destruction.
- P3: These empirical facts (**unwelcome facts**) rather than playing a part in the ultimate fulfillment of a purpose instead often amount to the *defeat* of the fulfillment of X (they stop the full development of the meaning of our ideas)
- C: Therefore, the real is not wholly the ultimate fulfillment of purpose (the fourth conception of reality is false).

Royce characterizes this objection as a **logical** (rather than pathetic) version of the problem of evil (he takes up the pathetic version in the second volume of the *World and the Individual*). The above argument then can be thought of as analogous to the following pathetic version of the problem of evil.

- P1: If God is the all-knowing, all-loving, all-powerful being, then there is no evil in the world.
- P2: There is evil in the world that is not due to the actions of human beings (unwelcome

natural facts)

- C: Therefore, God does not exist.

7.4.3.1 Royce's response to the logical problem of evil

Royce begins his response by distinguishing between two aspects of every unwelcome fact: (i) its positive character and (ii) its negative character.

- **positive character of unwelcome facts:** properties of the fact itself that allow it to be, that allow it to exist in space, take up time, be in relation to other objects, to be an object of scientific or historical thought, etc. Example: despite being evil, the devil has a number of positive properties; the same is true with murderers, thieves, earthquakes, etc.
- **negative character of unwelcome facts:** properties that allow the unwelcome fact to defeat, destroy, or vanquish this or that purpose.

Next, Royce considers a specific example of an unwelcome fact: the death of a friend.

- **positive character of death:** the physical / chemical properties that make our idea about it true or false, it is positive in the way many other natural facts are positive (in space, time, in relation to other objects). As an objective fact, *what death is* is the fulfillment of our idea about death
- **negative character of death:** involves the temporary defeat of the purpose of human love, the will or desire for good people in the world, vanquishes the idea that our friend will fulfill their goals or meet their destiny or their life has some ultimate meaning

Applied to death then, the objection is that

- P1: The case of death is one where human purpose is defeated (our idea of our friend meeting their destiny is not fulfilled). It is a case where a real fact (a real object of thought) is in direct conflict with the object of our idea.
- P2: This defeat is somehow part of the real.
- P3: Constructive idealism asserts the real is that which fulfills (not defeats) our purpose.
- C: Therefore, constructive idealism is false.

Exercise 7.3 While Royce has much to say about the nature of death and overcoming evil, his position is summarized compactly in the first two paragraphs of p.210. Read these two paragraphs. What is Royce's response to the above argument?

Royce's answer is to assert essentially that the object of the purpose is not defeated or destroyed. There are two points to make here:

- when we think the object of our purpose is destroyed, this is an error; we instead treat the object as though it were a complete individual reality when it is only a part of the whole
- the real object of our ideas is a fully completed object, viz., the Eternal

Note

It is important not to confuse that Royce is dealing with the logical aspect of the problem of reality, not the pathetic version. He is concerned with how (i) he can maintain that reality is nothing more than a purpose brought to completion yet (ii) make sense of experiences that suggest these objects are destroyed. He is not terribly concerned (at least here) with whether this apparent destruction is morally good or bad.

7.5 Notes

The "Being to which an idea refers is simply the will of the idea more determinately, and also more completely expressed" (p.196). Being is "a Life of Experience fulfilling Ideas, in an absolutely final form" (p.192)

- P1: Being / reality has to be that which makes our ideas true or false (valid)
- P2: Ideas and their object have to have some common characters.
- P3: The relation of an idea to its object cannot be defined from without (either by the object causing the idea or through resemblance)

Royce contends that this Fourth conception of reality is preferable to the third conception.

- P1: If the real is the possible experience that would make my idea true (valid), then our finite ideas are true if and only if there is some further experience that would make them true.
- P2: If this further experience is merely possible (rather than destined to occur), then the real is nothing more than whatever object *O* that would meet the description of my idea *i* (it is a general thing; it is some abstract experience that has this or that form or falls into the type defined by my idea; it is nothing more than a universal type of thing)
- P3: If the merely possible experience is nothing more than what is defined by my idea, then the real is not a genuine other (there is nothing to the real object that is independent from the idea itself)
- P4: The real thus needs to take an individual (concrete) form rather than being merely universal.
- P5: The Fourth conception of reality makes the real an individual.
- C: Therefore, the fourth conception is preferable to the third conception.
- P1: There are two possible relations between an idea and its object: (i) a correspondence between the idea and the object (determined by the object and idea having common characters) and (ii) an intentional selection of the object of the idea and the type of correspondence that they have.
- P2: The bare correspondence between the idea and the object fail to determine reality and truth.
- C: Therefore, the manner in which an idea is related to its object must be made by an intentional selection (by the will).

Seventeen years later, looking back to WI:1 and especially at this Lecture VII, Royce declared, “I do not myself view the argument of *The World and the Individual* as one that depends on setting up four different conceptions of Being, pointing out that three of them fall and declaring that the fourth of them alone is left. On the contrary, the whole argument of the book is contained in the seventh lecture, if you presuppose enough of the previous discussion to understand what is at issue.” (Royce’s *Metaphysics* lecture of May 23, 1916.)

Lecture 8 takes on two tasks.

First, he aims to argue that the fourth conception of reality is a **synthesis** of the prior conceptions of reality. The argument for the synthesis is contextualized in a larger argument where he contends:

- P1: Every other theory is self-contradictory.
- P2: Any attempt to deny the fourth conception of reality amounts to an acceptance of it.
- C: Therefore, the fourth conception of reality is true.

To some extent, we have already seen the argument for **P1** in earlier lectures. What we haven’t really seen is an argument for **P2**. In section II of Lecture 8, Royce doesn’t defend P2 but instead further aims to clarify the fourth conception of reality. He does this by asserting that the fourth conception is a **synthesis** of prior conceptions. In addition, he further aims to distinguish the fourth conception from critical rationalism by asserting that reality is not mere validity but a **life** that expresses the fulfillment of our present ideas.

Second, Royce responds to various objections to constructive idealism.

Some other statements concerning Royce’s fourth conception of reality:

[Royce] advocates a “Fourth Conception of Being,” a view of the totality of Being as an

actual Infinite, timeless, and encompassing all valid past, present, and future possible experience of fact including the facts of all finite beings. - Jacquelyn Ann K. Kegley, "Josiah Royce (1855—1916): Overview" <https://www.iep.utm.edu/roycejos/>

[Royce] presents a view of the totality of Being as an actual Infinite Individual that is itself timeless, encompassing as it does all valid past, present, and future possible experience of fact. All finite beings, such as ourselves, are but fragments of this Absolute Mind or eternal truth. - Kelly A. Parker <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/royce/>



8. Universality and Unity

8.1 Introduction

In the prior lectures, Royce has argued for the fourth conception of reality. He has argued for *what it means for something to be real*. What he has not done is say what existent things would satisfy this theory. That is, he has not argued for the types of things that are, in fact, real. This is the task of Lecture 9. Royce writes:

our task having been so far accomplished, we are prepared to pass from the doctrine of what it is to be real, to the consequent theory regarding what are the existent realities (p.218).

In making this transition, it is helpful to recall the principal topic of *The World and the Individual*. The aim of the series of lectures was not to simply present a theory of reality, but to address some of the central questions of **religion**. As Royce puts it,

I have been forced [...] to dwell so elaborately and so long upon the concept of Being, because that concept is no abstraction, but is precisely the richest and most inclusive of all conceptions, and because, until we had grasped its meaning, any speech as to the various beings that may be found in the world [...] would have altogether lacked metaphysical foundation (pp.217-218).

8.2 Multiplicity and unity

Royce presents two possible resolutions to the problem of the one and the many.

The first thesis emphasizes the **unity (and oneness) of reality** by asserting:

- reality is a complete life of concrete experience
- when we speak of *reality as a whole* our object is the entire world;
- all of our finite ideas aim at the resolution of **one idea** whose object is this complete life of

concrete experience.

- all supposed variety, all apparent individuals, everything that appears to be distinct and real in itself is subordinate or secondary to the single unified whole
- The meaning of every idea is, once fully developed, nothing more than the development of the idea of reality as a whole.
- And since the world is a world of completed ideas, a concrete life of experience, Royce contends that the one thing that is real is **God**
- what is real is an Absolute Being that “is the very life of the world taken in its wholeness as a single conscious and self-possessed life” (p.218)

The second thesis emphasizes the **variety (and multiplicity) of reality** by asserting:

- that ideas belong to individual minds (people)
- that my mind is different from yours (we are distinct from each other)
- what is real cannot simply be unified, but allow for some sort of real independence of beings from each other
- this is also necessary for accounting for moral responsibility and freedom for if you and I were not fully distinct your wrong doing would be partially my responsibility and you would partially share in my fine behavior

So, on the one hand, we have a thesis that emphasizes the unity of things while another insists on the multiplicity. Royce contends that the goal of this lecture and the next then is to show how both of these theses can be reconciled.

Exercise 8.1 Is there one absolute unity with many parts or are there many objects in no absolute unity? That is, when we characterize what is real, is there, primarily one single object that contains, for example, past, present, future parts to it?

8.3 Unity over multiplicity

Royce begins with the first thesis. In developing this thesis, Royce begins with the claim that constructive idealism entails the “absolute unity of the final knowing process” (p.219).

- P1: The real is that which is consciously known as the fulfillment of an idea.
- P2: The real is either consciously known by me at this present moment or known by a consciousness inclusive of me.
- P3: My ideas are of the real are incomplete (we recognize that our ideas are incomplete and we recognize our ideas select an object *other than* our very idea (one that is the completion of our very idea)).
- C: Therefore, the idea of the real is known by a consciousness inclusive of our own.

Royce argues that since *what is* is consciously known as the fulfillment of some idea, *what is* is either known by us at this present moment or known by a consciousness that is inclusive of our own. Such an inclusive consciousness not only includes our own but brings to completion whatever it is we seek to know. For Royce then, there are no facts besides known facts, and there are no known facts without a knower that knows those facts.

Royce then makes the following rather startling claim:

the whole world and being must exist only as present, in all its variety, its wealth, its relationships, its entire constitution, to the unity of a single consciousness, which includes both our own and all finite conscious meanings in one final eternal present insight. This complete insight is indeed not merely one, but is observant of all the real finite varieties, of experience, of meaning, and of life. Nor is the external insight *merely* timeless; but it is possessed of an inclusive view of the whole of time, and of whatever, when taken in its wholeness, this our timeprocess means. This final view, for which the realm of

Being possesses the unity of a single conscious whole, indeed ignores no fragment of finite consciousness; but it sees all at once, as the realm of truth in its entirety (p.220)

Let's condense what Royce is asserting before looking at his argument for this claim.

- all of reality exists as **the present moment** to a single awareness. This is not saying that there is no time, but only that reality is a single present moment to this single awareness. It sees the entire realm of truth all at once. It is as though there was a mind that simply saw the entire world of experience (every fact) in a single instant
- this single awareness is inclusive of all of finite ideas, experiences, meanings, and other minds (this would include us). Such an awareness would be aware of all of our ideas and experiences.
- that is in a single act of awareness includes the whole of time

Royce says the above position is the outcome of the constructive idealism and he offers the following proof:

- P1: Reality has its being only as the fulfillment of a conscious meaning (4th conception of reality).
- P2: Assume that there are many facts.
- P3: If there are many facts, then each of these facts is the fulfillment of a conscious meaning.
- IC1: If each is the fulfillment of a conscious meaning and there are no unknown facts, then what would explain this is that there are many knowers.
- P4: These facts (and therefore knowers) are either in relation or they are not.
- P5: If they are in relation, then it is a known fact that there is a relation between these facts.
- P6: If they are not in relation, then it is a known fact that there is not a relation between these facts.
- IC2: Thus, either way, there is a known fact about these relations.
- P7: The known facts about whether **there is or is not** a relation between the many knowers is only intelligible if and only if there is a fact *that includes these facts* in its expression (you can't express a fact about a relation between X and Y without expressing what X and Y are).
- P8: Since there is such a fact and since all facts are known by a consciousness, then it is known by a **consciousness inclusive of both known facts**.
- P9: Since the above can be extended to all known facts, it follows that there is a fact that is inclusive of all facts: "a conscious act or process for which the existence and the relations of all the various knowing processes constitute a present and consciously observed truth" (p.221).
- C: Therefore, there is "one final knower [that] knows all knowing processes in one inclusive act" (p.221).

For Royce, this one final knower consciously observes the world regardless of its constitution. Regardless of its constitution, multiplicity, the mutual isolation of the entities, of its temporal success, of the variety of the beings. It observes everything all at once regardless of whether the finite forms of consciousness include or don't include each other, and such an awareness knows all that is real including itself.

Thus, Royce asserts that the **ontological consequence** of the fourth conception of reality is that

What is, is present to the insight of a single, Self-conscious Knower, whose life includes all that he knows, whose meaning is wholly fulfilled in his facts, and whose self-consciousness is complete.

Exercise 8.2 Royce says that the above claim concerning what types of things that exist follow from the fourth conception of reality. Let's assume that the fourth conception of reality is true. Evaluate his argument that what exists is a unified consciousness that is inclusive of all knowing processes, viz., is presently aware of all we know and all that there is to know.

8.4 Types of beings

In Section I-III, Royce takes himself to have given an *a priori* proof for the absolute unity of reality. This proof began with the definition of the fourth conception for reality and concluded that the real is that which is present to a single, self-conscious knower (the Absolute). The life of such a knower not only includes my finite consciousness but every form of finite consciousness that exists. The world then is a single thing. It is one with many parts.

Section IV-VI address two main topics: (i) bringing the absolute unity of reality into unity with our empirical view of the world and (ii) addressing the potential charge that the fourth conception of being is anthropocentric.

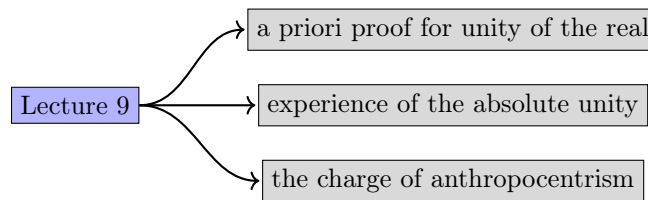


Figure 8.1: The three main topics of Lecture 9

Not only is there an *a priori* proof for the absolute unity of beings, but Royce further argues that this absolute unity of reality can be brought into unity with our experience. In other words, Royce contends that if we reflect on our experience, the unity that is present in the absolute is present in ourselves. Namely, it is suggested by our **common sense** and **natural science**. Royce begins this argument by considering the various kinds of objects that we take to be real. In doing this, Royce is not contending that these objects are, in the final analysis real. Instead, he is simply **assuming** them to be real for the purpose of argument. In making this assumption, Royce considers a variety of different real objects:

- present physical / natural objects along with the physical world
- the minds of other finite beings
- past objects and events
- future objects and events
- moral objects (beings) and properties
- mathematical objects and relations
- social constructions, e.g. contracts, stock prices, credit, institutions

For Royce, the fourth conception of reality needs to do one of two things with respect to these real objects of common sense and science. It needs to either:

- regard them as mere illusions (that is, they are not real), or
- explain how these objects are real according to the fourth conception of reality

Although Royce considers the skeptical hypothesis (that objects are really separate), he rejects this notion for the view for the view that there is one absolutely unified object. That is, Royce writes:

Despite all the contrasts of even the world of common sense, we deal so far then with one conceived infinitely complex whole, whose Being is of one inclusive type, though differentiated into various types (p.228).

8.5 Temporal beings: past, present, future objects

With respect to the unity of these objects, Royce begins by considering temporal objects. Namely, he considers whether past objects, present objects, and future objects are to be sundered or separated

or whether they are simple distinguishable parts of a single reality.

8.5.1 The skeptical hypothesis

First, Royce considers the skeptical hypothesis. He presents the following argument:

- P1: If the fourth conception of reality is true and what is real is absolutely unified, then there must be some sort of unity involving physical, mental, past, present, abstract, mathematical, etc. realities.
- P2: The only sort of unity possible would be to posit that all of these types of realities have some highly abstract and barren commonality (that is, unity is only possible if they all share some super abstract property).
- P3: There is no evidence for a such commonality.
- C: Therefore, the real is not absolutely unified.

P1 asserts the truth of the fourth conception and Royce's claim that the real is absolutely unified.

P2 asserts that we can only unify these distinct beings by pointing to some property that each being shares. As Royce puts it "the Being which the various classes of facts have in common can only be something extremely abstract and barren" (p.225).

P3 asserts that the search for such a commonality is hopeless. Royce supports this claim by asking a set of questions about the various real objects mentioned above. Namely, he takes two real objects X and Y (each from a different group) and asks what could X and Y have in common.

- it is hard to determine what the past, present, and future have all in common besides that we say they are all apart of time (what is it exactly besides saying they are a part of time that they have in *common*? what is the exact property they all share?)
- what do mathematical objects like irrational numbers have in common with the minds of our fellows?
- what do the contents of your mind have in common with a stock price?

Given that there seems to be no common property shared by all of these different types of beings, it would follow that common sense does not support the position that the real is unified.

8.5.2 The unification hypothesis

Royce, however, rejects the idea that these different beings cannot be unified. He writes:

if you look closer, does it not soon become afresh evident that all these various forms are indeed but mere variations of a single theme, mere differentiations of one idea, whose unity and universality remain indivisible amidst all its vicissitudes? (p.225)

Royce contends that these objects are, in fact, unified or inseparable from each other. To see this more clearly, let's examine the supposed lack of unity between past, present, and future objects.

Royce's argument for the unity of the past (P), present (N), and future (F) objects is relatively straightforward in terms of its structure.

- P1: The present is real.
- P2: If the present is real, then the past is real.
- P3: If the present is real, then the future is real.
- P4: If the present is real, then the past and future are real.
- C: Therefore, temporal objects can only be conceived as a single object with three distinguishable aspects (parts): past, present, and future.

With respect to **P1**, this premise appears to simply be accepted. Namely, we are reasoning from the objects of common sense and natural science, and so Royce does not consider here the possibility

that time itself is an illusion.

With respect to **P2**, Royce's argument is that (i) our knowledge of the present depends upon the past, but, more importantly (ii) that the very meaning of a present idea (and therefore its reality) depends upon the reality of the past. Royce writes:

Where are you now? In this city, in this room, aware of yourself as this person? But if I ask you [...] what you mean by these various expressions, you at once refer me to the past, not merely for your warrant, but even for your very meaning. This city exists for you only as the recognized city, that is familiar to you because it has long been here. In itself, apart from just your private recognition, it is what it has become.

So here we have Royce asserting that what we **mean** (not simply **how we know**) when we say we are presently in a city crucially involves a **reference to the past**. Royce says the same is true for all present objects. And so, Royce contends that past objects are not separate from the present but instead amount to a "correlated region of that very whole of temporal existence" (p.226). That is, our understanding of *the present* is really an understanding of an aspect of a more unified thing, namely a temporal-order that includes both the present and the past.

Furthermore, Royce contends not only does our conception of the present require a conception of the past, but he also contends that our conception of the present requires a conception of the **future**. Much like how he asserted that the **meaning** of the present (not merely our knowledge of it) essentially involves a reference to the past, Royce contends that were we to remove the conception of the future, we would lose a large part of the **theoretical meaning** of the present.

Royce provides a number of examples to help illustrate how a number of the claims we make about the properties of real present objects would no longer be intelligible were we to dissociate the past and the present from the future:

- a particle in a path is meaningless without reference to its past and future positions
- the present temperature of a cooling body is unintelligible without a reference to past and future states
- present history can only be understood as being some introduction for things to come
- If we say that a group of people *have a destiny* or that *the soul is immortal* or that *I will always love you*, we are asserting a property about something here and now but this assertion makes reference to the future

Thus, Royce takes past, present, and future objects to be conceptually dependent in a way that they are all part of **one conception**. And so, he contends that we cannot think of an *object in time* without thinking of its past, present, and future aspects.

Exercise 8.3 Royce's argument for this claim is a bit unclear. Intuitively, it is true. When I think of who I am as a person in the present, this conception is tied to a history of growth, development, love, loss, decay, triumph, and defeat. This conception of who I am only makes rational sense if I posit a past object (a past me) who is in relation with the present me. This past me is the person who changed from a child to an adult, who learned to read and write, who did X, and Y, and Z. However, it is a bit unclear if this is, in fact, the argument. Take a look at p.226 and try and determine if this is the argument Royce is making.

8.6 Possible beings

Royce also asserts that possible beings (e.g. mathematical entities, physical possibilities) are also not separate from past, present, and future beings. We won't discuss this in detail, but essentially his claim seems to be (i) in the present we deal with mathematical diagrams and symbols and this work in mathematics (insofar as it deals with infinity presupposes the future and (ii) when we make

physical claims, these claims are about the past the future, e.g. we are asserting that certain past laws will remain in the future. Royce's point then again is that we are always dealing with a single infinitely complex object that is differentiated into various types.

8.7 Other minds

Exercise 8.4 Take a look pp.228. Royce makes two interesting claims. First, he claims that our own rational and self-conscious life depends upon the rational and self-conscious life of others in such a way that if there were no other living or imaginary self-conscious beings, we would lose our self-consciousness. Second, he asserts that the meaning of other beings (self-conscious beings) is “inseparably bound up” with past, present, future, and possible objects. Royce's argument is pretty light here. Can you make an argument that we are essentially social? Royce's argument is also pretty extreme. Would you take the argument as far as Royce does?

8.8 Unity

Let's return to the discussion of whether or not common-sense empiricism is consistent with Royce's claim that the fourth conception entails that the real is a single, absolutely unified object.

Royce contends that the preceding has shown that

- real objects are not *merely* physically or morally connected
- instead real objects are **logically inseparable**: one of these aspects cannot be abandoned without abandoning the whole object (we cannot reject the past without the present and the future; cannot reject other minds without rejecting our own)
- our world possesses **ontological unity**: the various types of beings are all aspects of one being

Exercise 8.5 Royce asserts that the above unity is based on the acceptance of the things that common sense and natural science say are real. As such, Royce isn't committing himself to the necessary reality of say other minds or future objects. What he seems to suggest instead is that no matter what types of objects you take to be real, you will always be forced into some sort of ontological unity. Royce contends that the consequence of this is that it allows us to “get before us the facts of the empirical world ready for criticism” (p.229). The idea here then is that if there are facts in the world, then Royce's system organizes them into a system that allows us to evaluate these facts. With respect to this, Royce contends that “The whole of this world stands or falls together. [...] [W]hat we now see is that all our human ideas of real Beings form portions of a single system. All varieties of individuals and of individual ideas must be subordinate to the unity of this system” (p.229). In other words, Royce seems to assert a kind of holism such that theories and ideas cannot proven true or false in isolation but instead when we test single theories or ideas, we are testing our entire theory of the world. Thoughts?

8.9 Anthropocentrism and reality

The final key point of Lecture 9 concerns the potential charge that the fourth conception of reality is an anthropocentric conception of reality. The underlying charge seems to be that since (i) reality is constituted by the ultimate realization of rational finite ideas and (ii) the only finite and rational ideas there are in humans, then (iii) reality itself is the ultimate realization of our rational human ideas.

Royce rejects this charge flatly. He writes “[o]ur cosmology must not be anthropocentric in any special sense” (p.229). And,

There is, indeed, a sense, in which, according to our view, any rational idea in the whole universe seeks and in its complete development finds, as the expression of its ultimate meaning, the whole of the universe. But we have no right whatever to regard man as the only finite being whose ideas are rational (p.229).

Note

Royce makes an interesting remark about how the fourth conception ought not to anticipate the future results of science and so should avoid trying to antecedently determine it using a priori or anthropocentric categories. He intends suggests that the categories that should be adopted for understanding need to be as flexible as possible (“the most plastic adaptation”, p.230). For Royce, these categories are social conceptions. We will ignore this point and focus on how Royce plans to combat the charge of anthropocentrism.

8.10 Notes

Royce contends that his argument for the consequence of a complete knower wholly depends upon two premises (i) all facts are known facts, viz., all facts are present to a consciousness and (ii) the fourth conception of being. He asserts that (i) is true since to deny it is to contradict one's self.

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Bibliography

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