

*Introduction to  
Selections from Royce's Thought-Diary  
1878-1879*

The manuscript is a forty-five page handwritten document.<sup>1</sup> The document, an eight by ten notebook, is in the first folder of Harvard Archives Royce Papers (HARP) Box 126. The title on the front of the notebook is 'Special Questions Selected,' with a date of November 1876 written at the bottom left-hand corner, and the contents divide into three sections according to topic. The first topic, covering pages 1 to 53, is Kant and ideas from the critical philosophy; pages 54 to 99 are either blank or missing. The second topic, covering pages 100 to 145, is a set of disparate thoughts arranged according the format of a diary. The first entry is on 24 September 1878 and the last on 11 December 1879. The third and final section of the notebook, covering pages 151 to 212, are entries N to V in Royce's index; pages 146 to 150 are either blank or missing. The selections of the notebook from 1878 to 1879 that span Royce's 'thought-diary' are the forty-five pages of the present manuscript. The entries vary tremendously: The continuity of space and time in Aristotle, the problem of things in themselves, a table on volition and desire, the truth of memory, essay proposals, Lord Byron's *Manfred*, interest in Rousseau and Diderot, meditations on the California landscape near the Golden Gate, an outline for a major work in philosophy, and more. Despite the variety, there is a set of ideas that relate to Royce's larger project at this time, which points toward a growing vision for a systematic philosophy.

Josiah Royce (1855-1916), at the initial dating of the notebook in November 1876, had recently been admitted to John Hopkins University on a fellowship; while the date of the first entry in the thought-diary, 24 September 1878, was about a month after Royce was awarded a doctorate in philosophy.<sup>2</sup> His doctoral dissertation, *Of the Interdependence of the Principles of Knowledge*, was an early attempt at a post-Kantian theory of knowledge.<sup>3</sup> Unsurprisingly, the second entry in the thought-diary, dated October 20 of 1878, outlines an essay on the problem of things in themselves, which Royce characterizes as an extension of the project elaborated in the dissertation; referencing William Kingdon Clifford's article in *Mind*,<sup>4</sup> as well as Rudolf Hermann Lotze and Karl von Hartmann, Kantian philosophers Royce studied with while in Germany. Royce, without deviating significantly from the epistemology of his dissertation, proposes to consider the general forms of thought as synthetic judgments of a volitional nature, and therefore, the world as a product of the will and things as ideas in themselves. Hence, the concern is not with *things in themselves*

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<sup>1</sup> All information on the manuscript is found in Oppenheim's Comprehensive Index, Box 126 of Part III. An online version is available at <http://royce-edition.iupui.edu/docu/index.pdf>.

<sup>2</sup> For an overview of Royce's graduate studies, dissertation, and early years at Berkeley relevant to the present manuscript see Dillabough, Joseph. 'Introduction to The Possibility of Experience,' *The Writings of Josiah Royce: A Critical Edition*. February 2019. Available online at <http://royce-edition.iupui.edu/transcribed-manuscripts/>.

<sup>3</sup> An online version is available at <http://royce-edition.iupui.edu/online-royce-volumes/>.

<sup>4</sup> Clifford, W.K. 'On the Nature of Things in Themselves' in *Mind*, vol. 3, no. 9, January 1878: 57-67. Royce would specifically address this article in 'Mind-Stuff and Reality' in *Mind*, vol. 6, no. 23, July 1881: 365-377, available online at <http://royce-edition.iupui.edu/online-royce-articles/>.

but *objects as known* by ideas. Eventually, Royce would dismiss things in themselves as an unintelligible expression,<sup>5</sup> but the characterization of thinking as volitional would remain a constant theme throughout Royce's writings. Thus, six days later in the third entry, Royce proposes to analyze the volitional content of life.

For the epistemology of the dissertation, there is a volitional and practical aspect to the constitutive function of judgments because, to satisfy our needs as interpreters, we must willfully postulate the past and future to ideally synthesize our actual and possible experiences in a present appearance, which is the object of knowledge. A crucial problem for Royce at this time, then, is how such a synthetic process, viewed as a volitional and practical activity, is possible. Given the importance of the relations between past, present, and future, a potential avenue is to appeal to memory. The fourth entry, dated December 13 of 1878, does precisely that. An entry titled "*The Truth of Memory*," Royce states that the present is an act of will wherein the present consciousness of a fact bears a relation to the content of some past experience; hence, the past is an element of the present in and through the will. Given the constant need to postulate the past as an element of the present, the will therefore generalizes the relation for all past to every present, and declares the relation both necessary and real but always only for and in some present consciousness. Exactly what role memory serves in this scheme, Royce does not specify. Around this time, Royce does elaborate on the role of memory in the construction of an indefinitely extending series of time wherein the present stands in an ideal relation to past, future, and possible experience.<sup>6</sup> There, in a manner after Kant, the function of the memory is to serve as the vehicle that reproduces the past as an element of the present, and therefore, as the efficient cause by which the past affects the present; an effect of which we must become conscious if memory is possible at all. The function of memory is, in other words, to aid in the synthetic unification of past and present into a series of time with certain sequential regularities knowable by us.<sup>7</sup>

Such a recognition of the effects of memory and the sequential regularities they determine depend upon psychological laws of retention, association, and reproduction, but also another and more properly

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<sup>5</sup> See 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. The letter is worth reading in its entirety as a statement of a transitional phase that began with Royce's doctoral dissertation and culminated in the publication of *The Religious Aspect of Philosophy* in 1885, and therefore, the development of the ideas beginning to emerge in the thought-diary.

<sup>6</sup> See Royce, Josiah. c. 1880: 'The Possibility of Experience' in *The Writings of Josiah Royce: A Critical Edition*. Available online at <http://royce-edition.iupui.edu/transcribed-manuscripts/>.

<sup>7</sup> Royce continues to wrestle with such Kantian themes, such as the reproduction of memory and the synthesis of recognition, after the publication of *The Religious Aspect of Philosophy* in 1885. See, for example, Royce, Josiah. c. 1888: 'A Speculation as to the Nature of Mind' in *The Writings of Josiah Royce: A Critical Edition*. Available online at <http://royce-edition.iupui.edu/transcribed-manuscripts/>. There, Royce criticizes the mind-stuff hypothesis for its inability to account for the reproduction of past content in the memory and its synthesis with present experience through recognition, as well as the apperceptive unity of self-consciousness; see Dillabough, Joseph. 'Introduction to A Speculation as to the Nature of Mind.' March 2019.

phenomenological factor besides — namely, representation. Tellingly, in the next entry Royce lists potential essays on Kant and Shadworth Hodgson as well as one on self-consciousness and the nature of significance. Royce had begun around this time to wrestle with Hodgson’s *Philosophy of Reflection*, which was an extension of Kant’s critical philosophy and broadly a phenomenological approach that was quite similar to Royce’s efforts to analyze the structure of experience from the standpoint of consciousness.<sup>8</sup> Royce even proposes, in an entry dated April 3 of 1879, “The New Phenomenology” as the title for some work. The work, Royce says, shall open with the remark that every person lives in a present and contemplates a past and future; only the present is real, while the past and future are mere shadows, but shadows we always and must contemplate if the real is to have any life or value. Of course, the present is real because the present consciousness is always of some fact; while past and future are shadows because the present consciousness does not directly observe but represents both the past and future in and through the fact. Royce, presumably under the influence of Hodgson, elaborates on these themes in a manuscript from around this time.<sup>9</sup> We become aware of the fact by attentive interest. The function of attention is to reduce the indeterminate field of consciousness to a unit, which is a consciousness of the fact, that acquires significance as a representation of past, future, or possible experience. Given we are only ever conscious of the present unit, and these relations transcend the present, then past, future, and possible experience are only knowable in and through the present unit. Reflectively, which is to say self-consciously, we can distinguish between the form and content of the unit. Then we can representationally relate the unit’s content with the content of some past, future, or possible experience. As representations of content not presently known, units therefore become *signs* of past, future, or possible experiences.<sup>10</sup>

Plausibly, the preceding account is similar to what Royce intended to write for the essay on self-consciousness and significance. Regardless, these ideas from the thought-diary — together with the relevant manuscripts from around this time — are strains for what is arguably an emerging system of philosophy: An increasingly pragmatic epistemology, a nascent phenomenology, and what Charles S. Peirce in 1865 had already begun to call semiotic; that is, the science of representations or signs in general.<sup>11</sup> Of course, Royce had not come close to the degree of clarity Peirce already had concerning semiotics; but there are

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<sup>8</sup> For a discussion of Shadworth Hodgson’s *Philosophy of Reflection*, see Royce, Josiah. c. 1880: ‘Interpretation of Consciousness’ in *The Writings of Josiah Royce: A Critical Edition*. Available online at <http://royce-edition.iupui.edu/transcribed-manuscripts/>. For background on Royce’s studies of Hodgson, see Dillabough, Joseph. ‘Introduction to The Interpretation of Consciousness.’ February 2019. See also the letter to William James dated 19 September 1880 in Royce 1991: 86-91.

<sup>9</sup> Royce, Josiah. c. 1880: ‘Sketch of the Infinitesimal Calculus’ in *The Writings of Josiah Royce: A Critical Edition*. Available online at <http://royce-edition.iupui.edu/transcribed-manuscripts/>.

<sup>10</sup> See Dillabough, Joseph. ‘Introduction to Sketch of the Infinitesimal Calculus’ in *The Writings of Josiah Royce: A Critical Edition*. March 2019. Available online at <http://royce-edition.iupui.edu/transcribed-manuscripts/>.

<sup>11</sup> Peirce, S. Charles. *Writings of Charles S. Peirce: A Chronological Edition*, vol. 1. Peirce Edition Project. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1982: 174 and 303.

still traces of semiotic consciousness in Royce's early writings, especially in his nascent phenomenological investigations. Despite that semiotic consciousness being inextricably and confusedly bound up with phenomenological and epistemological concerns, Royce had clearly begun to perceive the centrality of representation or signification in philosophical inquiry. Towards the end of the thought-diary, in an entry dated October 21 of 1879, Royce even goes as far to say that:

All knowledge is, as rational knowledge, symbolic. To regard knowledge literally is to reflect on the content of any moment of consciousness as existing in and for itself, as independent of the content of all other moments. To regard one content as occupying a definite place in the world of thought or of being, is to regard this content symbolically, or as a symbol of an external and objective content.<sup>12</sup>

From the standpoint of the present consciousness, we are directly aware of various objects — facts or units, depending on Royce's terminology — but when we self-consciously reflect on those objects as the content of consciousness, we become indirectly aware of the symbols that represent this content, and therefore, mediately represent the objects of which we are directly aware. Hence, a symbol is of an “external or objective content” because the symbol points toward some content beyond itself, which belongs to the object of that symbol for the present consciousness, and where that symbol points toward is the definite place of that object in the world of thought or being. Besides the direct awareness of actual experience, the “places” objects “occupy” in relation to the present consciousness are past, future, or possible experiences. Hence, this process of externalization or objectification does not merely include the present but extends outward into, because that process points toward, the past and future; thus, the present can become a symbol representing objects of past, future, or otherwise possible experiences.

The objective construction of time is a part of the process of symbolization. Yet if, for every symbol that represents an object beyond the present, there are objects of past, future, and possible experience, how can a symbol truly represent these objects if only the present is real? There must *eternally* exist, Royce concludes, relations of time between these objects and their symbols; an eternal world of being within which there exists an infinity of simultaneous truths. The present consciousness still constructs the time-series out of the present *for itself*; to whom there corresponds to every present moment their own past and expected future. When that same relation is viewed from the world of being, then every moment is eternally and simultaneously present; thus, the failure of consciousness is in regarding only itself as the present, and opposing to itself past and future, when in fact there is a single world of simultaneous truths that are eternally present. The illusion is, therefore, not the reality of past and future but rather that there is a succession of time from future to present to past; only the present is real but the present includes every moment once in the future and now in the past, and includes them all simultaneously and eternally. Therefore, a symbol can truly represent an object not presently known because, if the representation is true,

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<sup>12</sup> Royce 1879: 136.

the relation is from the eternal standpoint a relation between two simultaneous truths for a consciousness that mistakenly regards itself as the only present. Here is arguably, in embryonic form, a statement of Royce's absolute idealism nested within a series of thoughts that are, if not very clearly or comprehensively, still decidedly semiotic in nature. Thus, these selections from Royce's thought-diary illustrate a growing vision for a systematic philosophy: An increasingly pragmatic epistemology, a nascent phenomenology and protosemiotics, as well as an early statement of the eventual absolute idealism of *The Religious Aspect of Philosophy*.

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