



The Real Issue in 'The Conception of God'

Author(s): G. H. Howison

Source: *The Philosophical Review*, Sep., 1898, Vol. 7, No. 5 (Sep., 1898), pp. 518-522

Published by: Duke University Press on behalf of Philosophical Review

Stable URL: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/2177114>

JSTOR is a not-for-profit service that helps scholars, researchers, and students discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content in a trusted digital archive. We use information technology and tools to increase productivity and facilitate new forms of scholarship. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of the Terms & Conditions of Use, available at <https://about.jstor.org/terms>



JSTOR

Duke University Press and are collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to *The Philosophical Review*

DISCUSSION.

THE REAL ISSUE IN 'THE CONCEPTION OF GOD.'

THE very full and careful notice of the book bearing the above-quoted title, in the May number of the REVIEW, repeats an omission which, singularly enough, has been made in every important account thus far given of the work. This omission, unfortunately, is of the very kernel of my own contribution to the discussion recorded in the volume. I can hardly avoid the suspicion that its happening must be due, at least in part, to some serious defect in my method of statement; for the omission has been made in common by such capable writers as President Schurman, Professor Charles Carroll Everett, Professor James Seth, and the pungent if not judicial reviewer in the *New York Nation*. It is therefore with satisfaction, as well as with thanks, that I avail myself of the space here kindly granted me by the editors of the REVIEW, to make a restatement of the matter omitted.

The omission amounts to a complete misstatement of the case really at issue between Professor Royce and me. It results in leaving the impression that I do nothing more than confront his acutely-argued theory of Monistic Idealism with the inertia of traditional prejudices, bedded in moral common-sense. In his *Supplementary Essay*, Professor Royce himself represents the case in this light. He says (p. 136): "The antithesis *between Monistic Idealism and Ethical Individualism* [italics mine] upon which Professor Howison . . . has laid such stress, reveals . . . a very deep and instructive antinomy of Reason." Still more explicitly (p. 220): "The antinomy . . . has appeared thus far as [italics again mine] *an antinomy between the claims of theory and the presuppositions of ethics.*" Finally, in his *Replies to Criticisms*, he recurs to this 'antinomy,' and (p. 329) states it with technical formality as follows:

"THEESIS.

"The entire world of truth, natural and ethical, must be present in the unity of a single Absolute Consciousness.

"The world of truth, for the reasons developed in Part First of this paper, must constitute an Organic Whole of Fact, realizing ideas. Otherwise, there would be relations of ideas and facts

"ANTITHESIS.

"The . . . moral world demands a real Variety of Individuals,—such . . . as cannot be present in the unity of any single consciousness.

"Moral relations are relations of individuals, who are free as to their will, and independent both of one another and of any whole of reality to which they be-

which were real relations, and which yet transcended all consciousness. Such real relations, as transcendent 'things in themselves,' prove to be meaningless. Hence the Thesis is established."

long. Such independence implies . . . separateness, and forbids the . . . individuals to be the mere fulfilment . . . of ideas of any one being. Hence the individuals cannot be contained in any single unity of consciousness; and the Antithesis is proved."

With the thesis and antithesis formulated in just this fashion, it is made to appear as if I only deny the thesis so far as it concerns the *ethical* world. It seems to be implied that I must perforce admit the argument in proof of the thesis, and therefore must admit the thesis too, so far as it concerns the 'natural' world (by which I presume the *theoretical* is meant). The implication is, in any case, that if I do not outright admit the thesis in its theoretical bearing, I have at any rate neglected to call it in question or to challenge its proof.

It would not surprise me if this piece of dialectical technics should turn out to have been quite as much responsible for the general overlooking of my central contention as any defect in my former method of statement. A presentation could hardly be more misleading, as to the main matter really in dispute. Yet in the published volume I have taken special pains to forestall, if possible, this misleading impression. In the 'Introduction' it is said (p. xxxv): "Professor Howison's point is not at all to set the moral consciousness, simply as a 'categorical imperative,' at odds with the theoretical, and merely have the 'heart' breathe defiance to the 'intellect.' . . . His position is by no means correctly apprehended as one side of 'an antinomy between the claims of theory and the presuppositions of ethics.' Ethics for him, as for Professor Royce, can have no valid presuppositions except such as find their place in a totally coherent, totally embracing *theoretical* view. His position is that of a side in a controversy between two schemes of *theory*." But the same thing had already been set forth in the body of my part of the discussion. On page 106, reliance on the 'warnings of moral common-sense,' as a basis for philosophizing, is expressly repudiated. Speaking of our instinctive moral sense as indicating the reality of many independent self-active minds, I there say: "By spontaneous moral sense we doubtless believe, indeed, that we are each entirely real, and a seat of inalienable rights; . . . this feeling of rights, though it be no more than a resentment at intrusion, points directly to our belief that there are other beings as unreservedly real as we, with rights alike inalienable, who lay us under *duty*. Still, [the italics here are new] *this uncomprehended instinct, ethical though it be, is not philosophy. Until we*

shall have learned how to give it in some way the authority of rational insight, we have no right to its effects when we are proceeding as thinkers; so far as we merely accept them, we do not THINK, we only feel." In short, as I remind the reader in a footnote to p. 181, the soul's *instinctive* allegiance to its membership in the 'City of God' I use only as "a stubborn Warning that any logical system which fails to satisfy it is defective, and requires revision." At the critical juncture of my discussion, I say (p. 123): "The religious reason firmly avers there must be some flaw in such philosophizing, and, in the name of *all* reason, protests against the claim that this [monistic] conception of God is 'the inevitable outcome of a reflective philosophy.'" And thereupon I proceed at once to point out precisely what the flaw in the argument for Monistic Idealism is; precisely where in the argumentative process it is found; and precisely what its causes were in Kant's misconstruction of his own principles of 'critical' Idealism.

So far, then, from my difference with Professor Royce being simply a dissent from his *results*, backed up merely by an appeal against them to our moral sense—so far from its being merely the obstinate assumption of an 'ethical' standpoint antagonistic to his 'philosophical' or 'theoretical' position—it is, rather, expressly a dissent from his *argument*, from his whole scheme and method of proof. In brief, it is a *philosophical*, a *theoretical* difference. It begins, to be sure, by calling attention to his *results*, and to the offense these give to moral ideals, the profoundest religious feelings developed in the ascending course of human history thus far; but, this once done, it proceeds directly to a critical examination and valuation, both positive and negative, of his *argument*. My real difference with him thus comes out of a rigorous analysis of that argument, resolving it (p. 120) into its two main premises: (1) "That no conception of God can have any philosophical value unless it can be proved real, or, in other words, unless it is the conception that of itself proves God to exist; and (2) that the conception [offered by Professor Royce and other monists] is the only conception that can thus prove its reality." It is precisely in denying the validity of this second premise that the vital point of my dissent consists. Thus (p. 120): The first, . . . nobody with a proper training in philosophy would deny. The second has a very different standing, and I take but little risk, I am sure, when I question its truth entirely."

The remainder of my discussion (pp. 120-127) is spent in bringing out the philosophical warrant for the denial of this premise. I point out the fact that any apparent force the premise may have comes

from the Kantian and post-Kantian tenet that every object of *knowledge* must fall within the compass of the knower's 'possible experience;' or, as the technical expression is, must remain 'immanent' within the subject's being, and can by no means ever be 'transcendent' of this. I then proceed to attack this now time-honored assumption, and to indicate wherein it is destitute of warrant. I suggest the steps for showing that the proofs of it supposed to be furnished in the course of Kant's *Æsthetic* and *Analytic* (chiefly in the famous *Deduction and Schematization of the Categories*) are unmistakably fallacious.

Finally, I go on (pp. 125-127) to indicate the several steps, mentioning each specifically, by which having gone 'back to Kant' out of the crooked bye-paths wandered into under the misguidance of Fichte, Schelling and Hegel, we may still, now at last, advance 'beyond Kant' in the 'main highway' to which he really introduced human thinking; a highway genuinely 'critical,' and genuinely continuative (by a *theoretical* fulfilment) of the moral philosophy which he did so much to establish,—genuinely continuative, because it will abide in maintaining the reality of that 'Kingdom of Ends,' that Divine republic of autonomous Persons, which is at once the spring and the goal of Kant's philosophy, and yet will vindicate this, not simply by showing that our consciousness of duty *commits* us to it ir-retrievably, but by bringing to light the truth that this 'City of God' is itself the only sufficient condition of *knowledge*; that the certainty of it is just as strictly presupposed in every cognition that surmounts the suspicion of subjective illusion, as the certainty of the union of time and space with the categories is presupposed in the formation of any 'object' of subjective experience and any judgment *a priori* concerning the order of such objects; in fine, that the unweakened word 'objective,' and the equivalent word 'true,' can have no valid meaning except as marking the *a priori* collective consensus of an absolutely total society of minds, independent and yet disinterested and harmonizing.

Let us look at the proclaimed 'antinomy' as my view now explained would present it. It would run :

THESIS.

The world of Truth, including truths of fact and law as well as truths of value and conduct, springs, as a whole and in every part, from the world of self-active intelligences; presupposes, and in its whole-

ANTITHESIS.

The world of Truth, including truths of value and conduct as well as truths of fact and law, cannot spring, either as a whole or in any part, from a world of many self-active intelligences, but pro-

ness is, a Plurality of such strictly free minds, and cannot be contained in the unity of any Single Consciousness.	hibits a Plurality of such strictly free minds, and can only be contained in the unity of a single Absolute Consciousness.
---	--

The thesis is my position, the antithesis is Professor Royce's. The antinomy is now genuine,—exact and whole. I solve it by pointing out the illusion—a case of Kant's '*transcendentaler Schein*'—at the bottom of the supposed proof of the antithesis. The required unity in the world of the surviving thesis is found in the rational nature characteristic of each conscious Self. It is the *Unity of Harmony* demanded by the problem, not the fatal *Unit of Experience* which the survival of the antithesis would give, and which would make the solution of the problem impossible—the reconciliation of God, Freedom, and Immortality.

G. H. HOWISON.

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA.