
The lengthy subtitle conveys some of the special merits of this reissue of Royce’s greatest work, a reprinting of the 1968 University of Chicago one-volume edition. Not only is the text of The Problem again conveniently available, but so are Royce’s “Preface” and “Introduction,” along with John Smith’s excellent 1968 “Introduction.” The pagination is identical to the Chicago edition; there is also a new Appendix that correlates pagination in all four previous English editions of the work. If one surveys the recent publication of many key works by Royce (including The Sources of Religious Insight, from the same press), together with a number of new secondary sources, it appears that Royce’s thought is more readily available now than at any time since his death in 1916.

The question, of course, is “Why should one care?” Smith addressed this question by dispelling certain misconceptions about Royce: that he was a quaint religious apologist, a pure metaphysical theorist, an old-fashioned Hegelian idealist. Smith went on to delineate Royce’s potential contributions to religious discourse in the late 1960’s. It seems that relatively few people took Smith’s recommendations to heart, though those philosophers and theologians who did have gleaned a great deal of worthwhile insight. In his new introduction, Oppenheim addresses some of what has emerged in the ensuing decades that recommends a reconsideration of Royce’s late work. These factors include Royce’s closer-than-we-realized connection to Peirce’s philosophy and his continued development of the philosophy of loyalty in The Problem and beyond. A more immediate factor, Oppenheim notes, is that “Around the world human hearts feel the urgent stirring for, and a call toward, that ‘Great Community’ of humankind--Royce’s term--which fosters both genuine unity and diversity, without
imposing uniformity or conformity” (xxx). When this reissue was planned, we faced significant questions concerning individualism and community, religious difference and globalization of culture. These questions are all the more urgent now, arising as they do suffused in shock, confusion, and dangerous fear.

One should care about Royce, and about The Problem in particular, because these were also Royce’s urgent questions. The Problem provides a sound model for thinking philosophically about community, and especially about religious community. More than that, however, it provides an account—which still registers as radically new—of the nature of genuine community and religion. The Problem will speak to those who ask any form of Royce’s own central question, “In what sense, if in any, can the modern man consistently be, in creed, a Christian?” (62).

Royce’s philosophy of religion was intended as a middle way. He sought to avoid, on the one hand, the narrowly dogmatic fundamentalist religion of his own youth and, on the other, the overly affective and individualistic concept of religion he saw endorsed in James’s Varieties of Religious Experience. In Part I of The Problem Royce drew on the history of the early Christian church for his model of religion and community. In Part II he drew on Peirce’s semiotic and socially-grounded realist metaphysics to understand the theoretical workings of his model—thus becoming Peirce’s first great creative interpreter, working out ethical and religious implications that Peirce scarcely envisioned. Royce’s resultant view that “the Church, rather than the person of the founder, ought to be viewed as the central idea of Christianity” (43) was unconventional but had its antecedent in Emerson, among others. Royce’s view that the Christian church’s primary importance is as the incarnation of a paradigm of community, however, took him into new territory. Royce writes that “the very being of the universe consists in a process whereby the world is interpreted” (346); the church at its best strives to embody the guiding Interpreter Spirit, so as to become a Universal Community of Interpretation “whose life comprises and unifies all the social varieties and all the social communities which... we know to be real” (340). Particular doctrines may fade away. What matters is the process of interpretation—the process of communicating and understanding one another in actual, imperfect, finite communities bound together by loyalty. Royce thus anticipated recent work in the ethics
of care, and his central concept of atonement (chapter 6) as creative healing and community-making by itself justifies a close reading of *The Problem*. More broadly, Royce develops what may be regarded as a picture of the universe as universal peace process. For all its potential faults, this is in my opinion an idea worth taking seriously.

Royce wrote for the modern westerner, the “morally detached individual” (50) of the twentieth century. His question about the possibility of being a Christian, when generalized, is perhaps paradoxically the question of the possibility of humanism that animated much mid-century European discussion. What attitude of the will allows us to live most fully and meaningfully? Royce looked beyond the “will to live,” which includes the Nietzschean “will to power” (351), looked beyond the “denial of the will to live,” which encompasses all forms of nihilism (including Buddhist, existentialist, and deconstructionist flavors), and found beyond these the will to interpret, or the attitude of Loyalty (356). Our best hope, says Royce, lies in loyalty to one another. Needless to say, Roycean loyalty reaches far beyond mere fundamentalism, patriotism and nationalism: “all the higher forms of loyalty are, in their spirit, religious; for they rest upon the discovery, or upon the faith, that, in all the darkness of our earthly existence, we individual human beings, separate as our organisms seem in their physical weakness, and sundered as our souls appear by their narrowness, and by their diverse loves and fortunes, are not as much alone, and not as helpless, in our chaos of divided will, as we seem” (133-34). In *The Problem* Royce offers a hope that has been largely neglected, but that might yet be pursued in our already-stricken twenty-first century.

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*Community as Healing*, though short, provides a very useful “meta-analysis” of the current field of bioethics, how it has failed in its basic approach to the self and the practice of medicine, and offers a pragmatic approach, reorientation and solution to bioethics current and future.