



Professor Royce and Monism

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PROFESSOR ROYCE AND MONISM.

I N the following pages I wish to examine one of the most notable of recent attempts in the direction of a monistic view of the world. As the views of Professor Royce are familiar to the readers of this Review, I shall content myself with a very brief statement of them as a basis for criticism, and that, too, rather as a summing up of the general spirit of their main result, than as an adequate account of the process by which they are reached. — Any fact of human experience is, as we come to know, a great deal more than it feels itself to be. My conscious life has, for the most part, a felt relation only to a comparatively few facts in the universe ; it has a real relation to everything whatever. There is consequently a system of related existence which includes all that thought can cover — our own selves as truly as the outer world. Now, the fact that the entire universe can be thought together, makes it necessary to conclude that its existence also falls within the compass of a single unitary thought. Since all things are knowable, and therefore related, and since relations have no existence outside of consciousness, every possible fact must get its reality from an all-embracing experience. The validity of knowledge has no meaning except as our judgments are brought within a larger system of judgment, by reference to which they are tested. Everything that we can say articulately, therefore, in the way of assertion, or even of doubt or denial, implies an all-embracing system of relations ; and not merely the truth of an assertion, but its very intelligibility, depends upon this system of thought being in some way real. Accordingly, the ultimate fact of the world is a unity of self-consciousness, within which every particular fact has its place, as an element in a thought content, and in which the idea, which in our own experience so often is divorced from its object, is brought together with it to form a living whole of feeling.

In considering now certain aspects of such a philosophical conception of the world, I should like to be understood, not primarily

as holding a brief for an opposing theory, but rather as desirous of having light shed upon some points about which I find myself not altogether clear. I am free to confess the difficulty of finding a complete answer to Professor Royce's arguments. On the other hand, there is one great objection to the acceptance of his main result, which seems to me fatal; and yet, as it appears not to be felt as a difficulty at all by Professor Royce, or by the defenders of monism in general, I cannot avoid the suspicion that I must somehow be befogging myself in thinking that I find any difficulty there. I shall, accordingly, after first pointing out a few minor details in Professor Royce's argument which seem to me inconclusive, go on to state briefly what this difficulty is. Then, assuming that, if it is at all a real one, it must be possible in some way to avoid the apparent force of his central argument, I shall make what suggestions I can as to the point in which this seems to me to fail.

In the first place, I shall examine briefly the practical tests of truth as we actually apply them, distinguishing this inquiry for the moment from the transcendental argument as to the conditions of truth and error upon which Professor Royce mainly depends. In general, then, it may be said that advance in knowledge is represented by an ever-growing inclusiveness.¹ This, however, does *not* mean that our experience enters into a continually wider experience. On the contrary, we abstract here altogether from concrete experience as such, and have to do only with the *thought* about reality. I do not mean that this reality which we are thinking about may not include, or indeed may not be, concrete experience, but only that for the moment we are taking it, not as experienced, but as known or thought about. We are approaching it from the standpoint of knowledge, and immediate experience forms a test of this simply, not a part of it. We are endeavoring to bring the whole of reality within our thought, wherein we wish to make it consistent; and consequently we have nothing to do with our direct experience, except as this forms a part of the reality which has now been transformed into a thought reality. Accordingly, while it is true from this

¹*Cf. Religious Aspect of Philosophy*, pp. 393, 405.

standpoint that truth involves the inclusion of all elements within a single consciousness, this has no self-evident metaphysical bearing, but simply means that my knowledge of reality must belong to the unitary me, in order to be my knowledge at all.

But there is another standpoint from which, again on the practical side, we may regard the question of truth and error. I say that a thing is true, when I can verify my thought about it by an appeal to direct experience.¹ If I think that a book lies on my table, I can only in the last resort be assured of this by looking to see; and the coincidence of the experience I get with that which I expected is my test. But here again we only seem, on the surface, to have an indication of our way of deciding what truth is, not a statement of what reality has to be in order that truth should be possible. The thought of the book and the sight of the book do indeed come within a single experience wherein they are compared, but this from the common standpoint falls short of Professor Royce's transcendental argument in two ways. In the first place, we think we mean a great deal more by the truth of the book's existence than the fact that my thought has been compared with my perception; we mean that this latter has been a sign to me that the book is there apart from any private experience of mine. And this real book does not, for our practical test of truth, come into a unity of experience with our thought at all. The coincidence of thought with experience exists solely, from the practical side, within *our* experience.

Moreover, this coincidence looks to me like a fact which belongs essentially to a finite and growing experience, and I am not clear what the duplication of thought and experience can be like for an absolute being.² Why, any way, do I think about things? So far as I can see, it is only because, for the moment, the direct experience which I desire is impossible. But the Absolute is such an immediate experience eternally, and so thought, as abstract and distinguished from experience, would seem to have no meaning for him. It is necessary, that is, to keep distinct the two uses of the word 'thought' which are sometimes confused. We may say that any concrete experience is a thought

¹ *Conception of God*, p. 9.

² *Ibid.*, p. 10.

experience, or rational experience, meaning that it is not merely a confused mass of feelings, but an articulate and intelligible whole. But this does not mean that in any sense we have two things — an experience, and a thought about it ; the experience is one. The thought about it, using thought now in the ordinary sense, is something which may precede or follow the immediate experience, lead up to or reproduce it ; but I can get no distinct notion how it can exist together with it. It may be true that a relatively passive experience, the vision, say, of the book, can coexist with the thought of the book. But that to which both the thought and vision of the book lead, and which alone gives them their meaning, is a thing of which it cannot be said that a thought is realized in something distinct from it ; if, for example, we begin to read the book with an active interest in it on its own account, our experience tends to be purely unitary. It may be that this is what Professor Royce means, when he says that in God the factors of idea and of feeling are inseparably joined. But if that is so, then the point from which he starts, and which involves the function of thought as distinguished from concrete experience, seems to be out of all connection with the Absolute ; and the coincidence of thought and experience in us can furnish no true notion of the ultimate basis of truth.

In so far, therefore, as Professor Royce endeavors to provide a starting point for his thesis by reference to the ordinary facts of our empirical judgments about reality, it does not seem to me that he is successful. And I am inclined to think that the terms by which he attempts to recommend his position to ordinary ways of thinking, are due to a confusion of the two standpoints just considered. “The ideal world,” he says, “is linked to our actual experience by the fact that its conceptions are accounts, as exact as may be, of systems of possible experience whose contents would be represented in a certain form and order to beings whom we conceive as including our fragmentary moments in some sort of definite unity of experience.” Again, “all our knowledge of natural truth depends upon contrasting our actually fragmentary experience with a conceived world of organized experience inclusive of all our fragments.”¹

¹ *Op. cit.*, pp. 27, 28.

Now knowledge does, as has been seen, imply the bringing together of all reality within a single whole, by reference to which the truth of the part is judged; but it is a whole of knowledge, of some one's thought. To change this now to an inclusion of our lives, as concretely experienced, in a larger whole of concrete experience, may represent the truth; but I do not think it is equivalent at all to our natural thought. For the ordinary view, individual lives, as realities, are separate from the world. To bring them together with it in an inclusive whole, would only serve to confuse our apparently clear ideas of the orderly course of the external universe, as we construct it in terms of sense perception. If philosophical considerations lead us to conceive of the reality of this world as a system of orderly experience, it would naturally be, not as an experience which includes all the fragments of human consciousness, but rather as one which includes the reality of which these fragments are imperfect representations, existing in relative separation from it. Our immediate experience as such does not come into question until we turn to the second standpoint, according to which experience tests our thought; and this is not only a different standpoint, but it also fails to take us outside the individual's experience, so far as forming a conscious unity is concerned.

But even if the practical tests of truth are not available, this of course need not militate against the more transcendental argument. And it might at first seem a somewhat hopeless task to attempt to get out of the toils of this argument, since, as it seems, the very fact of its not being true would only prove its truth. If human beings were really distinct from God, such a separation would only be *true* as it came within a single unitary consciousness, and so would not be true at all.¹ Before taking this up, however, I wish by way of preparation to elaborate a little the fundamental difficulty which I find in Professor Royce's conclusion.

And in a word it is this: there are certain aspects of our actual human experience which I do not see how it is possible to make consistent with an all-inclusive experience, without prac-

¹ *Op. cit.*, p. 169.

tically denying their existence outright. The point is at bottom very simple. I will take as an illustration the fact of ignorance. I am, we will suppose, at work upon a problem which baffles me, and of whose complete solution I am at present ignorant. This present state of consciousness of mine is a concrete fact, which psychology may make an object of study. Now, can this concrete state of mind exist in all its detail for an all-knowing consciousness? I can only reply that to me the supposition seems to involve a contradiction in terms. The only analogy according to which to represent this inclusion, is in terms of a later experience of our own, which recalls the details of the former difficulty, while yet it sees the way out. Now conceivably all the details might be remembered or known by such a later and more comprehensive experience; but does that mean that all the aspects of the earlier experience would be present unchanged in the later one, by a direct examination of which they could, if necessary, be adequately cognized? Would not this come pretty close to being an example of the psychologist's fallacy? Can a mental state possibly be the same in itself, when its relationships in consciousness are decisively altered? Take, for example, the feeling of being baffled. Can I feel baffled and see the solution in the same experience? Can I feel baffled and feel everything sun clear all as a unitary fact of consciousness? I can remember that I was baffled in the past, but this is not identically the same fact as the preceding fact; I can recall the feeling itself, in anything like its original completeness, only as I am successful in temporarily banishing from consciousness my more recent and completer knowledge. Nor, again, is the later experience the same fact that it would have been, had a previous experience not existed in which my whole consciousness was tinged temporarily by the presence of a problem unsolved. Had there not been a period in which I did not see the solution, I could not now know my ignorance. There is nothing esoteric about this; a glance at any act of psychological introspection will show what it means. The possibility of coming to a knowledge of a past state, without confusing it with the present knowing state of memory, is presupposed in the existence of the science of psychology.

The point is, then, that the attempt to make what we call human experience an identical part of a comprehensive and all-knowing experience, involves a confusion between the existence of a state as a fact of immediate feeling, and a subsequent knowledge of that state, separated from it empirically by an interval of time. When we carry the problem over to the Absolute, for whom there cannot be such a past experience, limited within itself, and temporarily unconscious of anything beyond its own limited content, it involves the assumption that a particular element of consciousness can be taken as an absolute piece of existence, whose nature is not influenced by the character of its associates. Is my feeling of ignorance identical with God's consciousness of ignorance? If it is, we are bound to accept an Absolute who grows in knowledge after the fashion of human experience. Is my consciousness of ignorance different from God's? Does the human fact change as it enters into the larger whole? It is almost impossible to state the theory without using words which imply that this is so; it is quite impossible, in my opinion, to think it, without recognizing that it must be so. But if the human fact is changed, it is not the same; there are, that is, two facts, only one of which comes directly within the Absolute experience. My actual feeling of ignorance is something which God cannot feel in the way in which I feel it. For one thing, it is something entirely dominating my consciousness as a whole, and this carries with it a peculiar qualitative result in terms of feeling; it can never characterize God's consciousness as a whole.

If it is insisted that this distinction of whole and part does away with all the difficulty, again this fails to meet the point. It is not the fact of being a part which causes the difficulty, but the quality of consciousness which goes along with the limitation. In particular, a distinction must be made between the consciousness by a total experience of one of its parts, and a feeling that a smaller totality has of its own limitation. A sensation, in my conscious experience, does not feel itself a limited element of experience, though I, the total consciousness, can know it to be such. But I as a human self can feel myself to be a part, beyond which other reality extends. The being a part *de facto*, and the

recognition by this part that it is a part, are two entirely different things, and it is only the first case which has any real analogue in the relation to which Professor Royce appeals to make his position intelligible—the relation of a sensation to our own larger experience. In other words, the presence of a limit gives a distinct tone to our consciousness, and this is something that must always belong to a part of reality, not to the whole. That it is really a matter with Professor Royce of a consciousness attaching to a distinct part of reality for itself, and not the conscious knowledge of an element by the whole to which it belongs, is shown, I think, in the fact of a separation in human experience between an idea and its object. It is the partial idea which recognizes itself as detached from its object, and the object as lying beyond its present reach; it is not God's more inclusive consciousness, since for God the separation does not exist. Is not this, on Professor Royce's hypothesis, like trying to imagine a sensation of red conscious of its distinction from blue?

If there is any force in the foregoing criticism, I see only two possibilities open. Either we must deny that the apparent facts of human consciousness—the facts that psychology investigates—have *any* existence; or we must admit that there are facts which cannot be conceived as lying within a single comprehensive experience. The former alternative I do not believe will be widely accepted. It is pretty well understood at the present time, that to call a thing phenomenal is not to deny its existence. An unreal appearance as compared with the reality which appears, it still, in order to be even an appearance, must have reality as a subjective fact; and it is precisely this subjective reality—reality as a finite fact of consciousness—which furnishes the problem.

Again, therefore, if the difficulty be admitted to be a real one, there must of necessity be some flaw in Professor Royce's main argument for monism. I wish next, accordingly, to inquire wherein the plausibility of this argument consists, and whether there is any way in which it may be met.

And I think it may be admitted that, if ultimate reality has no existence except in the form of 'truth,' *i. e.*, of thought, or knowledge, or an intellectual synthesis, Professor Royce's con-

clusion has a good deal of force. For a thing to be true, it must be true for a conscious being; and if truth, *i. e.*, inclusion within an intellectual synthesis, is the final word of philosophy, it also seems to follow that we cannot conceive of reality as involving more than one experience. For any single experience, that would not be true which did not come within its own immediate unity, exist merely as a part of its knowledge; and so, if two or more experiences existed, they would exist as so many distinct universes, which could stand in no possible relation to one another.

But may there not be another alternative? May it not be possible that the knowledge of reality, and the reality which is known, should, after all, not be entirely on a footing? Might not truth or intellectual knowledge fail in some degree to exhaust the nature of the real, and might not this failure possibly apply to the point at issue — the direct inclusion of all reality within a comprehensive whole of experience? Without attempting at present to justify its validity, I wish to point out that there is another category by which we are accustomed to think the unity of life, and that this is, moreover, for practical thought, a far more vital and ultimate one than the category of knowledge. This is the category of *active purpose*. Our experience is a whole just so far as its parts are consciously related to an inclusive end. But now meaning, or end, again, as it actually enters into life — and philosophy is not called upon to invent its categories, but only to discover them — is essentially a social thing. If I look to what I mean by a self, it is always a self in active coöperation with other selves. The unity which includes them is not anything which merges them into a single self. It is the unity of end, which, present ideally in each, enables them to act together and mutually contribute to one another's life. The connection is thus one of active *coöperation* between beings who possess each a life of his own, rather than of identity, or inclusion within a single consciousness. The statement that truth requires a unity would have, on such a theory, to be taken in a way which did not exclude this real separateness. That truth requires the unity would be simply our previous practical postulate, that for any fact to be *known* as true, it must come within the unity of the knowing self.

But this knowing as true would be only a function of an individual subject, and would not necessarily imply that the reality known — other selves, that is — must be a unity of the same sort. The ideal representation of the whole in knowledge would be only a means through which each individual would be enabled to play his part in the higher unity — the unity of social coöperation.

Of course this is hardly intelligible, if we confine ourselves to the standpoint of the human self. The fact that I know reality external to me furnishes evidence of, but not ground for, a more ultimate connection. There is as yet no reality in which the unity of the whole is immediately reflected; nothing to gather up the broken threads of the universal purpose as it appears in the partial and limited human experiences. And, accordingly, the demands of Professor Royce's argument are still unmet in a world made up solely of human selves. But if we suppose the existence of a self-conscious experience on which my own life depends, in a sense in which the opposite is not true, we are in a somewhat better position. Suppose we grant that God exists as a member of this community, but without the limitations and the ignorance of men. He exists, not as a thought unity, but as a unity of active life, whose nature is such as to require the positing of other lives which do not come within the same unity of experience, as immediate experience. He also is a social being, as men are, and finds his life in social coöperation; but the complete conditions of this life are eternally present to his consciousness. The whole of reality would thus be essential to the life of God, and would even, in the form of *knowledge*, come within in. All reality whatsoever would be known by God, and in this sense the Absolute would be able to compare my knowledge with the reality known by me, as Professor Royce requires. He would not do so, however, by bringing the two directly within a unity of experience; with him, as with us, the unity would be one of knowledge. My thought about reality would still be mine alone. It would be his knowledge of the thought, not the thought itself, which would come immediately within his own experience, and on which the comparison would be based; just as I base com-

parison on realities as they come within my experience and are known, not as they exist for themselves.

To come back, then, more directly to Professor Royce's argument. The suggestion of a way in which it may be met is already implied in what has just been said. There may be distinguished two possible meanings that the argument might have. The first is, that truth and error demand the existence of a being — a conscious experience — to whose knowledge all possible truth is eternally open, although this knowledge does not *constitute* all reality. As knowledge, it is within a unitary consciousness, while yet reality, to which the knowledge refers, may exist beyond this unitary consciousness. Knowledge, in other words, is the servant of life, and life is social. The other meaning is, that the validity of truth requires that reality itself should come entirely within a single experience; that knowledge implies the existence of the thought, and the object thought about, in a comprehensive unity of immediate consciousness. The question I would raise is: May not the first supposition be held to satisfy all the legitimate demands of Professor Royce's argument?

The argument appears to reduce itself largely to this: that the fact of meaning anything is unintelligible, unless the object meant is already in possession. And this, again, comes back ultimately to the fact that otherwise we could only mean our own idea of a thing, and therefore error would be impossible. The connection of the meaning with the real object would have no criterion.¹ Now we shall have to admit that, from the human side, there is no absolute criterion of correspondence. The fact of hitting the right mark is not something that depends upon us, nor is it anything that we can test directly; it has its ground only in reality that is more fundamental than our finite lives. But this is equally true on Professor Royce's theory. Since the wider self that embraces both factors is not our partial self, as actually present for us in experience, it is not pretended that we as finite include the two terms. But, on the other side, the correspondence is not inexplicable. The possibility of the existence of my life as a fact outside himself would not be, for God, a something given, as with

¹ *Conception of God*, p. 179; *Religious Aspect of Philosophy*, pp. 397 ff., 411.

us, in a sense, the existence of the object is given ; but all the conditions which make it possible would rest consciously within himself. He would not have to learn by a gradual process to know my experience ; that knowledge would be originally implicated in his own nature. In terms of the time process, my life only arises at a certain point ; but God is eternally prepared for the appearance of this life of mine. His essential nature consciously involves this knowledge, as well as the social relationships which the knowledge subserves, and which help to form the content of his being. There would, accordingly, be no uncertainty for him as to the meaning which he has, or as to its falling on the right object. God could not be in doubt whether my thought, the knowledge of which, within his own unity of consciousness, he is able to compare with the object it aims at (also within his consciousness), really means this object. No thought of mine could possibly exist without the conditions of its existence depending, down to the least detail, on the reality of God's own immediate and eternally conscious life.

To sum up, then : The ultimate concept for the understanding of the universe is not self-consciousness, but a *society of selves*. In this God stands for that ultimate Self in whom there are centered consciously the conditions of all reality whatsoever, and by whom the whole universe, and so all truth, is consciously realized throughout all time. It is this I should substitute for Professor Royce's conception, and it seems to me to meet the needs of his argument. In conclusion, I wish to call attention to two of the more obvious objections which may be brought against such a philosophical position.

In the first place, it may be claimed that the distinction which it is compelled to draw between the Absolute Self, or God, and the totality of existence, is a fatal and impossible one. I will not say that the difficulty is not real ; I only ask that it be not exaggerated by the refusal to keep the qualifying considerations in their proper balance. The theory can be taken to mean, for example, that each self has an existence in its own right, and that the relations are superinduced upon it ; whereas the very essence of the conception is, that reality consists of selves *in rela-*

tion. As opposed to this error, it may be advisable to lay stress upon the point of view from which human selves appear as created, and God as the only ultimate existence. This is true in the sense that, when we take reality from the standpoint of its history in time, God is the original presupposition, who contains consciously and eternally within himself all possible conditions; while the human self appears only at a certain point in the world process, depends for its existence upon these conditions already existing, and has no freedom of action which takes it outside the general purpose which is summed up in God's immediate life. For such a dependence, in terms of the temporal process, we have no better word than creation.

But creation may also be taken to imply that the created being has no essential relationship except to the mere will or power of God, and that its existence, therefore, is an arbitrary matter. This, however, is not at all what is meant. God is not first of all a being sufficient to himself, who afterwards decides to create other selves; he is social in his inmost nature. And, accordingly, I am an essential constituent of reality, in the sense that my life enters definitely into the purpose which from all eternity is working itself out in the life of the universe, and which is eternally present in the consciousness of God. God would not be himself if it were not for the part which I play in his life. But while the point at which I make my appearance on the stage is thus not determined arbitrarily, but has its due preparation, it *is* nevertheless only at this particular point that the need for my life arises, and it becomes actual. It is only as a factor in God's conscious knowledge, which has in so far an influence on the progress of his life, that it is eternal; as my direct experience and act, it begins to be.

But here, again, it will be said that we are distinguishing between God and Absolute existence, and are making God less than the whole. In a sense, the objection undoubtedly is true. God's immediate life, on such a showing, is not coextensive with reality. He is absolute in knowledge, absolute in the completeness of his experience, which has no broken edges; but he is in point of existence less than the whole. But the objection usually

is intended to imply — and this I believe is not true — that in saying this we are *limiting* God. Which, however, represents the higher type of existence, I will ask, judging by the best standard we are able to apply : a being who is shut up to his own self-centered nature, or one who finds his life by losing it in the common life which he shares with others? And if the latter is our truest ideal, why should we still claim that because God is such a God rather than another, his dignity is therefore lowered? It is the very condition of his absoluteness, in the true sense, that there should be beings beyond him to increase the perfection of his own life. And if it is said that we do not see how reality can give rise to such quasi-separateness of existence, I do not understand why it is not legitimate to fall back upon the answer that our business is to state what reality is, and not how it is possible. If such a conception is thinkable, and if it should happen to be a conception to which the facts of life point us, is not that enough? No finite intelligence, of course, could understand the ‘how’ of the fact. It is sufficient for us if we can see its *meaning*. And since this meaning is implicated in our whole life of action, it is by no means obscure.

The second objection I shall mention may seem even less easy to meet satisfactorily. It is this : that we appear to be compelled to admit as actual the existence of relations lying outside a thought content or activity. The relations between selves must have a reality which is other than what they have for anyone’s thought or knowledge, even that of God. The relations are reproduced in thought, both God’s and men’s, but they must also be real already in order thus to be reproduced. Relations, to repeat, or certain relations, must be real outside of consciousness. If this seems to the idealist a hard doctrine, I have only two suggestions to make by way of palliation. One is, that it is balanced by what seems to me an opposing difficulty of even greater seriousness on the other side. For while the other difficulty involves a self-contradiction, I am unable to see that there is anything self-contradictory in the idea that a relation, capable of being thought, can also exist outside a unitary thinking consciousness. We have not to do with an opaque and unintelligible fact ; the

relation is thinkable, and both the related terms are open to our knowledge.

And for the second point, it appears to me that something of the sort is tacitly admitted by Professor Royce himself in connection with the fact of human knowledge. If I do not misinterpret him, Professor Royce would agree that there is, in a certain sense, a transsubjective aspect of knowledge. It is possible for me, that is, to know a reality which has an existence beyond the limits of my finite knowing consciousness. This, no doubt, is considered possible only on the condition that a wider range of consciousness extends beyond me, inclusive of the object at which I aim ; but still the fact of a transcendent reference remains. Now what I wish to point out is, that if this is so, there exists, as a matter of fact, an aspect of knowledge which involves the thing at issue. There is, in other words, in human knowledge such a thing as a reference to reality lying outside the particular knowing consciousness itself, which thus reveals the existence of a relation which the consciousness, as a concrete fact of knowledge, does not create. This is not got rid of by an appeal to the closing of the gap in God's knowledge ; for that knowledge, if the transcendent reference is not present in it, must be in so far a different thing from ours. Again, we would seem to be compelled either to deny the existence of this reference in any form, or else to admit that it exists as a fact beyond the circle of God's immediate life. In the first case, it would at least be necessary, I think, to remodel Professor Royce's position very considerably. In the second case, there is admitted the existence of that as a fact which is all the pluralistic theory demands—the possibility of a connection in terms of knowledge between selves who yet are distinct, so far as immediate experience or feeling is concerned.

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