

Introduction to *The Sources of Religious Insight*

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"You philosophize when you reflect critically upon what you are actually doing in your world. What you are doing is...living. And living implies passions, faiths, doubts, and courage." Josiah Royce, 1892¹

Relevant for all Individuals and for our Time

The Sources of Religious Insight invites the reader to experience a series of lectures² which, since its publication, has been one of the two core texts on religion in the history of American philosophy.³ A compelling lecturer and Professor of the History of Philosophy at Harvard University, Royce was also appreciated for his obvious affinity with the full range of human experience.⁴ As a philosopher, Royce sought to illumine human experience in all its varieties and complexities.⁵ Born in Grass Valley, California, a mining community in the Sierras, from an early age Royce personally explored, lived, and wrestled with issues of religion and religious experience. These explorations first found expression in *The Religious Aspects of Philosophy* (1885)⁶ and culminated in *The Problem of Christianity* (1913), a work considered to be one of the finest studies of the meaning of early Christian thought and of religious community.⁷ In each of these and many others works, Royce makes a case for his conviction that philosophy of religion is a serious and necessary reflection on life.⁸

The Sources explores many of the ways that human beings can get in touch with religious experience, and the conflict between their desire to achieve a rich, fulfilling life for self and significant others and their own human fallibility, inattentiveness and failures. Individuals have a deep need for an ideal for their lives, some goal that will bring unity and purpose to their entire experience. But since humans falter in this endeavor, often failing to find this goal or achieve this aim, they need some 'deliverer,' some presence, power, individual, and/or community to address

their need and assist them on their path. According to Royce, the ideal, the need, and the notion are at the center of religious experience. In a truly open and catholic manner, Royce explores the seven ways that this fundamental human need can be addressed. There is first the ability of some individuals to achieve deep personal contact with something or someone to aid them in overcoming individual pride and inattention in service of their unity of purpose. These helpful individuals are often seen as saints, mystics, and founders of religious communities. A second source is the social, the experience of love and support of other individuals. Throughout his life, Royce focused intensely on the ideal relations between individualism and genuine communities. He was equally convinced that individuals needed community and others to win genuine selfhood and equally, that communities need exemplary individuals to keep them vital and to assist them in minimizing false pride and self-interest.⁹ Individual and community each need the other for full development of their potentialities. This individual-community theme plays a crucial role in *The Sources*. Other sources of religious insight include the achievement of a unity of purpose through rational reflection, through human action and specifically acts of will. For Royce, loyalty to community is a primary source of religious insight, especially the Beloved Community, a brotherhood of humans who loyally live in the Spirit of love, of concern for a community of all humanity.

Another compelling source of religious experience, for Royce, was what he called “the religious mission of sorrow.” Throughout his adult life, Royce was concerned with the deep human problem of evil. He experienced many sorrows and tragedies in his own life.¹⁰ He was particularly influenced by various tragedies in the history of California.¹¹ He early reflected on the pull of pessimism but concluded that pessimism was the outcome of a “half-hearted scheme of moral order” and a belief that life issues were insignificant.¹² Unique among American

philosophers, Royce tackled the problem of evil fully and without blinking. The ‘good person,’ in Royce’s view, was neither innocent nor inane, but a knowing, warm-blooded, passionate servant of the good.¹³ Virtue, for Royce, is hard-won, a matter of strife and alert conscience, and difficult moral choices. He writes:

Neither virtue nor knowledge exists in *abstracto*...there exists always some concrete virtue, which shows itself in good choices in favor of this or that good, or against this or that or some other evil end and motive...¹⁴

Because Royce believed that it is not possible to connect all cases of suffering with the deeds of the sufferer, he did not believe that the free will of agents sufficiently explained evil events.

In his “The Problem of Job,”¹⁵ Royce suggests that we are “essentially all companions in misery” and that God also suffers with us. In *The Sources*, Royce defines the religious mission of sorrow as a creative way to transform suffering into sorrow, revealing new possibilities and a wider perspective. Royce’s message speaks to all: both those who have committed irrevocable deeds which they now deeply regret and to those who have suffered deep grief and assault from the misdeeds of others.

The topics of need, community, reason, will, loyalty, tragedy and sorrow were life-long themes for Royce, part of his own deep human quest for meaning and fulfillment. Royce asserts of that *The Sources* “reflects the whole of me in a brief compass.”¹⁶ In his review, Jacob Lowenberg described *The Sources* as a statement of Royce’s philosophy brighter than the sun.¹⁷ This profound book should speak to all individuals and is also especially relevant to contemporary Western thought and culture. First, it effectively argues for the significance of religious experience. It presents a significant understanding of religious experience in a time of unconventionality in religion.¹⁸ In *The Sources* Royce reinterprets many traditional religious ideas and challenges traditional religions to generalize the idea of salvation to make it relevant to

any wanderer who is seeking some saving light. Royce also provides important ideas relevant to understanding and perhaps overcoming religious conflict and infighting. He offers a novel theory of sin in terms of human irresponsiveness and pride. He challenges all to see self and community as ethical categories, and to pursue their self-realization by way of dedication to the community. To this end, Royce proposes a religion of community, a Beloved Community of loyalty and love. He characterized the Beloved Community as a spiritual or divine community capable of inspiring and achieving the highest common good. He believed each individual should strive toward this goal of achieving the Beloved Community, and that the more individuals who join the effort, the greater the possibility of its realization. Martin Luther King significantly built his own moral and social philosophy on this idea.¹⁹ King envisioned the “Beloved Community” as a global community in which violence, racism, poverty, hunger, homelessness, and all other societal ills will no longer be merely tolerated, but actually resisted. In the “Beloved Community” hatred and prejudice of all kinds will be replaced by a willingness to transcend differences in a spirit of cooperation. For King and Royce, the Beloved Community is built on the ideal of *agape* love. This ideal is surely salvific for our time, and unfortunately characterized by self-centered individualism, the breakdown of human community, and numerous expressions of hatred and disrespect for persons of all kinds.

The last portion of *The Sources* concerns the ‘Invisible Church,’ which Royce describes as follows:

[The] community of all who have sought for salvation through loyalty... the crowning source of religious insight for us all is the actual loyalty, service, devotion, suffering, accomplishments, traditions, examples, teaching, and triumphs of the invisible church of all the faithful.²⁰

Rather than an unqualified affirmation of institutional religion, this is a powerful challenge to all religions. Royce writes:

The invisible church, then, is no merely human and secular institution. It is a real and superhuman organization. It includes and transcends every form of the visible church.²¹

This universal brotherhood of all the faithful is the ideal to which all individuals and communities must strive.

Courageous Challenges to Our Time

As indicated earlier, this book describes sympathetically seven of the possible sources of religious insight. In undertaking this task, *The Sources* affirms that religious experience is a *significant* aspect of human life. In so arguing, Royce confronts those who believe that the scientific method alone discloses the real world—a world seen as material and deterministic. Science, or scientism, claims to give the best explanation of all events, including those labeled ‘religious’. The scientific viewpoint was as powerful in Royce’s time as it is today. A decade prior to Royce’s *The Sources*, William James, in *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, also confronted scientific reductionism.²² James opposed the accepted opinion of the time that “all the special manifestations of religion have been absurd.”²³ He labeled the scientific worldview of his time “medical materialism,” a view that “reduces all human beliefs and faiths to some physical condition.”²⁴ James writes: “Medical Materialism finishes up St. Paul by calling his vision on the road to Damascus a discharging lesion of the occipital cortex, he being an epileptic.”²⁵ James responds that this is speculative and not empirical, a move that we as persons experientially reject.²⁶ James and Royce both courageously affirmed the significance of religious experience²⁷ as “the widest and deepest experience of humanity.”²⁸ *The Sources* reaffirms the significance of religious experience in a time when it is still dismissed by many scholars and laypersons.

The Sources brings to this time when institutional religion is widely viewed as problematic, an unconventional and insightful understanding of religious experience. Argentinian scholar, Claudio Viale, notes, as have others, that both James and Royce share “unconventionality in looking for the ground of religion outside narrow theologies.”²⁹ In her article, “Royce and Post-Modern Theology,” Linell Elizabeth Cody writes that “Royce’s work, consequently, “merits attention insofar as it offers, from the American tradition, a comparable critique of the individualistic, a temporal bias of classical theism and its attendant theories of knowledge and selfhood.”³⁰ Cody continues: “Royce traces the full theological implications of his social and temporal vision of reality, a methodological move that yields a novel theological alternative to contemporary theism.”³¹ Royce’s interpretation of religion, Cody asserts, is “not dependent on scripture or ecclesiastical warrants, but depends on the adequacy of his analysis of our experience.”³² Donald William Dotterer argues that Royce’s philosophy of loyalty should be considered a hermeneutical tool for interpreting Pauline literature.”³³ This claim relates to John McDermott’s remark, cited earlier, that Royce’s philosophy is salvific for today because of his argument that “true individualism is possible only insofar as one participates in a series of self-sufficient, complete communities.”³⁴ Dotterer notes that “the New Testament community, especially as reported by Paul, teaches some valuable lessons regarding the location of personal identity while maintaining group identity.” He continues:

Unfortunately, Protestant interpreters of Paul, beginning with Luther and continuing through such writers as Kierkegaard, Bultmann, Borkamm, and Kasemann, have stressed the salvation of the individual by faith encounter to the extent that the ideas of social identity and salvation in the community have been nearly lost.³⁵

Dotterer believes Royce brings a new and fruitful approach to religion, including religious experience, religious faith, and religious community. I believe that readers of these lectures will concur.

The First Source: Experience of Need

Royce's understanding of religion primarily in terms of loyalty and community arises out of a novel view of human sin and human failure—a view that addresses a time of religious conflict, of suspect, often violent actions performed by supposedly religious persons—and a time when many rely on scripture as a way to settle disagreements. While such actions—heresy trials, hangings, and burnings—by religious individuals also occurred in previous centuries, Royce's view and approach, one of catholicity of spirit,³⁶ makes his insight into Paul's teachings most relevant. John E. Smith, though writing some sixty years ago, identifies the contemporary importance of Royce's approach: "It is difficult to overestimate the current importance of Royce's idea that at a time when religion, the sphere in which ultimate problems are solved, itself becomes a problem, what is needed is an interpreter who is neither an apologist nor a *hostile critic*."³⁷

The second important emphasis Royce brings to an understanding of religious experience is one of human fallibility and pride. Royce reminds his readers that we are finite beings with a finitude of consciousness. "*Our finitude means, then, an actual inattention— a lack of successful interest, at this conscious instant, in more than a very few details of the universe.*"³⁸ Royce argues that if we wish to be fully human and to be fulfilled, we must: (1) intensely develop the power of our response to the universe, to maintain as much openness as possible; and (2) to recognize that full truth and reality are still to be recovered. In Royce's view, because we have failed, we as human beings have committed what he calls two kinds of 'sins': *the sin of irresponsiveness*, the deliberate choosing to narrow our focus, and *the sin of pride*, the lack of humility about our limited grasp of truth and reality. Both individuals and communities can fail in this regard, resulting in the failure to tolerate and understand perspectives different from our

own and the claim that our community possesses the truth on a religious matter and that other claims are blatantly false or heretical. Even our own self-understanding is inflicted with these failures: we become victims of conflicting interests and motives and/or believe we have reached our final goal as a self, thus becoming resistant to change or growth. Royce states: “The deeper tragedies of life thus result from this our narrowness of view.”³⁹ The answer, for Royce, is self-transcendence, seeking a goal outside of oneself and the companionship of others who constitute a “treasury of new ideas,” a check upon our views and a demand to think in wider terms. Royce writes:

The social world is wide, even if it is still full of conflict. It broadens our outlook at every turn. A man corrects his narrowness by trying to share his fellow’s point of view. Our social responsibilities tend to set limits to our fickleness. Social discipline removes some of our inner conflicts, by teaching us not to indulge our caprices. Human companionship may calm, may steady our vision, may bring us into intercourse with what is in general much better than a man’s subliminal self, namely, his public, his humane, his greater social self, wherein he finds his soul and its interest write large.⁴⁰

Given Royce’s emphasis on the need for self-transcendence, it is no surprise that in *The Sources*, he moves beyond the individual to social religious experience. In doing so, he provides an alternative to James’s emphasis on individual religious experience, especially that of saints, mystics, and founders of religious communities. Royce values individual religious experiences but considers them limited: salvation is a universal need, not limited to a particular time or faith. It is a matter that concerns all human beings, both ordinary and exceptional. Salvation, for Royce, “is a problem of life and experience. It arises whenever life is defined in terms of some highest good and whenever the danger of losing this highest good is realized.”⁴¹ He understands “religious insight” as “*insight into the need and into the way of salvation.*”⁴²

I care not...whether you have thought of this problem [the problem of human salvation] in theological or in secular, in reverent or in rebellious, or in cynical terms, whether you have tried to solve it by scientific or sentimental or by traditional means,

or whether the problem now takes shapes in your mind as a problem to be dealt with in a spirit of revolt or of conformity, of skeptical criticism or of intuitive faith, of hope or of despair, What we want is insight, if insight is possible into the way of salvation. The problem with which these lectures deal is:” What are the sources of such insight?⁴³

Salvation is necessary, not only because of human narrowness of view and propensity to false pride but because there is an aim of human life that is more important than all other aims. The natural person, beset with conflicting aims and interests, is in great danger of missing this highest aim and rendering his or her whole life a ‘senseless failure.’ Royce believed that individuals can be in touch with a genuine source of insight. His examples include, among other sources, Buddhism and Plato’s *Republic*. Royce asserts that these and other examples show that the search for salvation belongs to no “one type of piety or of poetry or of philosophy.”⁴⁴ Individual religious experiences concerns three elements:

The Ideal: (the Standard or highest aim of one’s life);
The Need (for salvation because of danger of failure to achieve this aim);
The Deliverer (the presence, power, light, truth, or great companion who helps the individual and saves a person from his/her need).

Religious insight is a natural process open to every individual. *The Sources* challenges James’s emphasis on experiences that well up from the subliminal self and the depth of one’s subconscious. Religious insight is available to all individuals seeking some saving light.

Royce believes the appeal to individual religious experience alone encounters another difficulty, namely, the “religious paradox,” the difficulty for a fallible human self, infected with narrowness of view and the sin of pride, to know the advent of the divine spirit.”⁴⁵ Royce states it fully as follows:

How is the divine to be known?...The paradox is that a being who is so ignorant of his duty and of his destiny as to need guidance at every point, so weak as to need saving, should still hope in his fallible experience, to get in touch with anything divine.⁴⁶

Royce would respond to James: how is it possible to distinguish genuine communication with the divine and the misguided hubris of false prophets? This message of *The Sources* speaks volumes concerning individuals and communities who claim direct contact with divine revelation and yet present the world with conflicting interpretations and claims and questionable behavior.

The Second Source: Social Experience

Because individual religious experience is insufficient self-transcendence and the broadening of insight, it is important to attend to the social world. It is also true, however, that Royce views communities as finite and fallible like individuals. Human beings, for Royce, are essentially social beings; even self-consciousness is achieved through interaction with others. He asserts: “Nobody amongst us men comes to self-consciousness, so far as I know, except under the persistent influences of his social fellows.”⁴⁷ Royce clearly affirms that the human being cannot be saved alone, for “he is bound to his brethren by spiritual links that cannot be broken.” Further, “both he and his fellow need salvation.”⁴⁸ To illustrate his case, Royce cites two classic examples of individuals who discovered that they could not be saved without the help of their fellows and that their salvation was to be found through the social world. The first example is Coleridge’s “Ancient Mariner, who in killing the albatross, becomes a curse to his fellows, and in cursing him they leave him alone in the nightmare of utter solitude. His curse was to “be alone in a wide, wide sea.” His escape from the horrors of despair begins with the first moving of his heart toward all living beings. He enters into human companionship, love and relationships. The second example is Raskolnikov in “Crime and Punishment,” who, after his crime and efforts at self-justification “finds himself prey of a simply overwhelming sense that he is alone among men...he is as one dead amongst specters.”⁴⁹ Like the Ancient Mariner,

Raskolnikov finds his way to salvation through love, love taught to him by the martyred Sonia. In these examples, Royce finds the “familiar conception that salvation involves reconciliation both with the social and the divine order, reconciliation through love and suffering-an escape from the wilderness of lonely guilt to the realm where men can understand one another.”⁵⁰

These cases focus on the lost individual, the person isolated from human companionship and perhaps lost in deep guilt until they are redeemed through love and social relationship. But this redeeming broader vision and self-transcendence can happen in certain experiences of ordinary life such as the sight of one’s new born child and the feeling of love that follows and pulls one outside oneself. Royce recognizes that the experience of love, such as the love of a husband and wife who love not only each other but cherish their union and their higher selves in that union, and of deep friendship, which is a form of love, can be a path to achieving a higher vision of self, of pulling oneself outward with loyalty to a common cause in which others are involved. In *The Sources*, Royce writes: “In fact, to seem to find the divine in the person of your idealized friend or beloved is a perfectly normal way of beginning your acquaintance with the means of grace.”⁵¹ Royce sees human love as a sign, a hint, and “an incarnation of a life that lies beyond the life of our present self-possession. It is an intimation of a process that is not merely human, but genuinely superhuman.”⁵²

We know that human experience of love, because it is an experience of fallible human beings, often fails to maintain the loyalty and love needed to maintain the experience. The commitment involved must be constant. We are continually called to seek to transcend self-interest, and we often fail. This same self-transcendence is also required of communities. Royce advocates “loyalty to loyalty,” an ethical call to look beyond one’s own communal ideals, to respect those of other communities, and to seek to build broader communities. Here failure also

can occur. There are prideful and destructive communities that tear down or attack the loyalties and commitments of others. Religious communities, of course, are no exception. Royce is proposing that though social experience brings religious insight, it is not the final step to the broadest religious insight. Loyalty to loyalty, the love of all mankind, is a difficult demand. More will be said about this shortly. First, we need to consider two other sources of religious insight: reason and will, or purposive action in the world.

Third and Fourth Sources of Religious Insight: Reason and Will

Royce sees reason as more than the power to form and use abstract ideas, or to analyze predetermined meaning of statements. Rather, he conceives of reason as an ability to provide a synthetic view of many facts, the ability to grasp a complex of relations in their total unified significance. He points to examples of insights in mathematics that provide novel discoveries and novel syntheses. In his opening lecture, Royce defined insight as follows:

Insight is knowledge that makes us aware of the unity of many facts in one whole, and that at the same time brings us into intimate personal contact with these facts and with the whole wherein they are united. The three marks of insight are breadth of range, coherence and unity of view.⁵³

Reason can be a source of insight because it can assist us in suddenly seeing our experience as a creative and meaningful whole. He was convinced that reason could lead to an all-inclusive and divine insight. Royce realizes that for many, such a notion may seem too abstract or too philosophical to meet vital religious needs. To counter this, Royce draws on ordinary human experience, citing two cases of acquaintances of his that illustrate how reason has been insightful in their lives. The first case is a youth beset with various doubts about his faith, but who maintained prayer as a ritual act, not as the conventional request for a change of fortune or for things desired but rather as communing with a Great Companion, who knows and estimates. Royce quotes the youth as follows:

When things are too much for me...I go alone by myself...and I think hard that God must know it all and see how matters really are, and understands me, and in just that way alone, by understanding me, will help me. So I try to get myself together. And that, for me is prayer.⁵⁴

The second example is of an older man who had endured professional attacks and ill health and told Royce:

What I most value about my thought of God is that I conceive of God as the one who knows us through and through, and who estimates us not as we seem, but as we are, and who is absolutely fair in his judgment of us.⁵⁵

Royce then suggests that these examples show that reason can bring insight, but also that reason and will work together in these cases. Reason guides specific actions.

Royce reiterates and develops his life-long, pragmatic belief that ideas are plans of action. He declares: "There is no such thing as a purely intellectual form of assertion which has no element of action about it. An opinion is a deed. It is a deed intended to guide other deeds."⁵⁶

He argues against those who claim that ideas cannot be tested by workings in the long run, because no one individually observes the long run and because such an appeal would be to an essentially superhuman type of empirical test and estimate. The scientist, for example, appeals not to the verdict of any human observer, but "to the integrated, and universalized and relatively impersonal and superpersonal synthesis of the results of countless observers."⁵⁷ Royce challenges the naysayers to perform a deed and then to try to undo it. This impossibility of undoing a deed once done, says Royce, indicates that reality is indeed absolute: "the very essence of will is that at every moment of action, it decides absolute issues, because it does irrevocable deeds, and therefore, if intelligent at all, is guided by opinions that are absolutely true or false as their deeds are irrevocable."⁵⁸ With the pragmatists, Royce believed that all is temporal, that time flows, that novelties constantly appear and that the world is ever incomplete.

Yes, even to assert this, says Royce, is to assert “*that the future, and, in fact, all the future, in its individual detail belongs to reality, and forms part of its wholeness.*”⁵⁹ He continues:

Both reason and will, especially as united in practical action, act as sources of religious insight.

They make us aware of the unity of many facts in one whole.

Fifth and Sixth Sources: Loyalty and the Religious Mission of Sorrow

Royce turns in his fifth lecture to “The Religion of Loyalty.” Loyalty, for Royce, is “*The willing and practical and thoroughgoing devotion of a person to a cause.*”⁶⁰ Two conditions of loyalty, for Royce, are (1) that the person willingly and thoroughly devotes self to the cause and (2) expresses this devotion in some sustained and practical way. Loyalty pushes a person to self-transcendence. It also provides unity and purpose for the self, thereby helping to make life worth living. This devoted service to a cause also brings insight into a transcendent ideal, whether it be a family, team, community, or nation. In seeking to illustrate this kind of loyalty Royce does not point to outstanding heroes or saints, but to the example of Ida Lewis, the keeper of the Lime Rock Lighthouse in Narragansett Bay. Ida spent her life saving others, even though she lost her husband to the sea. Lighthouse keepers seek to save others, but this occupation also brings with it personal peril, as it did for Daniel Williams, keeper of the light at Little Traverse Bay, in Lake Michigan. Williams went out in a boat to rescue a ship’s crew in distress and never returned. His wife, fearful for other lives, continued his duties, as did Ida, and, says Royce, and Mrs. Williams “is still at her post.”⁶¹ Though there are perils, says Royce, the hardest task for this kind of loyal person is the steady call upon daily fidelity. Royce does not ignore the usual examples of loyalty. He points out that the spirit exemplified by Ida, Williams and his wife and the other lighthouse keepers is the same spirit that we find in warriors who willingly face death for their cause. We also find this spirit in martyrs who die for their faith, but Royce focuses on

ordinary persons such as patient mothers and fathers, “however obscure and humble,” who toil in true devotion for their homes and children.⁶² Royce also believes such a spirit resides in the calm and laborious devotion to a science such as exemplified in Newton, Maxwell or a Darwin. In addition to their strong will and social motives, all these loyal servants also possess a gift, their Cause. The loyalty exemplified is no mere sentiment, and no mere morality, but “*it will also be in essence a religion.*”⁶³ Loyalty is the source of religious insight and it shows a person the will of the spiritual world, the divine will. The cause provides a “spiritual unit in which individuals may be, and (when they are loyal) actually are, united in a life whose meaning is above the separate meanings of human beings.”⁶⁴

As a man of experience, Royce never forgets the real world, in which causes are lost and lighthouses slide into the ocean. And, there is vague suffering and sorrow and the problem of evil. As indicated earlier, no other American philosopher grappled with the problem of evil in as sustained and insightful manner as Royce. Cornell West writes of Royce:

Royce is the single American Philosopher who seriously grappled with evil and at the same time recognized the dangers of a paralyzing pessimism...I would go so far as to claim that Royce’s systematic, post-Kantian idealism is primarily a long and winding set of profound meditations in the relation of a deep sense of evil to human agency.⁶⁵

Royce discusses loyal agency and the problem of evil and ‘lost causes’ in *The Philosophy of Loyalty*. He writes:

Only the loyal know the one great good of suffering, of ignorance, of finitude, of defeat, -- and *that is just the good of loyalty*, so long as the cause itself can only be viewed as indeed a living whole . . . When we find the preciousness of the ideal cause emphasized through grief, we see that, whatever evil is, it at least *may* have its place in an ideal order. What would be the universe without loyalty; and what would loyalty be without trial?⁶⁶

In discussing Royce’s *Philosophy of Loyalty* and the problem of evil, C. Hannah Schell suggests that Royce has two approaches to the problem of evil. One uses the language of “a

superhuman unity of life,” and discusses evil in an attempt to understand the divine life, and to develop a theodicy. This is exemplified in “The Problem of Job” where Royce suggests that God suffers with human beings. The second approach is what Schell terms the more ‘human-centered approach,’ namely, the *phenomenological discussions of the struggles with evil*, especially exemplified in *The Sources*.⁶⁷

In his discussion of “the religious mission of sorrow,” Royce suggests that when we call something a sorrow, we have begun to assimilate the fact of suffering, physical or otherwise, into the narrative of our life.⁶⁸ He defines “sorrow” as

...the ills one rationally faces only when one, through some essentially active, constructive, moral process, creatively assimilates and idealises [sic] them, and thus winds them over to be part of good—not when one merely drives them out of existence.⁶⁹

Royce thinks that sorrow provides us with insight, awakening us to a new view of the spiritual realm. He also argues that this does not offer an escape from the ‘hard facts’ of human life; it does not give humans a ‘moral holiday.’ Royce clearly distinguishes those tragedies of life in which there seems no possibility of assimilating the grief from those that hold the potential for good that might come out of the struggle with evil. “Useless sufferings “are the ones that lead us to assert that “evil ought to be destroyed.” About these he writes:

Pestilence, the cruelties of oppressors, the wrecks of innocent lives by cruel fortunes—all these seem, for our ordinary estimates, facts that we can in no wise assimilate, justify, or reasonably comprehend. That is, we can see, in the single case, no reason why such events should form part of human life—except so it indeed is. They seem, to our natural understanding, simply opaque data of experience, to be annulled or removed if we can.⁷⁰

Royce goes on to describe the process whereby human beings fold the experience of suffering into the on-going narrative of their lives. Humans are capable of this because they live in time and always try to make sense of the past in terms of the future. To be a self is to live in the future; we assimilate the pains, the sufferings, and the tragedies of life into our plan of life,

giving them meaning and setting them in their place in the whole. This act brings with it the insight that certain ills could not, even in principle, be removed from existence by an omnipotent being because to do so would abolish the conditions necessary for the highest good we now know.⁷¹ All of this relates, as indicated by Cornell West, to human agency. We are creatures who act in the world. Because we live in time our deeds are irrevocable. This implies full agency and human responsibility, a concept which Royce develops in *The Problem of Christianity* through the notion of ‘the hell of the irrevocable.’ In *The Sources*, he writes:

When we act, every act is done for eternity, since it is irrevocable. When we love, we ask the privilege to bind other destinies with our own. The tragedies of a world as ours are, therefore, not as such could be simply wiped out of existence, unless one were ready to deprive every individual personality both of its range of free choice and its effectiveness of action. When we suffer, then, in such a world, we know indeed that there need have been no suffering had there been no world at all...But if you possess this privilege, you share in a life that, in proportion to its importance and depth and range and richness of spiritual relations, is full of the possibilities of tragedy.⁷²

Idealized evils are so interwoven with good that if the grief were removed, says Royce, we would also remove courage, fidelity, spiritual self-possession, and the resolute action required to create good in the world despite our experience of evil. Royce, like James, believed in the ameliorative powers of human action, individual and collective, that human actions could make the world better, even if only in a very small way. Royce was continually calling on individuals and communities to be loyal to loyalty, to transcend self and community interest, and to seek broader perspectives on selves, other selves and the world. We human beings are fellow sufferers and fellow actors in the world, we form a brotherhood of all the loyal servants who seek to bring about good in the face of the many evils and examples of suffering. The “religious mission” of sorrow takes up suffering into one’s life plan and to give it meaning in the whole, making it a “sorrow,” rather than a pain or suffering.

The Seventh Source: The Invisible Church

Royce's insights on sorrow and evil lead us to the final lecture in *The Sources*, "The Unity of the Spirit and the Invisible Church." Royce restates the lesson of human finitude, the narrowness of our view, our propensity to pride, and the need for self-transcendence, for a level of the superhuman, for a vision of the unity of the whole. He writes:

Man needs no miracles to show him the...superhuman. You need no signs and wonders, and no psychical research, to prove the unit of the spirit is a fact of the world. Common sense tacitly presupposes the reality of the unity of the spirit. Science studies the ways in which its life is expressed in the laws which govern the order of experience. Reason gives us insight into its real being. Loyalty serves it and repents not of its service.⁷³

Any brotherhood of humans who thus loyally live in the Spirit, says Royce, is essentially religious in nature. However, they also need to be guided by the love of furthering such a brotherhood among all humans in general. They show respect for the loyalty of these other humans, they do not sow discord among humans and other communities, but seek to be a city on the hill, a model for others. They form a

...source of religious insight to all who come under their influence. Such a source acts as a means whereby any or all of our precious sources may be opened to us, may become effective, may bear fruit. *Hence in this new source, we find the crowning source of religious insight.*⁷⁴

This crowning source points to the *Invisible Church*. The broadest of religious experiences is to see and participate in a universal, infinite community of loyal interpreters who seek to bring about reconciliation, ethical action, and universal truth. Horace Kallen, in his review of *The Sources*, writes "The crowning source of religious thought is, for us all, the actual loyalty, service, devotion, suffering, accomplishment, tradition, examples, teaching and triumphs of the invisible church of all the faithful."⁷⁵ To gain membership in this invisible church, argues Royce, means to transcend greed and blindness, narrowness of vision and cause, predatory

impulses and intolerance toward other causes and communities. It is useless, says Royce, to reduce the many to the one, to wipe out diversities of spiritual gifts, or of loyalties, and

It is useless to make some new sect whose creed shall be that there are to be no sects. *The unity of the visible church, under any one creed, or with any one settled system, of religious practices, is an unattainable and undesirable ideal.*⁷⁶

Royce argues that Paul's message of *caritas* or love in Corinthians must be universalized. Such *love* or *loyalty* even when race or creed distinctions make it hard to do so, translates to tolerance.

Loyalty is tolerant, *not* as if truth were indifferent...but is tolerant precisely in so far as the best service of loyalty and of religion and of the unity of spirit consists in helping our brethren not to our own, but to *their* own. *Such loyalty implies genuine faith in the abiding and supreme unity of the spirit.*⁷⁷

The Sources offers seven avenues of religious insight, all of which address the human self as a limited being with a narrow consciousness and limiting pride. Through our individual understanding of the need for salvation, through transcending of self through the social experience with others, through our ability with reason to gain insight into an unity of facts, through our will and our irrevocable deeds which demonstrate a universal will, through our acts of loyalty and those of others, through the transformation of suffering into sorrow, and finally through our membership in the invisible church, we can gain insight into a rich, personal, unified, spirit who shares in our sorrows as well as our triumphs. This book brings us a treasury of insight for our time.

Notes

¹ Josiah Royce, 1892, *The Spirit of Modern Philosophy: An Essay in the Form of Literature*, Boston and New York: Houghton, Mifflin and Co., 1.

² The lectures were delivered as the Bross Lectures at Lake Forest College in November 1911.

³ The two core texts were Josiah Royce, 1912, *The Sources of Religious Insight*, New York: C. Scribner's Sons and William James, 1902, *The Varieties of Religious Experience: A Study in Human Nature*, New York: Longmans, Green and Company. Two other works on religion in the history of American philosophy are John Dewey, 1934, *Common Faith*, New Haven: Yale University Press, and Alfred North Whitehead, 1926, *Religion in the Making* Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, which are thin by comparison with the Royce and James volumes.

⁴ Royce's colleague, George Herbert Palmer makes this claim about Royce in his book on Idealism. George Herbert Palmer, 1964, "Josiah Royce," in *Contemporary Idealism in America*, edited by Clifford Barrett, New York: Russell & Russell, Inc., 3-7.

⁵ John McDermott notes that "Before his early death at the age of sixty, Royce had pursued virtually every field of inquiry known to his time." John J. McDermott, 1969, "Preface," *The Basic Writings of Josiah Royce*, 2 vols., Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, I, 2.

⁶ Josiah Royce, 1885, *The Religious Aspects of Philosophy: A Critique of the Bases of Conduct and Faith*, Boston and New York: Houghton & Mifflin & Co.

⁷ Josiah Royce, 1913, *The Problem of Christianity*, New York, Macmillan Co, two vols. Other works published in the early 1900's include (1900) *The Conception of Immortality* and (1909) "What is Vital In Christianity?"

⁸ 1892- *The Spirit of Modern Philosophy, : An Essay in the Form of Lectures*, Boston and New York: Houghton & Mifflin & Co., 1.

⁹ See: Jacquelyn A. Kegley 1997, *Genuine Individuals and Genuine Communities: A Roycean Public Philosophy*, Nashville, Tennessee: Vanderbilt University Press, especially Chapter 2, 24-53.

¹⁰ Royce suffered the loss of his dearest friend William James as well as the loss to fatal mental illness of his son, Christopher. Royce was also a man of risk who left California with his wife and infant to join the Harvard faculty on the mere offer of a sabbatical leave position.

¹¹ Josiah Royce, 1886, *California from the Conquest in 1846 to the Second Vigilance Committee in San Francisco (1856): A Study of American Character*, Boston and New York: Houghton & Mifflin & Son.

¹² Josiah Royce, 1885, *The Religious Aspects of Philosophy: A Critique of the Bases of Conduct and Faith*, Boston and New York: Houghton & Mifflin & Co., 452.

¹³ Josiah Royce, 1894, "The Knowledge of Good and Evil," *International Journal of Ethics*, vol. 4, 48-80, 57.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵ Josiah Royce, 1897, "The Problem of Job," *The New World*, 6, 261-81; Reprinted 1898 in *The Studies in Good and Evil: A Series of Essays on the Problems of Philosophy and of Life*, New York: D. Appleton and Co.

¹⁶ *Letters of Josiah Royce*, 1970, edited by John Clendenning, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 570.

¹⁷ Jacob Lowenberg, 1912, Review of *The Sources of Religious Insight*, *International Journal of Ethics*, Vol. 23, No. 1, October 1912, 85-88, 85.

¹⁸ This unconventionality is reflected in an interesting way in a recent book which represents a new development in contemporary theology and cultural engagement, namely, to apply theological truths to local contexts, in this case, California. Royce is referred to often in this volume: 2014, *Theology and California: Theological Refractions on California's Culture*, edited by Fred Sanders and Jason S. Sexton, Surrey, England: Ashgate Publishing.

¹⁹ See: Dwayne Tunstall, 2009, *Yes, But Not Quite: Encountering Josiah Royce's Ethico-Religious Insight*, New York: Fordham University Press; Rufus Burrow, Jr., 2014, *Martin Luther King, Jr., and the Theology of Resistance*, New York: McFarland Press; edited by Robert E. Birt, 2012, *The Liberatory Thought of Martin Luther King*, Lanham, Maryland: Lexington Press.

²⁰ Josiah Royce, 2001, (1912), *The Sources of Religious Insight*, Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 220.

²¹ *Ibid.* 281.

²² William James, 1902. *The Varieties of Religious Experience: A Study in Human Nature*, New York: Longmans, Green.

²³ These concerns were expressed in a letter from James to Frances R. Morse which was published by Ralph Barton Perry in his 1935 *The Thought and Character of William James*, Boston: Little, Brown & Co., II, 326-327.

²⁴ William James, 1961 (1902), *The Varieties of Religious Experience: A study in Human Nature*, New York: Collier, 29. For these insights, I am indebted to a superb article on James and his *Varieties* by Douglas Anderson, "Respectability and the Wild Beasts of the Desert: The Heart of James' *Varieties*," *The Journal of Speculative Philosophy*, New Series, 17, No. 1: William James; *Varieties of Religious Experience*," 1-13.

²⁵ James, *Varieties*, 29.

²⁶ Anderson, 3.

²⁷ In an interesting essay, Argentinian scholar, Claudio Viale, affirms the estimate of the courage exhibited by James and Royce, noting that they "both openly vindicate religion before the growing agnosticism of the day. "See: Claudio Viale, 2013, "William James' Conception of Religion in Josiah Royce's Mature Thought and Three Approaches," *Pragmatism Today*, Vol. 4., Issue 2, 1.

²⁸ Anderson, 6.

²⁹ Viale, 2.

³⁰ Linell Elizabeth Cody, 1988, "Royce and Post-Modern Theology, *American Journal of Theology and Philosophy*, Vol. 9, 149-164, 151.

³¹ *Ibid.* 154.

³² *Ibid.* 162.

³³ Donald William Dotterer, 1986, "Josiah Royce's Philosophy of Loyalty: A Hermeneutical Tool for Pauline Theology," *American Journal of Theology and Philosophy*, Vol. 7, No. 3, September, 149-163, 150.

³⁴ John J. McDermott, 1969, "Preface," *The Basic Writings of Josiah Royce*, 2 vols., Chicago, The University of Chicago Press, II, 639-40, 640.

³⁵ Dotterer, 150.

³⁶ John Wright Buckham says of Royce, "A rare and beautiful catholicity of mind is one of Professor Royce's finest traits," in John Wright Buckham, 1915, "The Contribution of Professor Royce to Christian Thought," *The Harvard Theological Review*, Vol. 8, No. 2, April, 1915, 219-37, 219.

³⁷ John E. Smith, 1953, review of *The Religious Philosophy of Josiah Royce* by Gary Brown, *The Journal of Religion*, Vol. 33, No. 4, October, 1953, 290-1, 290.

³⁸ Josiah Royce, 1959, *The World and the Individual*, New York: Dover Publications, II, 59.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, I, 48-49.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 55.

⁴¹ Jacob Lowenberg, 1912, "Review of *The Sources of Religious Insight*," *International Journal of Ethics*, Vol. 23, October, 1912, 85-88,

⁴² Josiah Royce, 2001, (1912) *The Sources of Religious Insight*, Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 17.

⁴³ *Ibid.*

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 15. "Cynics and rebels, ancient sages and men who are in our foremost rank of time, can agree and have agreed, in maintaining that there is some goal of life...some goal that, if accessible, would fulfill and surpass our lesser desires, or would save us from our bondage to lesser ills, while this goal is something that we naturally miss, or that we are in great danger of missing- so, that, whatever else we need, we need to be saved from this pervasive and overmastering danger of failure."

⁴⁵ Eric Wilm, in his review of *The Sources* states that the paradox is that the believer already knows the marks by which divine revelation is to be distinguished from any other report. But if the believer already possesses this knowledge, revelation is unnecessary; if he does not possess it, revelation is impossible. See: Eric Wilm, "Review of *The Sources of Religious Insight*," *The Philosophical Review*, Vol. 22, No. 3, March, 1913, 229-231, 230.

⁴⁶ *The Sources*, 25.

⁴⁷ Josiah Royce, 1894, "The External World and the Social Consciousness," *The Philosophical Review* 3, No. 5, (September), 513-45, 519.

⁴⁸ *The Sources*, 65.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 70.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 71

⁵¹ *Ibid.*

⁵² *Ibid.*, 74-5.

- ⁵³ *Ibid.*, 5-6.
- ⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 133.
- ⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 134.
- ⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 146.
- ⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 150.
- ⁵⁸ *Ibid.* 158.
- ⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 160.
- ⁶⁰ Josiah Royce, 1908, *The Philosophy of Loyalty*, New York: Macmillan and Co., 6.
- ⁶¹ *The Sources*, 191-2.
- ⁶² *Ibid.*, 194.
- ⁶³ *Ibid.*, 206.
- ⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 201.
- ⁶⁵ Cornell West, 1999, "Pragmatism and the Sense of the Tragic, in *Keeping Faith: Philosophy and Race in America*, New York: Routledge, 108.
- ⁶⁶ *Philosophy of Loyalty*, 130.
- ⁶⁷ C. Hannah Schell, 2004, "Roycean Loyalty and the Struggle with Evil, *The Journal of Theology and Philosophy*, Vol. 25, No. 1, January, 3-21, 17.
- ⁶⁸ *The Sources*, 239.
- ⁶⁹ *Ibid.*
- ⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 233.
- ⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 251.
- ⁷² *Ibid.*, 252.
- ⁷³ *Ibid.*, 272.
- ⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 276.
- ⁷⁵ Horace Kallen, 1964, review of *The Sources of Religious Insight*, *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, Vol. 4, No. 1 (Autumn, 1964) 108.
- ⁷⁶ *The Sources*, 294.
- ⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 297.