

## ARTICULATE REASON AND ITS ELUSIVE BACKGROUND

### NOTES ON JOSIAH ROYCE'S LATE READING OF PEIRCE

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ABSTRACT: Hans Joas has recently discussed the theories of religious experience advanced by William James and Josiah Royce at the beginning of the twentieth century. In particular, he has placed much emphasis on Royce's recourse to Peirce in his criticism of the *Varieties of Religious Experience*. On this basis, the present article tries to delve deeper into Royce's late reading of Peirce. Royce is quite successful – this article maintains – in grasping the Peircean conception of reason as an articulatory faculty. But he does not do full justice to Peirce's remarks about the inarticulate and experiential ground out of which articulation unfolds.

**Keywords:** Josiah Royce, Charles S. Peirce, William James, Religion, Experience

*And as imagination bodies forth  
the forms of things unknown, the poet's pen  
turns them to shapes and gives to airy nothing  
a local habitation and a name.*

William Shakespeare,  
A Midsummer Night's Dream

In his later years, the North American philosopher Josiah Royce published two books on religion – *The Sources of Religious Insight* (1912) and *The Problem of Christianity* (1913) – which show the traces of a renewed conversation with his long-standing pragmatist interlocutors, William James and Charles S. Peirce.<sup>1</sup> One of the leading motives of these works is an attempt to come to terms with James's psychology of religion. In *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, James had suggested grounding the study of religion on the analysis of subjective experience. Royce fully acknowledged the merits of James's move but inveighed against his exclusive concentration on the individual and inarticulate dimension of experience. He thus set himself to formulate a more comprehensive view.

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1 Royce ([1912] 2001); Royce ([1913] 1968). For a comprehensive assessment of Royce's relation to the pragmatists, see Oppenheim (2005).

Royce's argument can be analysed as proceeding in two steps. First, in *The Sources of Religious Experience*, he sketched a view of religion as moulded by social interaction and by the influence of "articulate reason."<sup>2</sup> Then, in *The Problem of Christianity*, he explored the relationship between experience, reason and history, by asking how the avowedly eternal nature of the Christian message can be reconciled with its contingent and historical character. To answer this question, Royce developed a conception of reason as an interpretive faculty which resorts heavily to the writings of Peirce: a thinker with whom he had a lifelong intellectual exchange but whose philosophical significance he came to appreciate more fully right around the year 1912 (that is, in between the composition of the two books I am considering here).<sup>3</sup>

We owe to Hans Joas's *Die Macht des Heiligen* one of the most compelling readings to date of Royce's late exchange with James and Peirce, and of its relevance to both the philosophy of religion and social theory.<sup>4</sup> As Joas puts it, Royce's criticism of James helps us understand why the validity claims of religious experiences, although grounded on subjective certitude, cannot dispense with the historically contingent forms in which those experiences are socially articulated.<sup>5</sup> In turn, this idea is related to Joas's own conception of social values and religious doctrines as the articulation of specific experiences that have risen to prominence in the lives of individuals or communities.<sup>6</sup>

In the present article, I aim to follow up on Joas's discussion by focusing on some further aspects of Royce's late dialogue with the pragmatists. Above all, I would like to deal with the Royce-Peirce relation. However, I start with a preliminary discussion of Royce's misgivings about James's conception of individual experience (1). I then consider Royce's late reception of

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2 See, in particular, Royce ([1912] 2001, 90-91). The terms "inarticulate" and "articulate" were already used by James. See, e.g., James ([1902] 1985, 67).

3 See Oppenheim (2005, 29).

4 Joas (2017), Ch. 2. See also Joas (2016a, 67-70); Joas (2016b).

5 Joas (2017, 11-24 and 106-109).

6 See Joas ([2004] 2008), in particular Ch. 3, "On the Articulation of Experience"; Joas ([1997] 2000), in particular Ch. 3, on James. In these earlier writings, Royce does not play a role yet.

Peirce and, in particular, the role of semiotic considerations in his view of community (2). Finally, I pause on what is perhaps Royce's most original development of Peirce's semiotics, namely its application to a fully-fledged theory of historicity (3). My overall claim is that while Royce's reading of Peirce succeeds in bringing to the fore the latter's sophisticated understanding of reason as an interpretive and semiotic faculty, it fails to do full justice to Peirce's remarks about what we might call the *inarticulate and experiential ground* out of which articulation unfolds. This shortcoming reverberates in all three aspects of Royce's argument that I shall consider.<sup>7</sup>

### 1. Individual Experience

Let me start with *The Sources of Religious Insight*. Here, Royce makes a double move. On the one hand, he takes seriously the Jamesian conception of experience as a new basis for the study of religion. On the other hand, he seeks to expand it, by contending that religion is nourished not only by individual experience but by a plurality of "sources," seven in total, to which he devotes the seven chapters of his book. Taken together, these sources lead to what Royce calls religious "insight," that is, a kind of knowledge that is both synthetic and personal. "Insight is knowledge that makes us aware of the unity of many facts in one whole, and that at the same time brings us into intimate personal contact with these facts and with the whole wherein they are united."<sup>8</sup>

Hans Joas has advanced the suspicion that Royce's strategy might turn out to be little more than a "mere listing" of a plurality of factors in the study of religion, by definition less unilateral than James's analysis, but not derived by any systematic principle.<sup>9</sup> While this is indeed a difficulty of Royce's account, I believe it is possible to

detect a more systematic claim in his book. Royce's goal is not merely to criticise the unilateral character of James's work, but to put forth a decomposition of religious insight into its major components.

Let us see why. The first two sources indicated by Royce, "individual" and "social" experience, provide the starting point of the process through which insight is to be gained. In a sense, they fulfill the same function of doubt in pragmatist epistemologies: they represent a state of discomfort and malaise that sets in motion the whole process of inquiry. They do so, however, from different angles. While individual experience is by its very definition unstable "like the foam of the sea,"<sup>10</sup> and thus leaves us with the need for a higher and more stable dimension of reality, social experience presents us with a painful clash between the "chaos of needs" of ordinary life and the ideal of an ordered community of human beings who strive for collective salvation.<sup>11</sup>

Individual and social experiences, however, are just the first step in the process. In order to lead to genuine insight, they need to be complemented by a rational faculty that interprets or *articulates* them. "Articulate reason" is thus the third, and in a sense paramount, source of insight. But reason, too, is incomplete and powerless, as long as it is not aided by two more sources. One such source – the fourth – is the will, which guides and accompanies the exercise of reason. Another – the fifth – is "loyalty", i.e. the caring love for the community, which provides the horizon within which "the lessons that the preceding sources have furnished" are united.<sup>12</sup> Finally, two more sources close the picture: the experience of "sorrow," and more importantly, the "invisible Church," that is, the ideal and transcendent unity of all the faithful, which plays a regulative role in the whole process of insight formation.

Seen in this light, Royce's argument appears directed not so much against James's exclusive concentration on

7 Auxier (2013, 71-73 and *passim*), has argued that Royce's way of dealing with the issue of immediacy, although engaging, is not altogether satisfactory. If I am not mistaken, my observations can be read as going in the same direction.

8 Royce ([1912] 2001, 5-6).

9 Joas (2017, 93, 97, and 103). Joas refers to Oppenheim (2005, 464 n15), who shows that "[Royce's] listing was not intended to be exhaustive".

10 Royce ([1912] 2001, 30).

11 Royce ([1912] 2001, 75). On this see also Royce ([1908] 1995).

12 Royce ([1912] 2001, 166).

individual experience, but against his conviction that individual experience is the only element that plays a *constitutive part* in the justification of the religious faith of individuals.<sup>13</sup> In particular, James had ruled out the possibility that “intellectual operations” might have a substantial role in the experience of conversion. Even if “we cannot exclude the intellect from participating in any of our functions,” the intellect ends up playing the merely subsidiary role of ordering the material provided by inarticulate feeling.<sup>14</sup> And this is precisely the point that Royce’s insistence on the multi-layered character of religious insight is meant to disprove.

However, one difficulty arises here. If we look beyond *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, it is not difficult to find texts in which James puts forth a much more nuanced account of the relation between inarticulate feeling and articulate reason, thus potentially neutralising Royce’s objections. Joas has already pointed to one such work, the posthumous *Some Problems of Philosophy* (1911), where James describes the act of writing as a process of progressive articulation of our still inchoate thoughts. “As I now write,” – says James, – “I ‘strive’ after words, which I *only half prefigure*, but which, when they shall have come, must satisfactorily complete the nascent sense I have of what they ought to be.”<sup>15</sup> Here the process of articulation, far from playing an ancillary role, represents the moment in which the thoughts I am trying to express find their effective realisation.

13 Thus, I do not fully agree with Joas (2017, 103), who distinguishes between two different lines of criticism that Royce addresses to James: “Man kann eine ausschließliche Berücksichtigung individueller Erfahrung entweder kritisieren, weil sie andere Dimensionen nicht berücksichtigt oder weil sie sogar das Wesen individueller Erfahrung verkennt. Die Aufzählung der Quellen religiöser Einsicht dient dem ersten Zweck, die semiotische, peirceanische Kritik an James dem zweiten.” I think, on the contrary, that Royce’s argument in the *Sources* can be grasped as already going in the direction of the systematic criticism fleshed out in the *Problem*, although in a way that is still not so heavily influenced by Peirce. This is another way of saying that I do not think that the renowned turning-point of 1912 should be taken as an absolute break in Royce’s thinking. For a similar attitude, see Auxier (2013, 62).

14 James ([1902] 1985, 342, 359-360).

15 James ([1910] 1979, 106), my emphasis. Cf. Joas (2017, 101); Joas ([2004] 2008, 41).

But by far the fullest account in this respect is contained in James’s psychological masterpiece, *The Principles of Psychology* (1890). In particular, the celebrated chapter on the “Stream of Thought” aims at what James himself calls a “re-instatement of the vague to its proper place in our mental life.”<sup>16</sup> Thought, James claims, is made of “transitive” psychological states that surround more definite ideas as their “fringe” or “penumbra,” and in which other ideas are vaguely prefigured. Our mental life is full of such “rapid premonitory perspective views of scheme of thought *not yet articulate*,” which have “no definite object” yet, but already display a “sense of the direction” along which that object shall be found. James characterises the specificity of these elusive states of mind by insisting on the crucial difference between the “feeling of an absence” and “the absence of a feeling.” If, for instance, I have a vague sense of what I want to say before having precisely formulated my thought, this “feeling of an absence” is something entirely different from having no thought altogether. “Every one must know the tantalizing effect of the blank rhythm of some forgotten verse, restlessly dancing in one’s mind, striving to be filled out with words.”<sup>17</sup>

Unlike the coarser opposition between intellect and individual experience suggested by the *Varieties*, James’s subtle comparison of inarticulate states of mind to the “feeling of an absence” is quite compatible with Royce’s remarks about the structurally unstable nature of experience. Indeed, Royce was well aware of this fact. In the *Sources of Religious Insight*, he remarked that “James, as a *psychologist*, well knew this truth about the value and the limitations of private experience.”<sup>18</sup> However, his polemical objective on that occasion was not James the psychologist, but James the philosopher of religion. Thus, the possibility of a closer and more productive confrontation with James’s conception of the vagueness and inarticulacy of experience was left unexplored.

16 James ([1890] 1981, 246). Cf. Gavin (1992).

17 James ([1890] 1981, 240-246).

18 Royce ([1912] 2001, 30), my emphasis.

This is noteworthy also because that conception would have provided a link to the philosophy of Peirce quite different from the one on which he would insist a year later in *The Problem of Christianity*, and closer, rather, to the one highlighted by John Dewey with his notion of “qualitative thought.”<sup>19</sup> Both in his semiotics and in his theory of the metaphysical categories, Peirce insisted on the idea that immediate qualitative experience (the category of “Firstness”) pervades all processes of thought, but is intangible and ephemeral, and is thus in need of being complemented by two more dimensions: the dimension of physical resistance (“Secondness”) and that of semiosis (“Thirdness”). Inarticulate qualities are thus characterised by a metaphysics of potentiality. They are general elements *in potentia*, which need to be expressed in physical facts and embedded in semiotic structures in order to bear fruit. Otherwise, they remain “airy nothings.”<sup>20</sup>

## 2. Hermeneutics and The Doctrine of Signs

While substantially overlooking the implications of Peirce's philosophy for a theory of inarticulate experience, Royce was on the contrary quite perceptive of the latter's relevance to another major goal of his theory, that is, the description of “articulate reason” as a source of religious insight. In fact, Royce could only defend this idea by convincingly demonstrating that reason, far from being the purely analytical tool that James decries in the *Varieties*, can be a source of genuine novelty. And it is precisely here that his 1912 re-discovery of Peirce came to play a crucial role:<sup>21</sup> while the *Sources of Religious*

*Insight* cite Peirce only once,<sup>22</sup> the whole of the second part of the *Problem of Christianity* is devoted to an in-depth examination of his thinking.<sup>23</sup>

The crucial idea on which Royce bases his interpretation of Peirce may be expressed by saying that reason can have a genuinely synthetic or creative power, even if it is not construed as an intuitive faculty but as a downright *inferential* operation. Although he is sometimes untidy in his terminology, Royce correctly identifies the two aspects of Peirce's logic that deal with this point. The first is the concept of hypothesis, or “abduction,” as the only kind of inference that is inherently creative. The second is what Peirce would have called the “*theorematic deduction*” of mathematics. This is a specific kind of deduction that, thanks to the operations we perform on diagrams we ourselves create, can bring to the fore some necessary implications of the problem that we could not have perceived otherwise.<sup>24</sup>

In *The Problem of Christianity*, however, Royce adds a further, crucial step. He comes to recognise that the Peircean conception of synthetic reasoning is inextricably bound up with his conception of reason as the faculty of producing and interpreting signs. In this way, the “articulate reason” already deployed in the *Sources* is substituted by the concept of “interpretation.” Correspondingly, the “will,” which in the *Sources* had the function of accompanying and guiding our rational faculty, is now referred to as “the will to interpret,” thus making even clearer Royce's strong but ambivalent relation to James. While both Royce and James place emphasis on the importance of volition, Royce makes clear that what he is looking for is not a “will to believe”

19 Dewey ([1930] 1984). See also Dewey ([1934] 1987); Dewey ([1935] 1987).

20 “A Neglected Argument for the Reality of God” (1908), in Peirce (1992 [henceforth: EP2], 435): “Of the three Universes of Experience familiar to us all, the first comprises all mere Ideas, those airy nothings to which the mind of poet, pure mathematician, or another might give local habitation and a name within that mind.” Peirce is here referencing the Shakespearean verses I have chosen as an epigraph to my paper. Royce knew well this text, which is the central piece of his philosophy of religion. See Raposa (2010).

21 See above, fn. 3, and my comments on fn. 13.

22 Royce ([1912] 2001, 98).

23 After the publication of *The Problem of Christianity*, Royce sent a copy to Peirce, who at that time was already ill and approaching death. Peirce replied with an appreciative letter, which Royce read as a substantial approval of his interpretation of Peirce. But Oppenheim, who has found the letter Peirce sent to Royce, expresses some reservations about Royce's enthusiasm, on the basis of the scarce evidence provided by that letter. See Oppenheim (2005, 23).

24 Royce ([1912] 2001); Royce ([1913] 1968, 308-312 and 392-395). For Peirce's definition of “*theorematic deduction*” (a term Royce does not use) see, for instance, his “*Syllabus of Certain Topics of Logic*” (1903), in EP2, 297-298.

but a “will to interpret.” The will does not represent a source of insight alternative and complementary to reason, as James’s argument on the will to believe might suggest. Rather, it guides reason in every step.<sup>25</sup>

*The Problem of Christianity* also goes back to some of the other sources of religious insights that Royce had identified in the previous book, such as loyalty and the church. But most importantly, it is the social dimension of experience that now comes to play an even more crucial role.<sup>26</sup> Royce explores the Peircean concept of interpretation not only from the angle of its epistemological implications, but above all from the angle of its relevance to an all-encompassing theory of communities and historical traditions.

Drawing in part on the anti-individualistic view of communities he finds in Wilhelm Wundt, Royce suggests that the act of interpretation is the medium through which communities live and structure themselves through time. In fact, he goes as far as to suggest that interpretation is virtually equivalent to the flow of time, because time is the movement through which “the present interprets the past to the future.”<sup>27</sup> Thus, a “community” is created out of a simple collection of individuals at the moment when that collection of individuals starts to share memories about its past, or hopes and expectations about the future. In other words, communities are held together by the fact that their members interpret their past or their future in overlap-

ping ways.<sup>28</sup> The acts of interpretation that are enacted by the community are always related to other acts of interpretation enacted by other people in the past. The community thus emerges out of a continuous stream of interpretive acts that relate to one another.

A crucial corollary about the very nature of “articulate reason” follows from this idea. The process of articulation can be directed not only to individual experience in the sense of James, but also to the symbols and signs that we derive from tradition. We articulate experiences but we also articulate the meaning of the past as is embodied in signs and, indeed, this is the only tool we have to make “some vast body of facts of experience” available to the limited compass of our individual life.<sup>29</sup>

Royce draws on these general considerations to describe the Pauline church as a community of interpretation constantly building on its own past and striving toward a more and more accurate interpretation of the Christian message. But he also makes clear that the church is only one among many historical traditions that make up the history of humanity. Other cultural formations, such as philosophy, science and art, can be analysed along the same lines:

Amos introduced into the controversies of his time the still tragic, but inspiring and mediating, idea of the God who [...] delights not in sacrifices but in righteousness. And by this one stroke of religious genius the prophet directed the religious growth of the centuries that were to follow. [...] Let the Sistine Madonna or Beethoven’s Fifth Symphony illustrate the same process in other forms of the artistic consciousness.<sup>30</sup>

Still, Royce is careful not to lapse into the ‘Nietzschean’ mistake of taking into account only the outstanding inventions of religious prophets, artistic geniuses or scientists as the kind of “interpretation” that makes up the fabric of human culture. On the contrary, he maintains that the “will to interpret” can take both the form of highly reflected intellectual articulations and that of

25 See Royce ([1913] 1968, Ch. 12). Joas (2017, 99), also mentions Schopenhauer and Nietzsche as possibly alluded to by Royce’s use of the phrase “the will to interpret.” This is, indeed, quite plausible: after all, in Royce ([1913] 1968, 351-354), James’s voluntarism is treated as a continuation of Schopenhauer’s. In doing so, however, Royce ends up underplaying some important differences between James and the Schopenhauer-Nietzsche tradition: differences pointed out by Joas ([1992] 1996, 116-126). On Royce, Peirce and Nietzsche, see also Fabbrichesi (2010).

26 For loyalty, see in particular Chs. 2 and 10; for the church, Chs. 2, 10, 15, 16; for social experience, p. 224: “The psychology of the origins of Christian experience is thus social, and is not an individual psychology.” Joas (2017, 97-98), reads the relation between the two books in a slightly different way, and sees a strong continuity only in Royce’s considerations about the church.

27 Royce ([1913] 1968, 344).

28 Royce ([1913] 1968, Ch. 9).

29 Royce ([1912] 2001 265-266).

30 Royce ([1913] 1968, 307). See also p. 332-333.

more unsophisticated attempts to make sense of ordinary experiences.<sup>31</sup>

Overall, what Royce is after here is a comprehensive *hermeneutic* approach to history and culture, i.e. to the different objectifications of the life of communities that are handed down from generation to generation. I call this approach hermeneutic, quite literally, because it is based on a general theory of interpretation. Only, this theory of interpretation does not have the classical European hermeneutic tradition as its primary source, but the semiotics of Peirce.

Herein lies one of the most original and compelling aspects of *The Problem of Christianity*. The book successfully shows how pragmatist philosophy can be brought to bear on some major problems of hermeneutics, the philosophy of history and the philosophy of culture. It elaborates on Peirce's theory of signs in the direction of an understanding of historical interpretations, while insisting that these historical interpretations should be anchored in the Jamesian dimension of subjective experience.<sup>32</sup>

This is a truly original development of Peirce's philosophy, for it pushes in new directions some insights that Peirce had only seriously articulated within the framework of science. Even Peirce's work as a historian and philosopher of history, although extremely significant in its own right, centres almost exclusively on the history of science. As a result, his account of religion, art and other aspects of human culture is left rather underdeveloped.<sup>33</sup> Why is this so? I think that one way of answering this question would be to say that Peirce was too sceptical of the possibility of bestowing the property of rationality on domains of human discourse that do not follow the scientific ideal. He took the possibility for people to reach consensus by means of disinterested

inquiry as one of the defining features of genuinely rational enterprises. He had, therefore, a hard time investigating those cultural domains that follow different dynamics.

However, Royce's use of Peirce's semiotics has its own problems: problems that are structurally analogous to what I have already said about the issue of inarticulate experience. In particular, Royce does not dwell on the inner differentiation of the concept of sign, and thus neglects a fundamental insight of Peirce's, i.e. the existence of less articulated but nonetheless thoroughly semiotic dimensions of experience. Peirce's famous partition of signs into icons, indices and symbols is meant to capture precisely this insight. This classification would have been very relevant to Royce, as it would have strengthened his contention that all forms of cultural production, from philosophy to art and religion (and indeed, even the thoughts that accompany our ordinary lives), are acts of interpretation or articulation.<sup>34</sup>

In the same vein, insisting on the existence of non-symbolic but, nonetheless, semiotic entities such as icons and indices may also help us formulate more precisely an idea that plays an important role in Joas's theory of articulation. I mean the idea that the articulatory process, as Joas has it, can "begin at both ends." That is, it is not always the case that we first have an inarticulate feeling which we then set out to express in words or actions. Rather, sometimes it is the action, the gesture or the word that comes first, and feeds back into the feeling.<sup>35</sup> But the existence of this feedback effect can only be truly integrated in a theory of articulation if we clarify in which sense a non-verbal entity such as a gesture or an action can be said to "articulate" a feeling – that is, to be a *semiotic translation* of that feeling.

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31 This thought comes out with particular prominence in Royce ([1912] 2001, 120-129).

32 See the emphatic allusion to James in Royce ([1913] 1968, 247): "The concept of the community [...] depends indeed upon an interpretation of the significance of facts, and does not confine itself to mere report of particulars; but it does not ignore the *present varieties of experience*" (my emphasis).

33 See, above all, Peirce (1985).

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34 Compare Joas (2017, 95). It is worth noting that Royce used to mention this aspect of Peirce's thought in his seminars. See Costello (1963).

35 Joas ([2004] 2008, 12).

### 3. History and Teleology

A last significant aspect of Royce's hermeneutics is its relevance to a new assessment of the relation between the historicity of religious traditions and their normative claims of validity (i.e. between "The Historical and the Essential", as the title of one of the book's chapters has it<sup>36</sup>). Indeed, answering this question is the one fundamental goal of *The Problem of Christianity*. Overall, the book aims to understand "how Christianity, considered as a body of religious beliefs, is related to the whole lesson of religious history".<sup>37</sup> Royce's strategy, here, is to look at Christianity neither "as the one true faith" nor "as an outworn tradition to be treated with an enlightened indifference, but as a central, as an intensely interesting, life-problem of humanity."<sup>38</sup>

Once again, the problem is closely related to Royce's criticism of James. While admitting that James's focus on experience helps circumvent a reading of Christianity exclusively in terms of its historical and institutional development, Royce insists that "Christianity is not merely a religion of experience and of sentiment" either.<sup>39</sup> Rather, it is a religion that pivots on tradition. This problem has important methodological implications. Royce is explicitly committed to finding a "union of historical summary with philosophical reflection."<sup>40</sup> He wishes to assess the Christian doctrine "partly in the light of its history, partly in the light of a philosophical study of the meaning and lesson of this history."<sup>41</sup> In this sense, he is once again recapitulating a classical desideratum of hermeneutic theories, i.e. to link a general theory of interpretation with an appreciation of the historical nature of interpretation itself.

In concrete, Royce seeks to strike a middle course between recognising the historical nature of the Christian doctrine and denying that this historical nature is tantamount to utter contingency. Christian religion is based on a number of "essential" ideas about the role of the Church, the moral burden of individuals, and divine plans for redemption.<sup>42</sup> On the one hand, these essential ideas are never directly and intuitively available but only accessible through their historical formation: "as symbols, as parables, as shadows cast by the things of some higher world."<sup>43</sup> But on the other hand, faithful individuals have to read these symbols not as fortuitous historical events but in light of the eternal message that they convey.

A structurally equivalent argument applies to the question whether the Christian doctrine is already entailed *in nuce* in the teaching of Jesus, or whether it needs to be completed by the subsequent theological doctrines that were elaborated by the Pauline church. Royce sides unambiguously with the second position, because the first "miss[es] the meaning of history to a degree unworthy of the highly developed historical sense which should characterize the 'modern man'."<sup>44</sup> The teachings of Jesus are, quite obviously, foundational to the Christian doctrine. But as they stand, they are incomplete, vague and unclear. Therefore, they call for various interpretations that aim at completing and making explicit their ultimate message. But once again, these interpretations are not purely contingent historical facts. Rather, they are the realisation of an eternal message: they "include doctrines which indeed supplement, *but which at the same time in spirit fulfill*, the view of life and of salvation which the original teaching of the Master [...] made known."<sup>45</sup>

Royce is thus advocating a position that, faithful to the tradition of hermeneutics, recognises a fundamental tension between the content of the Christian doctrine

36 See the title of Ch. 15 in Royce ([1913] 1968).

37 Royce ([1913] 1968, 64).

38 Royce ([1913] 1968, 61). Here, it is easy to note a relation to Hans Joas's idea of an "affirmative genealogy." See Joas ([2011] 2013, Ch. 4).

39 Royce ([1913] 1968, 230).

40 Royce ([1913] 1968, 74).

41 Royce ([1913] 1968, 65), where he also speaks of a "synthesis of certain philosophical and of certain historical problems".

42 Royce ([1913] 1968, 70-73).

43 Royce ([1913] 1968, 376).

44 Royce ([1913] 1968, 67-68).

45 Royce ([1913] 1968, 70), my emphasis.

and the historical manners in which that content has been conveyed – or between the “spirit” and the “letter,” to use the classical Pauline formulation. These “conflicts of spirit and letter [...] cannot be understood unless our historical sense is well awakened. On the other hand, they cannot be understood *merely* through a study of history. The values of ideals must be ideally discerned.”<sup>46</sup>

To use a slightly different terminology, making sense of the religious doctrine is neither about *discovering* something outside of history nor about *constructing* an intellectual content from scratch. Rather, it is about putting forth interpretations of historically given symbols (or of historical facts) in light of a value-laden assessment of their meaning. This midway point between discovery and construction, between a neatly a-historical attitude and a historicist form of reductionism, is conceptually equivalent to Royce's concept of articulatory reason, where a certain organic totality is given from the very beginning but needs to be further unfolded and developed.<sup>47</sup>

One may be tempted to push a comparison with Peirce's philosophy of science here. As I have already pointed out, science is the domain of human culture to which Peirce was philosophically most sensitive; and this applies also to his reflections on the relation between historical genesis and a-historical validity of scientific truths. Peirce's “fallibilism” claims that scientific theories are approximations to a truth that can only be seen as the regulative ideal of inquiry, to be reached “in the long run.” An immediate corollary of this idea is that no theory is ever conceivable as absolutely true: “what has been indubitable one day has often been proved on the morrow to be false.”<sup>48</sup> However, what does bestow objective scientific validity on each of the theories that follow one

another in history is the scientific “spirit” in which the inquiry is pursued, and those theories' ability to bring us closer and closer to the truth. Royce formulates a similar idea with regard to the development of religious communities over history. Among all the symbolic tools we deploy to make sense of the eternal teachings of Christianity, none is absolutely valid. But the truth of the religious message shines through the whole chain of historical interpretations.<sup>49</sup>

However, in spite of the relevance of Royce's ideas for an understanding of the link between historicity and interpretation, there remains a weak spot in his dealing with the problem of history: one that Hans Joas has already forcefully indicated. I mean the overly teleological account of historical progress. Royce is adamant that precisely in virtue of reason's ability to mediate between the past and the future, and in furthering the links between different ideas, it is possible to conceive of human history as the “process of the spirit,” in the course of which “to every problem corresponds [...] its solution, to every antithesis its resolution, [...] to every tragedy the atoning triumph which interprets its evil.” This closed and teleological character of history, Joas maintains, is emphatically at variance with one of the main tenets of pragmatism, i.e. the acceptance of the contingent and unforeseeable nature of human affairs.<sup>50</sup>

In closing this paper, I would like to stress that the teleology that characterises Royce's philosophy of history does not necessarily follow from its Peircean premises. On the contrary, it can once again be related to Royce's *failure* to take into account one specific aspect of Peirce's philosophy, namely the tight link between articulate reason and its inarticulate, experiential background.

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46 Royce ([1913] 1968, 79).

47 A contemporary theorist of articulation such as Charles Taylor has emphasised the same idea of articulation striking a middle course between discovery and construction (or invention). See, e.g. Taylor (2016, 146). On Taylor's reading of James, see Taylor (2003).

48 Peirce, “Consequences of Critical Common-Sensism” (1905), in Peirce (1931-1958, par. 5.514).

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49 Cf. the explicit analogy between the scientific community and the Pauline church in Royce ([1913] 1968, 333). One difference, however, would remain: while in the case of science what remains fixed over time is the adherence to a procedure, in the case of religion we can identify the persistence of a positive message, or content.

50 Royce ([1913] 1968, 381); Joas (2017, 104).

Royce's insistence on "the process of the spirit" reveals that he is still at least in part committed to an idea that Peirce himself had rejected some years before, in his review of another book by Royce, *The Religious Aspect of Philosophy* (1885). On that occasion, Peirce had used a memorable phrase – the "Outward Clash" of reality – to point to the unforeseeable and irreducible constraints of experience that he saw gravely underestimated in both Royce and Hegel.<sup>51</sup> Now, whether or not Peirce was right in reading Royce's early book through the lenses of Hegel, I believe that the substance of his criticism could still be levelled against *The Problem of Christianity*. Royce's understanding of the relation between interpretation and temporality, for instance, although undoubtedly comparable to certain Peircean ideas, fails to do justice to Peirce's conviction that the future is open and undetermined.<sup>52</sup> By the same token, Royce's understanding of the very concept of interpretation leans toward a conciliatory model that is alien to Peirce. Royce tends to equate every act of interpretation to the operation of producing a third element that mediates between two opposite ideas. But this is to mistake the species with the genus. The Peircean concept of interpretation is a much more general operation than the specific act of comparison and reconciliation.

It is, furthermore, important to realise that "teleology" is said in many ways. While it may be convincingly maintained that all hermeneutic arguments rest on a teleological structure that is embedded in the very act of interpretation, this teleology does not necessarily coincide with the idea of a fixed *telos* in human history. The teleology of hermeneutics descends from the renowned circular structure of interpretation. Every act of interpretation is accomplished in light of a general idea that is pre-existent to the interpretation itself; and conversely,

that general idea is further determined by the single acts of interpretation that are accomplished in its light.

In the same vein, the process of articulation I have been exploring in this paper presupposes the existence of a given element or an unarticulated totality, which orients the process by providing the direction along which articulation will unfold. But there is no internal reason why this hermeneutic or articulatory teleology should be projected onto a super-individual, historical scale – or worse, why it should obliterate the contingent and unforeseeable dimension of human action.

Peirce was a profoundly teleological thinker. His semiotics dictates that the way in which general signs influence the world of material individuals is subsumable under the category of final causation.<sup>53</sup> In particular, his account of intellectual evolution (interestingly called "agapasm", from Greek *agapē*: the same Christian love that Royce puts at the center of his concept of "loyalty") suggests that ideas can exert an "immediate attraction" on individuals and become the final cause to which habit-taking processes are directed.<sup>54</sup> However, this emphasis on final causation is closer to the hermeneutic or articulatory teleology I have just described than to the super-individual teleology that is involved in Royce's philosophy of history. Individuals can feel the force of a philosophical, scientific or religious idea because they are captured by it before they really possess it, like in "the conversion of St. Paul."<sup>55</sup> They thus orient their subsequent efforts to the development of that vaguely-felt idea. However, these dynamics should be understood in the light of another key idea of Peirce's account of intellectual evolution, namely, the reality of contingency and chance, and the consequent impossibility of predicting in advance what the final outcome of individual actions will be.<sup>56</sup>

51 Peirce, "An American Plato" (1885), in Peirce (1984-2010 [henceforth: W], vol. 6, 225): "The capital error of Hegel which permeates his whole system in every part of it is that he almost altogether ignores the Outward Clash."

52 See, e.g., Peirce, "Issues of Pragmaticism" (1905), in EP2, 357-359.

53 Short (2007, Ch. 5).

54 Peirce, "Evolutionary Love" (1892), in W8, 184-205.

55 Peirce, "Evolutionary Love", in W8, 196. Cf. what Joas says on Royce's loyalty in (2017, 92): loyalty is a "Hingabe an eine Sache, die man nicht einfach gewählt habe, sondern die einen ergriffen, die sich einem offenbart habe".

56 This paper is the English version of a German article that will be published in *Idealbildung, Sakralisierung und Religion. Im*

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