



Voluntarism in the Roycean Philosophy

Author(s): John Dewey

Source: *The Philosophical Review*, May, 1916, Vol. 25, No. 3 (May, 1916), pp. 245-254

Published by: Duke University Press on behalf of *Philosophical Review*

Stable URL: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/2178261>

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>



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

JSTOR

VOLUNTARISM IN THE ROYCEAN PHILOSOPHY.

I AM not about to inflict upon you a belated discovery that voluntarism is an integral factor in the Roycean theory of knowledge. Were it not obvious of itself, we have the emphatic utterances of Professor Royce himself in his address to this Association twelve years ago. Following a clew in that paper, it is my purpose to present some considerations relative to the relationship of voluntarism and intellectualism¹ in the earliest phase of Mr. Royce's published philosophy, thinking that the matter has historic interest and that it involves points relevant to forming a critical judgment of his later developments. Let me begin by quoting Mr. Royce upon his own early attitude.¹ In 1881 he wrote a paper in which he "expressed a sincere desire to state the theory of truth wholly in terms of an interpretation of our judgments as present acknowledgments, since it made these judgments the embodiments of conscious attitudes that I then conceived to be essentially ethical and to be capable of no re-statement in terms of any absolute warrant whatever." And, referring to his change of views in the last respect, he says: "I am still of the opinion that judging is an activity guided by essentially ethical motives. I still hold that, for any truth seeker, the object of his belief is also the object of his will to believe. . . . I still maintain that every intelligent soul, however weak or confused, recognizes no truth except that which intelligently embodies its own present purpose."² The statement is explicit. Taken in connection with the earlier position, it arouses curiosity as to the reasons for the transition from subordination of intellect to will to the reversed position.

I first turn to the paper of 1881.³ The paper was one of the

¹ To avoid misunderstanding I would say that intellectualism is here used not in antithesis to empiricism or to sensationalism, but to denote any philosophy which treats the subject-matter of experience as primarily and fundamentally an object of cognition.

² PHILOSOPHICAL REVIEW, Vol. 13, p. 117.

³ *Journal of Speculative Philosophy*, Vol. 15, p. 360.

addresses at the Kantian centenary. Its title is, significantly, "Kant's Relation to Modern Philosophical Progress." It makes an attempt to assess, on one hand, certain contemporary movements in the light of Kant's critical principles, and, on the other hand, to indicate the ways in which Post-Kantian thought suggests a reform in Kant himself. The first part holds that Kant's criticism still bars the way to every attempt at a philosophical ontology. The ontological monism of Mind-stuff, of Panlogism,¹ of Alogism alike stand condemned as illegitimate excursions into ontological dogmas. The reforming portion centers about the Kantian dualism of sense and reason. The difficulty left over by Kant is clearly stated: A given category, say causality, is nothing unless applied to experience. But how can it be applicable? Only in case experience furnishes instances of uniform succession. But in that case, why the category? Thought is not needed. Or if it is said that it is necessary to introduce necessity, how about necessity? If sense experience doesn't justify it, then it too is futile. If it does, thought is superfluous. Either sense already conforms to order or else it is inexorably at odds with it. Now Royce's solution is, in brief, as follows. Sensuous, irresistible presence, presence wholly unquestionable, absolutely certain, is an ultimate fact: a datum. Spatiality (as had just been claimed by Professor James) exists also as just such a simple irresistible quale. Succession as instantaneous sequence is also such a datum. What thought, as

¹ With respect to the problem of the evolution of Royce's later philosophy in its entirety, it is extremely important to note the ground for rejection of that Panlogism which was later accepted. It is connected with the fact of evolution. How can an Absolute Rational Whole change? How can it consist with progress from an earlier lower to a later higher? Or how can we think of every stage of the historical progress as itself a goal, when "the first starving family, or singed moth, or broken troth, or wasted effort, or wounded bird, is an indictment of the universal reason"? "Either evolution is a necessity . . . and the Absolute must be conceived as in bonds, or else it is irrational and the Logos must be conceived as blundering." I call this ground of rejection extremely important, for surely the key-note of all Royce's later philosophy is the formulation of a way to combine the notion of the eternal moment with genuine struggle and defeat in time. The ethical connecting link in the *Religious Aspect* is the conviction that all genuine virtue or moral good exists at the point of overcoming evil. Hence the Absolute would be lacking in moral quality unless in its eternal changelessness it included and overcame the temptations and struggles of the finite and changing.

essentially spontaneous, essentially active, does is to give the immediate momentary datum a reference beyond the present moment. However, the reference is not at first to an external cause. The primary reference is a time reference. In every cognitive act there is an assertion that the given data stand for, symbolize, recall, resemble, or otherwise relate to data that *were* real in an experience no longer existent. In short, thought primarily asserts or acknowledges the past. Then there is acknowledgement of the future: the synthesis of anticipation. Chief of all there is acknowledgment of other conscious beings than ourselves, acknowledgment of a universe of reality external to ourselves. Now "for the objects of these acts no possible theoretical evidence can be given more nearly ultimate than the one great fact that through acknowledgment and anticipation they are projected from the present moment into the past, future, and possible world of truth." And finally, "the goal of philosophy can be found only in an ethical philosophy. The ultimate justification of the act of projecting and acknowledging the world of truth constructed from sensible data" must be found in the significance—*i. e.*, in the moral worth of this activity itself. In short, the act of thought or judgment by which sense data become a knowable world of objects and a world of other minds is itself an act, an affirmation of the spontaneity of consciousness. Hence it is impossible to get behind it intellectually or give it an absolute warranty: it has to be justified in terms of its own worth as an act,—that is to say, ethically.

The student of Royce's writings will see here certain ideas which are found in all his later writings: The acceptance of empirical sense data as ultimate, things simply to be accepted as they are; the conception of them as intrinsically momentary, yet while including in themselves the fact of immediate or instantaneous sequence; the conviction that the problem of knowledge is, on the one hand, the problem of the temporal reference of these data, and, on the other, the problem of their reference to other minds, to orders of experience transcending our own; the belief that knowing is an act, an assertion, an acknowledging. Conjoined with them is the unfamiliar text that the active side,

the voluntaristic and ethical side, is ultimate, and that no theoretical justification for it can be found. In his *Religious Aspect of Philosophy* published only four years later, we find established, however, the reversed relationship: we find set forth the Roycean all-inclusive thought which eternally realizes itself in all fragmentary and partial acts of will. From henceforth acts of will are not self-justifying. The ethical is transcended in the cognitive.

I make no pretence to tell how the change came about, in the sense of ability to reconstruct Mr. Royce's mental biography. There are, however, a number of indications of the *logical* sources of the change, which are found in the *Religious Aspect*; and to them I invite your attention. In the first place, the Fichtean tone of the acknowledgement in the first essay of the reality of other experiences, other wills, than our own is evident. It is not so much a bare fact that we acknowledge them, as it is a supreme moral duty to acknowledge them. Our natural, carnal acknowledgment is not of them as Experiences like our own but rather as factors which affect our own well-being: selfishness is the radical moral evil. This *motif*, implicit in the earlier document, is explicit in the *Religious Aspect*. But recognition of this fact brings with it the recognition of the reality of clash of wills, and of the need of an organization of wills or aims. To restate the treatment, rather than to try to paraphrase it, if my own cannot be the ultimate law for other wills neither can the will of any other be the law of my will. There must be an inclusive organization which determines the aim of each alike. The same logic applies within one's own purposes; they too conflict and clash. Scepticism and pessimism are but the consciousness of this clash, in recognizing that amid plurality of aims there can be no ground for one making any one supreme, and no guaranty of abiding satisfaction. Moral certainty and moral confidence alike demand an organization of aims. Now such an organization cannot be itself an affair of will; it must be a matter of fact, a matter of reality or else of unreality, and hence something whose primary relationship is to knowledge. If it is valid, it is not because of anything in the "moral worth of the activity

itself" or it is just that worth which is put in jeopardy by the conflict, the plurality, of wills. The moral worth of the will can be established only on the basis of an organized harmony of wills as an established fact. Whether such an organization exists or not is a matter of truth, of knowledge, not of volition. For if one say that one wills that such an organization exist, the dialectic recurs. This is but an individual will; an assertion of one will among many. And why should *its* assertion of an organization of wills be any better than any other assertion of bare will?

In his *Defense of Philosophic Doubt* Mr. Balfour¹ had stated expressly that preference for one ethical end over another must itself be a purely ethical matter—that is a matter of choice undervivable from any theoretical judgment whether scientific or metaphysical. Each end founds a system of propositions all of which are logically coherent with one another. If revenge is an end-in-itself for me, then the proposition prescribing shooting a man from behind a hedge is a dependent ethical proposition belonging to that system. It is not knowledge but arbitrary choice which determines the end which fixes the dependent logical or theoretical system. It is fairly open to question whether such a conclusion does not follow from the principles set forth in Royce's earlier essay, when the clash of aims or acknowledging wills is taken into account. And, in the words of Mr. Royce, "The reader may ask: 'Is all this the loftiest idealism, or is it simply philosophic scepticism about the basis of ethics?'"

The moral will depends then upon an insight into a harmonious organization of all wills—an end in which pluralistic aims cease to be conflicting because they are taken up as elements into one inclusive aim. But does such an organization exist? This leads us to the discussion of knowledge and the criterion of truth. The conclusion is the absolutism of an all-comprehending eternal consciousness which has remained the central tenet of Mr. Royce's writings. "All reality must be present to the Unity of the Infinite Thought" (*Religious Aspect*, p. 433). "The possibility of an ontology and the supposed nature of the ideal absolute

¹ *Religious Aspect*, Preface, and pp. 128-130.

knowledge" which, true to the spirit of Kant, Mr. Royce had denied in his earlier essay,¹ is now asserted as the sole way out of ethical scepticism. The transition to Absolutism is through (a) discovery of the scepticism latent in voluntarism when that is made ultimate: (b) in the demand for a community of aims or organization of wills:² (c) the discovery that all recognition of ignorance and error, all sceptical doubt involves an appeal to a Judge or Thought which included both the original object and the original judgment about it. The analogy of such a comprehensive judge with the required moral organizations of wills which, in their separateness, clash, is obvious enough.

In being reduced to a secondary place, voluntarism is not, however, superseded. It persists, first, in the conception of the method of approach to Absolutism, and, secondly, within the conception of the Absolute itself. (1) The first step out of the world of doubt is through the World of Postulates—a conception substantially identical with the acknowledging activity of the earlier essay. The external world may be regarded as an assumption, as a postulate, which satisfies certain familiar human needs.³ Subjected to analysis this postulate turns out to be, in the rough, "an active assumption or acknowledgment of something more than the data of consciousness." The immediate data are of that fragmentary and transient nature which was earlier noted. Hence judgment must do more than reduce these present data to order; it must assert that context beyond them in which they exist and in which they have their real meaning and truth. This is, again, the corrected restatement of the Kantian problem. We are not faced with an incredible act of thought which forms sense-data as such, but with the act of thought which supplements the specific and empirical givens, in their temporal limitations, with the larger setting which gives them objectivity. This restatement at one stroke does away with the trans-empirical Ding-an-

¹ *J. S. P.*, XV, p. 371.

² The student of Royce will be interested in comparing this with the explicit doctrine of the Community in Royce's latest work. Peirce's influence is presumably effective in the earlier as well as the later writing, though it is less explicit in the *Religious Aspect*.

³ *Religious Aspect*, p. 292.

sich, putting in the place of a trans-empirical Reality, a trans-momentary one, and with the subjectivistic character of sense-data, in any sense of subjectivism which identifies them with a particular knowing self;—since sense-data are given in the most emphatic sense of given.

The sketch which Royce sets forth of the psychology of the process of the postulating activity of thought makes explicit the voluntarism implicit in the idea of the postulate. It is quite unnecessary to recall its details to you. The preface of the book makes an acknowledgement to Professor James, and the address of 1903 to which I referred at the outset expressly connects the influence of James with this voluntarism. The activity which transforms and transcends the immediate data is, psychologically, of the nature of attention; attention is essentially will, and it expresses interest.¹

A voluntaristic element, persisting all through Royce's philosophy, is seen in his treatment of a cognitive idea. An idea to be cognitive must be a part of a judgment, or itself an implicit judgment. For a judgment to be true or untrue means that it agrees or does not agree with its object—an object external to the ideas connected in the judgment. Yet the judgment must always have something which indicates what one of the many objects of the world it picks out for its own, which one it cognitively refers to. In other words, the cognitive idea is, in its objective reference, an intent. The voluntaristic implications of the cognitive idea as intent are in no way elaborated in this document as they are, for example, in *The World and The Individual*, but the root idea is present.

It is no part of this paper to follow the logic of the treatment of the possibility of error and the method which leads to the conclusion: "All reality must be present to the Unity of the Infinite Thought" (p. 433). The purpose of the paper limits me to noting, first, that we have now found the ethical desideratum—the ontological reality of an organized harmony of all aims. For being a complete *thought*, a complete knower, it must have present in it all desires and purposes, and being a *complete* or

¹ *Religious Aspect*, pp. 308-324.

perfect knower, it must also present in itself the realities in which aims find their realizations. Secondly, we note that in the formulations of this absolute knowing consciousness intellectualistic considerations predominate to a greater extent than in Mr. Royce's subsequent formulations. The Infinite Truth is conceived by predilection as Knower; it is referred to as Seer, as Spectator, as Judger. The function of infinite Thought in *knowing* our aims and *knowing* the objects in which they are fulfilled is most dwelt upon. In the treatment of the problem of evil, however, that voluntaristic aspect of the Absolute which is made so explicit in later writings appears in germ. Goodness is not mere innocence but is transcending of evil. In the divine our evil is present but is transcended in good. But such transcendence is by way of conquest. The cognitive Seer possesses also a Universal Will realized in it.¹

It is not my intention to engage in criticism of either the conclusion or the method followed in reaching it. I shall, however, indulge in a few comments which may suggest the direction which my criticism would take if occasion and time permitted. In the first place, I would point out that all solutions are relative because relevant to the problem from which they set out. In the last analysis, everything depends upon the way in which the problem is formed and formulated. With Mr. Royce the problem is fixed by the results of the Kantian philosophy, taken in its broad sense. It seems axiomatic to him that the problem of knowledge is the problem of connection of sense data which are facts of consciousness with the spontaneous constructive activity of thought or judging—itself a fact of consciousness.² It is significant that his discussion of the possibility of error sets out with a provisional acceptance of Ueberweg's definition of judgment as "Consciousness about the objective validity of a subjective *union of ideas*" (italics mine).

¹ *Religious Aspect*, pp. 456-59.

² In the first published writing of Mr. Royce with which I happen to be familiar, entitled, "Schiller's Ethical Studies" in the *Journal of Speculative Philosophy*, Vol. XV, p. 385, the peculiarity of Kant is stated as follows: "Kant's philosophy is a glorification not of self but of Consciousness. In Consciousness is all knowledge rooted, through Consciousness is all truth known," etc.

My second line of comment may be introduced by reference to the fact that I have spoken of the voluntarism of Royce, not of his pragmatism. I have done so in part because pragmatism (while it may be construed in terms of facts of consciousness, and so be identified with a psychological voluntarism) may be stated in non-psychical terms. But in greater part it is because the original statement of Royce, the one where a critical voluntarism still lords it over an ontological Absolutism, conceives will purely as Act. It is the *act* of Acknowledging which is emphasized. There is no reference to determination or measure by consequences. Now Peirce repudiated just such a position. He says, referring to Kant, that this type of position would be Practicalism, and that he adopted the word Pragmatism, still following a Kantian suggestion, to emphasize empirical consequences. The importance attached by James to consequences, last things, as a test of pragmatism, is well known.

Voluntarism rather than pragmatism is found in the Roycean notion of judgment. When intent or purpose is conceived of as the essence of judgment or cognitive idea, the intent is to know. The reference is intellectualistic; connection with the object intended is cognitive, not practical. As "attention constantly tends to make our consciousness more definite and less complex" (p. 316), so of the process of thought knowing, it is said: "The aim of the whole process is to reach as complete and united a conception of reality as is possible, a conception wherein the greatest fullness of data shall be combined with the greatest simplicity of conception" (p. 357). Construing the operation of fulfilling a supreme cognitive interest in terms of purpose and will is a very different thing from construing the cognitive interest in terms of a process of fulfilment of *other* interests, vital, social, ethical, esthetic, technological, etc.

Finally, just because consequences and the plurality of non-intellectual interests which cognition serves are ignored, the ethical voluntarism of the essay of 1881 is itself an absolutism—ethical to be sure, but absolutism. The acknowledging activity must finally be justified by "the significance—*i. e.*, the moral worth—of this activity itself." It would be hard to find

anything less congenial to the ethical side of pragmatism than a doctrine which justified moral purpose and motive by something residing in its own activity, instead of in the consequences which the activity succeeds in making out of original vital and social interests in their interaction with objects. Putting the matter somewhat more technically, the transition from the voluntarism of the early essay to the intellectual absolutism of the later book was indeed logically necessary. A will which is absolute is purely arbitrary, and its arbitrariness leads to scepticism and pessimism for the reasons pointed out by Royce. 'Will' needs a rational measure of choice, of preference, in the selection and disposition of ends. If it does not find this measure in a coordinated foresight of the consequences which depends upon acting from a given intent, it must find it in some *pre-existing* Reality, which, of course, is something to be known. In short, what the transition from the voluntarism of the earlier essay to the intellectualism of the later exhibits, is not a change from pragmatism to absolutism but a recognition of the objective absolutism latent in any ethical absolutism. I would go as far as to suggest that the ulterior issue involved in the theory of knowledge is whether regulative principles have a prospective and eventual reference, or whether they depend upon something antecedently given as an object of certitude—be it fixed ready-made goods, fixed ready-made rules, or fixed Absolute.

JOHN DEWEY.

COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY.