

Josiah Royce Society Session**Eastern Division of the American Philosophical Association****December 29, 2006**

For Peter Ochs

“As Time Goes By: Royce on Transcendence and Immanence”

Part I

One question that faces interpreters of Royce's The Problem of Christianity¹ is the relation between part I of PC, Royce's historical analysis of the essence of Christianity, and part II, his metaphysical interpretation of the Beloved Community, the universal community of interpreters. It is not clear, even to the most careful readers, the way the historical and religious relates to the scientific and metaphysical.

The interpretative task of relating Parts I and II of PC becomes increasingly difficult in a historical context where natural science increasingly eclipses theology for understanding the meaning of the Christian life. In particular, given the unclear relation of the historical and metaphysical in Royce's interpretation of Christianity, the development of modern science appears to require interpreting Christian theology and doctrine as symbols for patterns of transcendence that, in the final analysis, are immanent to nature.

Given the history of pragmatism, this approach is not without its justification and success. Moreover, a form of naturalism is intrinsic to PC. For example, in chapter sixteen, Royce's "Summary and Conclusions" Royce writes:

*Simply...traditional Christology, in order thereby to enrich its spirit. The religion of loyalty has shown us the way to this end... The name of Christ, has always been, for Christian believers, the symbol for the Spirit in whom the faithful-that is to say the loyal-always are and have been one...Look forward to the human and visible triumph of no form of the Christian church...the office of religion is to aim towards the creation on earth of the Beloved Community, the future task of religion is the task of inventing and applying the arts which shall win men (sic) over to unity, and which shall overcome their original hatefulness by the gracious love, not of mere individuals but of communities... (Therefore) Judge every social device, every proposed reform...by the one test: *Does this help toward the coming of the universal community*...If the spirit of scientific investigation, or learned research shows signs-as it already does-of becoming the best of all forms of unifying mankind in free loyalty, then regard science not merely in possible harmony with religion, but as itself as one of principal organs of religion.²*

Royce is not unaware of the fact that modern canons of academic discourse require analysis rather than prophesy. Despite a tendency to project the future, he is, in addition, shaping it in a naturalistic direction by interpreting Christian doctrine in terms of modern philosophical thought: the doctrinal categories of Christ, faith, the atonement, the church, and sin become the philosophical and socio-psychological categories of the Spirit, loyalty, the loyal, the beloved community (of interpreters) and (social) hate.³ Moreover, it is clear that these expressions can be understood without

reference to revelation and the supernatural. But if Royce “naturalizes” doctrinal categories, what does this imply for the relation of traditional Christian and modern philosophical-scientific thought? In particular are there religious sources or patterns of transcendence that cannot be naturalized?

The briefest answer to this question is no. But as correct as this is, isolating it is to take the end of complex process for the meaning of the argument itself. But given all that is unclear in the relation between Part I and II of Royce’s argument and the power of his metaphysical analysis in Part II, why not just cut to the finish? This much is clear: the argument of PC starts with an analysis of theological categories and ends with translating them into the categories shaped by science, logic and metaphysics. But does this imply that Christian doctrine and theology is most appropriately expressed in a naturalistic metaphysics? Does this mean that Christianity will become lost in translation in the modern world?

The thesis of this essay is that in PC it is not and that, generally, it should not. But can this be justified? For Royce, the development of modern science is an integral part of the “coherent process of education” that has formed the modern mind. Following a Pauline metaphor, Royce believes that we once spoke as children, in Christian symbols, but now we have put away childish things and speak in the

categories of natural science. At the time he was developing the argument of PC it appeared that natural science would become one of the principal “organs of religion”. But does this mean that the body of scientific knowledge and practice will replace theology, doctrine and worship in the body of Christ?

There may be other reasons for a form of naturalism to be preferred to the supernaturalism inherent in Christian doctrine, but taking the argument of PC as a whole, this need not be the case. For Royce, the development of natural science is not the only source of modern intellectual maturity. Logic, particularly the logic and phenomenology of C. S. Peirce, also constitute a significant moment in the birth of the modern mind. In particular, in chapter XIV of PC, it is Peirce’s logic that forms the foundation of Royce’s theory of interpretation. Most importantly, it is Peirce’s categories from “The Phenomenology⁴” of firstness, secondness and thirdness that constitute the foundation of the argument of Part I of PC. In PC, it is Peirce’s logic and phenomenology that permit a philosophy of religion that does not subordinate Christian theology and doctrine to metaphysics and natural science or, for that matter (but this is an argument for another time), does not require subordination of natural science to the Christian religion.

The difficulty, of course, is to justify this thesis. A more extended review and analysis of Royce's later papers⁵ (guided by the analysis in Respect for the Relations of Life⁶ by Frank Oppenheim) would permit a more comprehensive understanding of Royce's later philosophy of religion. But given the restraints of time, a more direct and experimental process is necessary. This essay proposes to read Royce's argument in part I as an appropriation of Peirce's categories of Firstness, Secondness and Thirdness and argue that this permits an understanding of Royce's interpretation theory developed in Part II that, for practical purposes, encourages a translation, but does not logically require, a transition from the theological and doctrinal to the natural. In the final analysis, Royce extends but does not eclipse Christian theology by a naturalistic metaphysics.

Part II

There is, however, a problem with this reading experiment. Despite Royce's conscious appropriation of Peirce's logic in Part II of PC, there are no references to Peirce in part I. So why not read part II as a translation that transcends and naturalizes religion and Christianity? The fact is that this need not be done because this task has already been accomplished. The essence of Christianity in part I of PC is the result of filtering Christian doctrine and theology through the filter of Peirce's phenomenology. Part I is

an interpretation of Christianity *for a scientific point of view*. In terms of Royce's interpretation theory, stated explicitly in chapter XIV, Royce's analysis of the essence of Christianity in part I of PC is a third, a mediating idea that interprets Pauline Christianity to modern minds who speak the discourse of science. It must be noted, however, that this third idea is not a complete translation of Christianity into the categories of science and philosophy. For Royce, a mediating idea, an interpretation, is "an invention or discovery of a third idea, distinct from both the ideas that are...compared" which permits understanding the difference and similarities between two different ideas. (PC pp. 304-306) So, although "love" or "faith" may be translated by Royce for the modern mind by "loyalty," the meaning of the translation is not substituted for the meaning of love in Christian life. The question is why isn't this noticed?

The answer is that although Royce does not explicitly use Peirce in Part I, Royce's analysis is a performance of Peirce's phenomenology. Long before Royce explicitly identifies Peirce's logic as the foundation of his semiotic metaphysics, he has presented the reader with a form of triadic Christianity that is a translation of Christianity for the modern world. This translation does not, however, transcend and then eclipse Christianity. But how does this work?

As is well known Peirce explicated the categories of firstness, secondness and thirdness in different ways at different times. Yet an experimental reading of the “Phenomenology⁷” side by side with PC suggests that firstness, Peirce’s concept of newness and undifferentiated unity, is analogous to Royce’s first Christian idea: the ideal of the universal community. For Peirce, firstness, creativity or possibility exists in the beginning and will exist, fully, at the end of time. For Royce, in the beginning all things are possible because the ideal is the beginning. It de-centers the actual towards, as yet, undifferentiated futures and, in addition, makes self-consciousness possible. The ideal provides coherence and purpose to our actions by permitting us to interpret separate events and actions as part of the same history. If there is any difference between Peirce and Royce on this point it is Royce’s emphasis, in context of PC, that the ideal community, the community of interpreters, contains, in its unity, multiple patterns of difference.

Royce’s second Christian idea is “the moral burden of the individual.” If, for Royce, the ideal is the beginning and the end of purpose, the ideal is, however, inevitably betrayed. This is the result of the way actions individualize the ideal, itself the result of a resistance between the ideal and the particular circumstances of its realization. The ideal, the possible, transcends the particular, but the particular, so to speak, forces the ideal into

the constraints of the real. Force is, for Peirce, secondness. Secondness, which Peirce also describes as opposition or contingency, is analogous at the level of ethics and the Christian life with Royce's concept of the moral burden of the individual. It is contingent events that form and limit us and force us to acknowledge that, no matter what we hope to accomplish, we must accept a limitation on the full possibilities of our ideals.

Secondness, therefore, is a matter of the resistance of facts to ideals. But if this was the limit of Peirce's phenomenology, there would be only the possible and the lost. Opposition, however, does not imply absolute negation. There are developments in and of the ideal and in order to describe this, Peirce introduces another category, thirdness. For Peirce, thirdness "is a something, A, which denotes some fact or object, B, to some interpretant thought, C." Firsts, seconds, thirds, but how does this all work?

Peirce, like Royce, is not without his obscurities, but in the "Phenomenology", he succinctly describes the relations between the categories in the following way:

The first is a *posse* which it has in itself; for the *primum* stops at *can-bes* and never reaches to existence which depends on interaction, or *secundarity*. Next there is a reactive force, a twoness. ...It is the property by which any state of high cohesiveness tends to spread through ... matter. We usually call the property contractility. Thirdly the categories suggest...looking for a synthetizing law; and this we find in the power of assimilation, incident to which is the habit-taking faculty. This is all the categories pretend to do. They suggest a way of thinking; and the possibility of science depends upon the fact that

human thought necessarily partakes of whatever character is diffused through the whole universe and that its natural modes have some tendency to be the modes of the action of the universe.⁸

Some things are now clearer. A third can be both a sign and an object and thus can be a thought, habit, pattern, physical law. Any third thus can function as a sign which constitutes an interpretation between firsts and seconds and a way of development beyond the conflict of firsts and seconds. So, for Royce, his three part analysis of the essence of Christianity is itself both an interpretation of Christianity to science and a way for the development of Christianity in the modern world. But, again, what does this imply for the relation between Christian doctrine and theology and the natural sciences?

A final answer to this question requires using Peirce's phenomenology to imagine the possible intellectual psychodynamics between Christianity and modern science. There is, for example, a type of secondness in the resistance of the culture of natural science to traditional Christian theology and doctrine. Noting this, Royce begins PC with an interpretation of the essence of Christianity for a scientific point of view. He avoids the conflict of two cultures by linking them through Peirce's phenomenology, a third or mediating idea. Royce's three Christian ideas, in Peirce's logic, are, therefore, "thirds," interpretations of Christian doctrine and theology that

function to form a community of discourse between Christianity and natural science. Finally, taking thirdness as interpretation and development permits a correlation between Royce's third essential concept of Christianity, the idea of the atonement, with his first idea, the universal, beloved community and his conclusion that, in time, science will become one of the chief organs of the community of interpreters. For Royce, it is the loyal and loving interpreter that recovers-redeems the ideal from the limits imposed by intractable secondness through actions and interpretations that transcend patterns of resistance. For Royce, atoning action or loyalty reintroduces firstness into secondness, freshness and freedom into force, and permits new thirds in new patterns or interpretations. In the terms of Part II of PC, thirds form real communities that through practical loyalty and love are capacitated to seek and realize the ideal community, the universal community of beloved. In terms of Part I of PC, the atoning deed of the loyal interpreter reclaims the ideal in the ways that the community discovers its purposes in the process of overcoming the resistances of betrayal and brute fact to the ideals that give purpose to and unify human life.

But if these are the ways Part I and Part II of PC work, why not simply take Royce's translation and transformation of Christian doctrine as the first step in a process that leads to an eclipse of Christian symbols by the categories and practices of modern science? Hasn't Royce shown the way

by apparently privileging his “thirds:” the Spirit, loyalty, the loyal, the beloved community (of interpreters) and (social) hate over the expressions of Christian life and doctrine that they translate?

This, of course, is one way of reading PC. Royce does appear to prefer the ideal and the universal to the particular. For example, his hypothesis of the future transformation of church polities by the projects of science evidences this and may lead interpreters to identify the ideal and universal with the developing logic of science. Moreover, Royce’s argument for the ideal unity of all things leads those with nominalist and realist dispositions to turn back to the rough grounds of the natural world. But, if the implicit and explicit use of Peirce’s “Phenomenology” is taken seriously, these readings (idealist or naturalist) misappropriate Royce’s positioning of Christianity and natural science by viewing them as seconds, resistances from the discourse and practice of science to the discourse and to the insights of Christian doctrine and theology. For Royce, Peirce’s phenomenology and logic are “thirds”, interpretations that describe “a third type of knowledge”⁹ that extend the benefit of reason and its creativity to both Christianity and Science. For Royce, in the final analysis, in PC the problem is not with Christianity, as if things could be improved by replacing Christianity with something that did the same things without the deleterious side effects. Christianity is a problem, for Royce, because the Christian life,

its doctrines and theologies contain insights whose benefits can be increased when they are translated in terms understandable to natural science. There is, however, no need to transcend Christian theology and doctrine and replace it by science. Since the phenomenology indicates the similarities and differences between these practices and their discourses, the structure and development of both Christian doctrine and natural science can be described by the same logic. The task for PC, the practical problem, is to not interpret one in terms of the other, but, using Peirce's phenomenology, to interpret one to the other.

This paper has taken on much more than it should have. Absent a miracle, it could not complete what it proposed. The simple thesis of this essay is that Royce's use of Peirce's phenomenology and logic permits interpreters to resist the conflict of interpretations between doctrine and natural science that leads to the naturalization of Royce's philosophy of religion. If this is clear, then the development of the fullest implications of PC will require a philosophical perspective, fully responsive to developments in science, but in addition, responsive to theological perspective a triadic theology that is fully informed by the semiotics of redemption and/or renewal of human nature in the community of the beloved. As a final hypothesis, given the integrity that Royce's use of Peirce's phenomenology and logic permits Christianity, in the future this will

require a re-appropriation of the Trinitarian tradition. This tradition, given Royce's projections in PC, is in the later twentieth and early twenty-first century, a paradoxically creative resource for the renewal of Christian doctrine and theology and the dialog between science and religion. In the final analysis, admitting the difficulties of individual cases, PC provides a means to adjudicate the apparent conflict between Christian thought and science through interpretations that show the similarities and differences between two apparently exclusive alternatives. This, for Royce, is the beginning of metaphysics. Given this perspective and the time, it is possible that Royce's final and greatest work would have been The Problem of Science, a triadic interpretation of science to Trinitarians. This, of course, could be the beginning of a beautiful friendship.

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¹ Royce, Josiah, The Problem of Christianity, The University of Chicago Press, Chicago and London, 1968.

² PC, pp 402-5.

³ Ibid. 404.

⁴ Peirce, Charles Sanders, "The Phenomenology," Collected Papers, ed. Charles Hartshorne and Paul Weiss, The Belknap Press of Harvard University, Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1965, vol. 1. paragraphs 284-353.

⁵ Royce, Josiah, Josiah Royce's Later Writing: A Collection of Unpublished and Scattered Works, vol I, ed and introduced by Frank M. Oppenheim, S.J., Thoemmes Press, Bristol, England, 2001.

⁶ Oppenheim, Frank, Reverence for the Relations of Life.: Re-imagining Pragmatism via Josiah Royce's Interactions with Peirce, James and Dewey, University of Notre Dame Press, Notre Dame, Indiana, 2005.

⁷ Peirce, C.S. "The Phenomenology," 1. 284-353.

⁸ Ibid. 1.350

⁹ PC, p. 306.