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Two Critical Points in Professor Royce's Paper on "Self-Consciousness, Social Consciousness, and Nature"

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## DISCUSSIONS.

### TWO CRITICAL POINTS IN PROFESSOR ROYCE'S PAPER ON "SELF-CONSCIOUSNESS, SOCIAL CONSCIOUSNESS, AND NATURE."

IN the very able and suggestive paper of Professor Royce, published in this REVIEW of September and November, 1895, there are two points which especially drew my attention, and upon which I venture some criticisms of the author's position. I refer to the proof that there is other human experience than my own, and that Nature is other reality than human experience.

The proof which Professor Royce offers in support of his thesis, that there are finite beings like myself, other human experience than my own experience, is the following. "A man becomes self-conscious only in the most intimate connection with the growth of his social consciousness. These two forms of consciousness are not separable and opposed regions of a man's life; they are thoroughly interdependent. Take away the conscious *Alter*, and the conscious *Ego*, so far as in this world we know it, languishes, and languishing dies. . . . Hence I am not first self-conscious and then secondarily conscious of my fellows. On the contrary, I am conscious of myself, on the whole, as in relation to some real or ideal fellow; and apart from my consciousness of my fellows I have only secondary and derived states and habits of self-consciousness" (p. 468). "In us men there is no self-consciousness apart from some more or less derived form of social consciousness. I am I in relation to some sort of a *non-Ego*" (p. 470). "It is by virtue of this very contrast (*i.e.*, that between our own inner life and what we regard as the inner life of our fellows) that we become self-conscious" (p. 471). "A man is conscious of himself as this finite being only in so far as he contrasts himself with what he takes to be the life and, in fact, the conscious life of some other finite being — unless, indeed, he modifies his natural self-consciousness by contrasting his own life with the conceived fulness of the life of God. But except by virtue of some such contrast one cannot become self-conscious, and the result is that, as a matter of simple and necessary meaning, if any metaphysical argument is to prove that I am I, viz., this finite being, then, at the same time this argument will prove that there is other conscious life besides mine. For otherwise my own finite life can-

not be defined or conceived" (pp. 471-2). "Without knowledge that the other experience is, there can be no meaning in saying that the presented experience itself is" (p. 481). "That there is some experience not individually mine, is an assertion precisely as sure as the assertion that my own experience is; for neither assertion has meaning apart from the other" (p. 483). Hence one ought not to say, as Descartes does, "*Cogito, ergo sum*"; but, "I think; therefore other beings like myself exist also."

The argument is to this effect. The existence of other human experience is so connected with my own existence both in its genesis and its meaning, so far as it is known and definable to myself, that whatever reasons there are for affirming that I am, are equally valid for affirming that other human beings are. Looking at my self-consciousness psychogenetically, I must say that, in its origin and development, my consciousness of self is so bound up with my social consciousness that, but for that social consciousness, there is no reason to suppose that I should possess any self at all. At all events I could not have the self-consciousness I now have, were there not other selves with whom I have been in communication from the beginning of my conscious life. I have "rounded to the separate mind" I now am, and my "isolation has grown defined," only in consequence of that social environment in which my experience has been set from the beginning.

Again, looking at my self-consciousness epistemologically, the knowledge of myself, the meaning of my experience, is possible, is explicable, only if there are other experiences not mine. "My actual inner life is then always contrasted with experience other than is now mine" (p. 479). "Whichever way I turn, I am definable to myself only in terms of a contrast with other experiences" (p. 480). Another characteristic of my experience demands the same explanation, viz., systematic continuity and persistency. For instance, the existence for me of such an object as the valley of the Upper Nile is explicable only if there are other beings, other experience than mine. "When I conceive the Upper Nile Valley, there are presented to my inner life words, images, map-experience, and the like; and these I know as meaning something to me, in so far as I contrast these relatively immediate data with the conceived contents of the experience of other men who more directly verify what I only conceive as to that region" (p. 479).

To the objection that the other experience than mine need not be an actual one, but only a conceived one or a possible one, the suffi-

cient reply is that any such conceived other experience, whether rightly conceived or not, must have "relation to a real experience which is other than my presentation" (pp. 482, 483); and any possible experience for me, if that is to mean anything, must presuppose some actual experience not mine. "Possibilities need actualities to give them meaning." "Bare possibilities to which no actualities correspond are meaningless" (p. 483).

But now is this reasoning really to the point, and is it conclusive? We do not think so. And first, in reference to the genesis and development of self-consciousness, admitting the correctness of Professor Royce's view, we can hardly suppose that he would make the psychological history of my experience a proof that there is other experience than mine, unless it is to be assumed that genesis carries with it validity. All that this account of self-consciousness proves is that I have always believed in the reality of other experience than my own. But, from the standpoint of epistemology, the question is a legitimate one: Is that belief true or well founded? My self-consciousness might conceivably have had such a genesis, if in reality there were no social fellows and my belief in their existence were an illusion. It is only upon epistemological grounds that the fundamental question which Professor Royce raises can be answered, namely, What warrant have I, philosophically speaking, for assuming that there is any other experience than mine at all (p. 481)?

And, in fact, the argument upon which Professor Royce relies is the argument from knowledge, or rather from my own experience as known and definable to myself. The epistemological argument which we have reproduced, does, we think, prove the proposition that there must be other reality of some sort than my own existence, — other experience of some kind than my own experience; but what the content of that experience is, whether it is or embraces other finite experiences like my own — my social fellows — or is the "conceived fulness of the life of God" as the absolute experience, the reasoning so far does not determine.

Up to this point the existence of other human minds has not been proved. The only proof on this point which Professor Royce offers, is in the passage on page 484, where he undertakes to explain how "we get information about the contents of experience not our own." This information we get "when we communicate socially with our fellows, and the essence of social communication is this. My fellow does something in a certain situation, — deals with his environment so and so. He uses tools, utters words, makes gestures."

These expressive acts of my fellow "get a meaning to me as the suggestion of his concrete inner life, just in so far as I am able to imitate these deeds of his by bodily acts of my own, brought to pass under conditions like those in which he, my fellow, acts. For, when I definitely repeat a bodily act that expresses any human meaning, the act, as I repeat it under definite conditions, gets for me an inner meaning, which I could never grasp so long as I merely observed such an act from without, as an event in my perceived phenomenal world. But this inner meaning which the act gets when I repeat it, becomes for me the objective meaning of the act as my fellow performs it. And thus the meaning of the imitated act, interpreted for me at the moment of my imitation, gets conceived as the real meaning, the inner experience of my fellow, at the moment when he performs the act which is my model."

The argument contained in this passage is really the argument from analogy; and it presupposes, as something already known or established, the objective reality of my body. It is only as I first know that I have a body which sustains certain definite and constant relations to my inner experience, that I can know that there are any other inner experiences like my own; and my inference to the reality of such inner experiences is based solely upon an assumed identity of relations, viz., the relations I know to exist between my body and my inner experience, and the relations between what I take to be the like body of my fellow and his inner experience. I reach, then, the minds of my social fellows only through the medium of a body common to us both. I reach an inner human experience, not mine, only through a something which is not human experience; and this must mean, not the mere fact that I get more definite information about the content of my fellow's inner experience which I have already proved exists in reality, but the fact of *there being* such inner experience other than mine.

Now, unless it is first established that there is common to me and my assumed fellows such a reality as I mean by my body, it has not, we think, been proved that there is a world of human experience other than my own. But my body is a physical object, a part of nature; it is a nature-object; and the order of proof which Professor Royce follows is from human beings to non-human beings. He teaches that, both in the order of psychological growth and logical proof, the existence of nature is dependent upon self and social consciousness.

Turning now to the proof that there is non-human experience which he calls nature, or nature-objects, we find this proof is based

upon the fact of social communication — the social consciousness. The fact of communication between human experiences proves there is body, my body and the bodies of my fellows, which are the necessary media of our communicable experiences; and, since body is indissolubly connected with the totality of those phenomena we call Nature, the argument from continuity establishes the reality of nature-objects whose content is non-human experience.

We think, however, this argument is open to two rather serious criticisms. In the first place, unless it assumes without proof that there are social fellows, in communication with each other, the proof that there are other human experiences than my own presupposes the existence of just those nature-objects which it is the aim of this argument to establish. In a word, the argument either rests upon an unproved assumption, or the proof moves in a circle. Our position is that, without the previous assumption that body exists common to me and my fellows, Professor Royce has not proved that we have social fellows; and without the assumption of such human experiences in communication with each other, there is no proof that bodies as extra-human experiences exist. But even supposing it had been established that other human minds than mine exist, this argument does not prove what it undertakes to prove, viz., that there must be some non-human experience, or that nature is such experience.

There are, as Professor Royce says, two possible hypotheses respecting nature. According to the one view, nature is "the sum-total of those facts of our various experiences concerning which our conceptual experiences seem most easily to agree" (p. 581); that is, nature-objects are merely agreeing human experiences. The other conception is that, while the content of nature is experience, that experience is other than human, *i.e.*, nature-objects are non-human experiences.

Now Professor Royce rejects the first hypothesis and maintains the second; for "there is," he says, "one class of nature-objects in case of which just this negative and sceptical hypothesis cannot be carried out without destroying the very basis of our social consciousness itself" (p. 581). This class of objects is our bodies, phenomena which are "definable as the expressive movements, the gestures, words, deeds of our fellows." The argument here is, that the fact of communication between human minds is inexplicable, if nature-objects are only agreeing experiences; such a fact can be explained only if there is an experience not human and

of identical meaning for all minds in communication. The fact of communication between our inner experiences is therefore an exception, fatal to the hypothesis which makes nature a merely human experience, and it is to be explained only by the hypothesis that our bodies at least are nature-objects, whose contents are extra-human experience. Professor Royce takes the concrete case of a desk in the lecture-room and myself communicating with my fellows. In reference to the desk, he asserts: "You could say that if this desk were here alone, you could indeed so far talk sceptically of phenomenal experiences in various observers, which only seemed to be experiences relating to the same object, but which as a fact do not demand the real sameness of their object. But it is no longer so if, in terms of the social consciousness, you consider not the desk but me as your nature-object; for I am to you not only nature-phenomenon represented in you by comparable and merely similar perceptual experiences of your various private worlds; but I am, as communicating fellow-man, the same outer object for all of you" (p. 582).

Now we maintain that this proof is not cogent. All that the argument proves is, that there must be some content in our human experiences, which is so far common to them all, that it can be a medium of communication between them. The argument does not prove that this common or identical element must be something which transcends our experiences; or, if some extra-human reality is established, that reality certainly need not be what Professor Royce maintains, viz., our bodies as he conceives them.

Why not in reference to our bodies, as well as other nature-objects, keep within our human experience, and explain this fact of communication by a supposition of this sort: Within my experience there is a certain group of elements or events, relatively stable, uniform, and persistent, which I call my body; this content possesses the peculiarity of being regularly connected with those more internal experiences I call ideas, feelings, emotions, volitions; and what is true of myself, I assume to be the case with my social fellows.

Now, if I find on certain occasions, that events or phenomena occur within my experience, which closely resemble those I know as my body, though of course not identical with them, I shall interpret them to mean the existence at that time of experiences in my fellows, which correspond to my own more internal experiences, and which are of like character. Now, if this supposition is inadmissible, and we must transcend our human experiences, why not set up the Berke-

leyan hypothesis of an Infinite Spirit operative in our finite spirits, and the actual medium of communication between them?

Our conclusion is that Professor Royce has not established the two most important theses in his paper. He has not proved that other finite minds like my own must exist, nor has he proved that nature-objects must be finite, non-human experiences.

JOHN E. RUSSELL.

MR. BALFOUR AND TRANSCENDENTAL IDEALISM.

In the January number of this REVIEW, Professor Daniels calls Mr. Balfour to account for "his mistaken portrayal of one of the fundamental tenets of Transcendental Idealism." He wishes it understood that his criticism is not written in the interests of Idealism, but rather in the interests of logical consistency, which he supposes Mr. Balfour to have violated. That a mistaken portrayal is to be found in his own account of Mr. Balfour's position, is, I believe, the true state of the case. Let me then present reasons for so thinking, not as one arguing a case for or against Idealism, but rather as one who, like Professor Daniels, has a human interest in logical consistency.

His criticism of Mr. Balfour seems to me to rest partly upon a misapprehension of the scope and purpose of the chapter which is attacked. Mr. Balfour's purpose is to translate briefly into popular language the essence of Green's theory. To this end he singles out Green's data and method, and seeks to drive them to their logical issue. He is therefore not concerned so much with inconsistencies of expression as with inconsistencies of thought. Whether he is right in charging Green's metaphysics with bringing us "face to face . . . with a mind which is conscious of itself and a world of which that mind may, without metaphor, be described as the creator," is a question to be settled by an immanent criticism of Green's system; it cannot be settled by an external appeal to tabulated citations. To use the latter method would be to return from philosophy to mere talk. Professor Daniels asserts that "Mr. Balfour attacks Idealism for postulating the 'causal or *quasi*-causal activity' of the thinking Self or Subject." Now this is precisely what Mr. Balfour does not do. Professor Daniels refutes himself as soon as he quotes the passage in which he seems to find that assertion. To say that Idealism postulates such activity is surely a very different thing from saying that Green has illogically invested one of the Idealistic