

***Introduction to
Speculation as to the Nature of Mind
c. 1888***

Historical Context

The manuscript is an incomplete ninety-page handwritten document.¹ The document is in Folio Volume Box 85, the first of five other undated documents. Given that Royce, on page 83, refers to George T. Ladd's *Elements of Physiological Psychology*,² published in 1887, then the manuscript's composition must have occurred sometime between 1887 and 1889. The topic of the manuscript is a working hypothesis suitable for modern psychology concerning the general nature of the human mind and its various processes. Royce's interest in psychology began at least as early as 1874 with youthful explorations into the study of human nature,³ was probably heightened from his exposure to Wilhelm Wundt's empirical psychology while studying at Leipzig in 1875,⁴ and continued throughout the course of his life. After Germany, Royce returned to the United States and received his doctorate in philosophy from John Hopkins University in 1878. Royce's doctoral dissertation, *Of the Interdependence of the Principles of Knowledge*, was an attempt to develop a post-Kantian theory of knowledge. From 1878 to 1882, while employed at the University of California, Royce sought to systematically elaborate the theory contained in his doctoral dissertation. As a consequence, Royce was involved in a detailed investigation into the study of consciousness, which led to an increasingly pragmatic epistemology and a nascent phenomenology.⁵ In 1882, Royce began his lifelong career at Harvard and then later published *The Religious Aspect of Philosophy* in 1885, which announced his commitment to absolute idealism. Hence, the study of the human mind was central to Royce's investigations from the very beginning. At the time of the composition of this manuscript, Royce was probably trying to tie together his pragmatic epistemology, nascent phenomenology, and metaphysics of absolute idealism. Given the centrality of the human mind and conscious experience to each of these distinct but related inquiries, Royce presumably saw psychology as the proper empirical starting-point to tie

¹ All information on the manuscript is found in Oppenheim's Comprehensive Index, in Folio Volume Boxes 1-98. An online version is available at <http://royce-edition.iupui.edu/docu/index.pdf>.

² Ladd, T. George. *Elements of Physiological Psychology: A Treatise of the Activities and Nature of Mind From the Physical and Experimental Point of View*. London: Longmans, Green & Co. 1887. An online version is available at <https://archive.org/details/in.ernet.dli.2015.218916/page/n5>.

³ For an autobiographical account of Royce's psychological studies, see the 1886 introductory address to the Harvard philosophy committee, available online at <http://royce-edition.iupui.edu/royce-autobiographical/>.

⁴ Clendenning, John. *The Life and Thought of Josiah Royce*. Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press. 1999: 62.

⁵ For a sample of Royce's study of consciousness, his increasingly pragmatic epistemology, and nascent phenomenology, see c. 1880: 'The Possibility of Experience' and 'Interpretation of Consciousness,' available online at <http://royce-edition.iupui.edu/transcribed-manuscripts/>. See also a letter to William James dated 19 September 1880, in Royce, Josiah. *The Letters of Josiah Royce*, vol. 1, ed. John Clendenning. Chicago & London, University of Chicago Press 1991: 86-91. And the 1881 publication, 'Kant's Relation to Modern Philosophic Progress' in *The Journal of Speculative Philosophy*, vol. 15, no. 4. Penn State University Press: 360-381, available online at <http://royce-edition.iupui.edu/online-royce-articles/>.

everything together. The return to the study of psychology, in the years between 1885 and 1889, is thus probably not accidental.⁶

Royce's contention, in the present manuscript, is that modern psychology lacks a working hypothesis concerning the general nature of the human mind and its various processes. After a brief survey of some alternative hypotheses, Royce evaluates a version of the mind-stuff hypothesis in Morton Prince's 1885 publication *The Nature of Mind and Human Automatism*.⁷ Royce had published a critique of William Kingdon Clifford's version of the mind-stuff hypothesis in 1881,⁸ and his interest in the psychophysical parallelism postulated by that hypothesis was a part of his earliest psychological and philosophical inquiries. Mind-stuff, according to the proponents of this hypothesis, is a substance with an inner aspect of mentality and an outer aspect of physicality. An elementary feeling is the limit of mentality, the thing in itself, and the ultimate datum of consciousness. Therefore, whatever object is in consciousness is an aggregate of such feelings. Yet, what are those feeling apart from consciousness? As we decrease in the complexity of organism, the level of consciousness presumably diminishes. But, we cannot definitively draw a determinate boundary between the non-conscious and conscious, between the merely material and wholly mental. Otherwise, we would have to explain the emergence of conscious life from a dead and non-conscious matter, which is absurd. We must suppose, in other words, that everything ostensibly outside of consciousness, which we conceive of as a world of dead matter, is actually a world of mind-stuff, or of material substances with traces of the beginnings of consciousness without being conscious. The simplest of substances are mind-atoms, that is, atomic elements of unconscious feeling. The aggregation of mind-atoms, therefore, explains the increasing complexity of organisms and the growing level of consciousness. When such atoms aggregate into the brain, the physical aspect forms the organ and the mental aspect determines the degree of consciousness. When such a consciousness apprehends the ostensible world of matter, that apprehension is of the mind-stuff responsible for the very growth of that apprehending consciousness.

The parallelism of physicality and mentality, according to the mind-stuff hypothesis, consists in the correspondence between unconscious atoms of feeling in the world of matter and conscious atoms of feeling in the life of mind. Each atom is a substance with a physical and mental aspect, and every such

⁶ From 1885 to 1889, Royce published reports on recent psychological research in *Proceedings of the American Society for Psychical Research*, available online at <http://royce-edition.iupui.edu/royce-other-writings/>. There is also the 1884 publication 'After-Images' in *Science*, vol. 3, no. 58. American Association for the Advancement of Science: 321-322. And the 1888 publication 'Hallucination of Memory and Telepathy' in *Mind*, vol. 13, no. 50. Oxford University Press: 244-248. Both available online at <http://royce-edition.iupui.edu/online-royce-articles/>.

⁷ Prince, Morton. *The Nature of Mind and Human Automatism*. Philadelphia: J.B. Lippincott Company 1885. An online version is available at <https://archive.org/details/natureofmindhuma01prin/page/n5>.

⁸ Royce, Josiah. 'Mind-Stuff and Reality' in *Mind*, vol. 6, no. 23, July 1881: 365-377. For Clifford's view, see 'On the Nature of Things in Themselves' in *Mind*, vol. 3, no. 9, January 1878: 57-67.

substance forms one reality of mind-stuff. Yet, the relation of the physical to the mental is precisely the issue. As Royce aptly notes, the hypothesis of mind-stuff is problematic because proponents posit a mysterious underlying substratum, define that substratum as partly physical and partly mental, and assume the physical and mental aspects correlate without explaining how or why such a relation obtains. Therefore, not only do proponents of the mind-stuff hypothesis beg the question, but also complicate the problem by positing another mysterious entity in need of explanation. To avoid the appearance of circularity, these proponents instead speak of 'substance,' 'physical aspect,' 'mental aspect,' and 'mind-stuff' as if these terms can satisfy the demand for explanation on their own. Furthermore, even if we ignore this explanatory demand, the mind-stuff hypothesis faces a more serious objection: The mind-stuff hypothesis has no explanatory value. For mind-stuff renders the unity of consciousness unexplainable and the spatiality of matter impossible. The latter follows because ultimately proponents of mind-stuff want to explain materiality in terms of the mental, such as growth of the brain in terms of an aggregation of mind-atoms. But, if everything is ultimately mental, and the mental is not spatial, then to reduce the material to the mental is to render materiality non-spatial, which is absurd. The former follows because proponents of mind-stuff want to draw an analogy between physical atoms of matter and mental atoms of mind, where the former is an element of unconscious and the latter of conscious feeling. But, no aggregate of mental atoms of conscious feeling could ever suffice to explain the original unity of consciousness: We do not experience singular atomic feelings at certain moments, but rather we experience each moment through the unity of a judgment that is irreducible to the feelings out of which that judgment is constructed. Thus, besides being circular, the mind-stuff hypothesis cannot explain either the physical world of matter or the mental life of consciousness.

A Speculation as to the Nature of Mind

The empirical facts of modern psychology afford a wealth of data in need of explanation. Such a demand for explanation is satisfiable, according to Royce, in terms of a metaphysics of absolute idealism. To ask what is true about the human mind, in other words, is to ask how mental phenomena in the human mind appear to an absolute knower. All science, Royce qualifies, must address the question of how the world appears to such an absolute knower, and therefore, psychology is only a special case. The solutions sought are hypothetical in nature, and the hypotheses advanced must account for the empirical facts. How does the mind-stuff, as opposed to the idealist, hypothesis account for the empirical facts of psychology? To adequately account for the empirical facts of psychology, the proponents of the idealist and mind-stuff hypothesis alike must address what is the general nature of the human mind and its various processes. The fundamental problem of psychology, and therefore, any hypothesis as to the general nature of the human mind and its various processes, is how brain states relate to conscious states. According to psychological

researches into animal and human intelligence, brain states are parallel to conscious states. How does such parallelism occur? Prince's solution, according to Royce, offers the clearest solution to this problem among the proponents of the 'mind-stuff' hypothesis.

Prince's version of the mind-stuff hypothesis dispenses with the mysterious terminology of 'substance' and the vague opposition between 'inner' and 'outer' aspects of mentality and physicality; instead opting to describe consciousness in terms of a parallelism between physical changes and mental states according to an outside observer. Such a parallelism is not a mysterious relation between two aspects of one substance, but an observable parallel between a certain behavior (e.g., pain) and a physical reaction (e.g., nerve vibration), where the latter is a sign of the former. Thus, the problem of parallelism is reducible to how an outside observer may identify a physical change with a certain type of conscious experience: The outside observer would, through the aid of a microscope, feel an alteration in nerve vibration; then, as a sign of pain, that observer would infer the subject under observation is consciously experiencing pain; or, will feel the cessation of that nerve vibration, and infer the experience of pain is over. Nonetheless, Prince's version of the mind-stuff hypothesis suffers from the same defect as Clifford's version: Even if an outsider observer could unambiguously identify a physical change with a certain type of conscious experience, that observer cannot feel the unity of consciousness within which pain is a possible experience. The unity of consciousness, in other words, is not reducible to the physical changes in nerve vibration, whether observed or otherwise, because there is no discernable parallel between nerve vibration and the conscious unity of experience. Such a reduction would try to explain, for example, the solution to a mathematical problem in terms of physical change in nerve vibration; but, no amount of observation of nerve vibration could suffice to explain either the actual procedure or real experience of that solution in the unity of a judgment.

If Royce is critical of Prince's version of the mind-stuff hypothesis because of its reductionism, he does not intend to explain away the physical in terms of the mental as Clifford's version of the hypothesis. Instead, Royce appreciates the paradoxical nature of the human mind as both fundamentally physical and irreducibly mental; that the unity of consciousness is ultimately a nonphysical fact, even if that unity proceeds from a physical structure and is fundamentally dependent upon physical conditions. While thought is explainable in terms of our motor responses to environmental stimuli, the thinking-process is not wholly explainable by an appeal to such responses nor their stimuli. There is besides a self-reflexive aspect to thinking, whereby we reflect upon *our* judgments, *our* meaning of those judgments, and *our* objects that these meanings intend. Such instances of self-reflection are not reducible to nerve vibrations, but occur wholly within the field of conscious awareness and reflective attention to that conscious field as a dialogue between the self and itself; not a dialogue between the self and its nerve vibrations, nor between motor responses and their environmental stimuli.

The dialogical nature of the self, in its conscious and self-conscious life, is irreducibly mental and yet fundamentally dependent upon the physical structure of the brain and its conditions. One such condition is the physical retention of past experience in the apparatus of the brain that is collectively referred to as the memory. Yet, even in the case of memory, the paradoxical nature of the human mind reappears. Since, while we must possess the physical structure of the brain to retain experiences, the reproduction of those past experiences in the present must occur to establish the continuity of the self and its dialogical nature. Such a continuity depends upon a synthesis of recognition, a dialogue between the present with its past self, wherein the present self recognizes that an experience of the past self correlates with present experience. For this recognition to occur, the present self-need not experience the physical fact again; much less recognize the physical conditions responsible for the retention of past experience in the memory. Rather a synthesis of recognition depends upon the irreducibly mental fact of apperception, whereby past and present self are knowable as one and the same person to whom all these experiences belong; a unity of consciousness which is neither explainable nor reducible to the physical structure of the brain and its conditions, nor motor responses and their environmental stimuli.

The upshot of Royce's description is that Prince's mind-stuff hypothesis can account for neither the reproduction of memory nor the synthesis of recognition because that hypothesis cannot establish the apperceptive unity of consciousness upon which memory and recognition depend. What apperception affords is a parallel between past and present experience in and through the same self; except, that parallel is not, as Prince maintains, an identity of nerve vibrations with mental states according to some outside observer. Presumably, an outside observer could identify a parallel between nerve vibrations and a *presently* occurring mental state of some actual event. Whereas, any parallel of past and present is decidedly not a physical relation: For the past is no longer an experience of an actual event for some *presently* occurring mental state, and consequently, no nerve vibrations *presently* exist for that past experience. Rather the relation of past to present experience is held together in *thought* through the apperceptive unity of consciousness. Thus, while an outside observer could identify nerve vibrations with this presently occurring mental state, no finite observer could identify nerve vibrations that connect past and present experience. Yet, the apperceptive unity that connects past and present experience is the necessary presupposition for all higher-order thinking and reflection. Therefore, Prince's mind-stuff hypothesis cannot explain the most important, and irreducibly mental, fact about conscious and self-conscious life.

The relation of past and present is an irreducibly mental fact concerning the apperceptive unity of consciousness, and therefore, is not amenable to physicalist explanation. An outside observer could not, in other words, perceive the relation between past and present experience, or the apperceptive unity of consciousness, with the aid of a microscope. Certainly, consciousness is fundamentally dependent upon the physical structure of the brain and its conditions; as a consequence, some mental events are parallel to nerve

vibrations. Simultaneously, conscious and self-conscious life possesses a degree of mental autonomy from that physical structure, which manifests as a spontaneous activity not parallel to any nerve vibrations. Such is the case with the apperceptive unity of consciousness, and the reproduction of memory and synthesis of recognition that unity determines. To recapitulate: No outside observer could perceive a parallel between nerve vibrations and the apperceptive unity of consciousness because that unity entails an irreducible relation between past and present. Since no nerve vibrations exist for those past experiences, there is no observable parallel between past and present in terms of nerve vibrations. Consequently, without a physical relation between past and present experience in terms of nerve vibrations, the apperceptive unity of consciousness lacks a physical basis for an outside observer to perceive. The manuscript terminates before Royce offers a defense of the idealist hypothesis, but there are ample clues that warrant a guess. Of course, a *finite* observer could not perceive, in the absence of a physical basis for the apperceptive unity of consciousness, the relation of past to present experience. Whereas, an *absolute* observer could perceive the parallel between nerve vibrations and mental states, as well as the relation of every past to each present experience, and how all these would relate to future experience. An absolute observer could, in other words, perceive the apperceptive unity of each and every self as a single and complete reality of possible and actual experiences.

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