

## WANDERING, CRISIS, AND LOYALTY REFLECTIONS ON ROYCE

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**ABSTRACT:** This article develops an interpretation of Josiah Royce by placing the metaphor of wandering at the center of his philosophical anthropology and ethics. The essay argues that Royce diagnoses the human condition as structurally precarious: shaped by crisis, conflict, lack, and the incessant search for unity within the temporal flow of life. The motif of wandering serves as an existential category describing the in-between character of finite subjectivity and its striving to overcome its own indeterminacy. Royce's ethics of loyalty is interpreted as a pragmatic strategy to manage this precariousness without ever transcending it; loyalty is framed as an art of synthesizing conflicting impulses, forming a life-plan, and relating the self to causes that constitute social orders of meaning. Yet because selfhood itself is marked by negativity, crisis and adversity remain constitutive rather than eliminable.

**Keywords:** wandering, human condition, crisis, conflict, temporality, negativity, self, loyalty, unity, good

Texts allow for multiple readings depending on the contexts of interpretation. Such contextualizations provide occasions to interpret texts in a particular direction. Without these contextual perspectives, our interpretations would lose their sharpness and devolve into a mere reproduction of syntactic facts. In the following pages, I interpret Josiah Royce's thought from a perspective that is at once deeply rooted in the collective consciousness of the present and, in its variations, visible within the pragmatic matrix—especially in Royce's own writings. This viewpoint expresses a heightened awareness of the precariousness of the human condition, the crises it experiences, and the opportunities and limits of political or ethical strategies to respond. I pursue a systematic sketch of these themes in Royce's thought, not chronologically and not as a survey of any single phase, but by tracing some aspects of the overarching structure of his ideas while largely setting aside the development from his early articles to his late theory of community. I recog-

nize that such a method risks neglecting important parts of his theory – in my case, for example, the concepts of the absolute and interpretation. Yet the advantages lie in revealing how deeply grounded these topics are in Royce's thinking. Central to my reading will be *The World and the Individual*, from which I will draw on both earlier and later writings. The argument will proceed in four steps: following a brief contextualization of my research question, (1) I will reflect on the metaphor of wandering, which appears to be crucial not only for Royce's understanding of philosophy but of existence; (2) subsequently, certain traits of his ethics will be examined in light of "wandering"; (3) I will conclude with a few brief remarks for further inquiry; and (4) as is evident, the various parts of my interpretation are linked to one another by a guiding motif, the motif of "wandering," and especially by the aspect of negation that can be discerned therein.

### I. Context

We live in an age of crisis. At least, that is what one might assume if one follows prevailing diagnoses of our culture. There seems to be agreement that many crises have overlapped in recent times on a larger scale, and they may even be interconnected. For example, we talk about the crisis of democracy, the ecological crisis, the crisis of international institutions, or of the crisis of attention in the digital age, to name just a few well-known highlights. At the personal level, crises occur in many forms, from birth to death, sometimes subtle and sometimes disruptive. It is therefore difficult to offer a universal definition of all possible crises; it may be said, however, that we speak of crises when we encounter situations in which our established habits of orientation fail to operate, and we experience disorientation in our world- and self-relation, with varying degrees of severity. In severe cases we feel as if we have literally fallen from the world. Accordingly, crises are accompanied by particular emotional states—typical examples include fear or anxiety, as well as feelings of

powerlessness or vulnerability.<sup>1</sup> These emotions should not be treated as merely mental states reflecting an inner disposition; instead, they are intentional modes of our engagement with the world, expressed in situationally embodied forms of action. Through feeling, a situation is already apprehended with a particular quality; in a crisis, it is often experienced as irritating, threatening, or dangerous. This is why crises seize our attention so strongly, narrowing our view of some aspects of reality. From a somewhat more detached vantage point, concrete crisis events can, however, also shed light on a much broader issue. They can cast light on what the human condition fundamentally designates: its precariousness.

Thinkers at the dawn of pragmatism were well aware of this more general matter; among them, Josiah Royce, after all, was no stranger to crisis, conflict, and tragedy. Born and raised in California, he did not belong to the Boston elite, which was able to pursue the great tasks of philosophy and science within a relatively stable institutional framework. In contrast, the situation on the West Coast was anything but institutionally stable. Royce's historical/sociological studies on the subject provide an excellent impression of the sensitivity with which he perceived the problems of this emerging social order in the West (Royce, 1886). They describe anarchic conditions familiar above all from contemporary Western films. These experiences made a lasting impression on him and are likely to have influenced his social sociology, whose most basic idea is, as is well known: "it must be my community that, in the end, saves me." (Royce, 2001c, 41). Throughout his life, Royce retained a philosophical sense of the tragic and crisis-prone nature of existence, in this respect resembling William James. This is evident not only in his studies of the situation in California, but also, more fundamentally, can be seen in the basic structure of his philosophical thinking. I would

like to examine some features of this structure in more detail in the next section.

## II. The Human Condition: Wandering

Royce defines the process of life and thought with the help of a metaphor that is very catchy at first glance, the metaphor of "wandering." Several years ago, Douglas Anderson has lucidly shown how the shifting meanings of "wandering" are reflected in the different phases of Royce's intellectual biography, especially concerning the notion of the Absolute (Anderson 2006, 33–49). In this article I choose a more phenomenological approach interpreting it as a kind of "*Existential*" in a Heideggerian sense that might reveal something of the fundamental structure of the human condition. In general, one can say that those who wander are on a journey, have not yet reached their destination, and are in a peculiar in-between state. They are moving on the border between the known and the unknown, between the familiar and the foreign, or between the self and the other. In a sense, those who wander are border crossers, neither here nor there, who risk, taking detours or even going astray. This is true of wandering as an outer journey with a fixed spatial beginning and end, but it is also true of wandering as the temporally ongoing human quest to understand one's own destiny. It is primarily this perspective that bears on the interpretation of Royce, who conceives the "process of coming to consciousness" as a fundamental "wandering in the wilderness of ignorance." (Royce 1901, xv).<sup>2</sup> Hence, the metaphor holds central significance for his philosophical framework. It entails many aspects, including ethical and epistemic dimensions. Both belong together, but for analytical reasons I will briefly address them separately.

(1) The ethical dimension of "wandering" has to do with the fact that, for Royce, what we call our self is not

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. Tietjen, Ruth Rebecca. 2023. "Feeling and performing 'the crisis': on the affective phenomenology and politics of the corona crisis." *Phenomenology and the Cognitive Sciences* 22/5: 1281–1299.

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<sup>2</sup> Note that the "wandering" metaphor serves both as opening of the Second Series of the Gifford Lectures (Royce 1901, xv; 3) and as ending of the last lecture (ibid., 452).

an empirical datum to which we can directly refer and say once and for all: That is me. Rather, it is to be understood as an “Ethical Category” (Royce 1901, 275), denoting an ethical task which is in principle infinite. The motive of “wandering” thus expresses what belongs to the conceptual core of Royce’s thinking: The situation in which we find ourselves is not a mere state of affairs, but a constant temporal transition.<sup>3</sup> It is a temporal constellation that, on closer inspection, reveals that we are always in a shifting or flowing mode of existence. Our past no longer exists as a direct presence, yet it continues to exert influence in many ways; our present state of selfhood has already passed as we come to know it; our future way of being is not yet present and must first be acquired, and it stirs us with emotions like restlessness or fear.<sup>4</sup> In this temporally shifting mode of being, the ongoing transitions between present, past, and future create a dynamic partly driven by the experience of lack and by the desire and will to fill it. The sense of lack should not be seen as a relation to a particular object that we do not have and therefore seek to acquire; rather, it should be grasped as a fundamental structure of our self-relations that includes lack as a defining feature. If that were not the case, the self could not be defined as an “Ethical Category,” since this presupposes that the aim is to become an individual self, which in turn implies that it is not yet, and thus something that, strictly speaking, is missing, at least in its full meaning. Absence of determination, negativity, is thus a structural component of our being-in-the-world, even if we do not always notice it in our daily affairs. The self we refer to as our own develops in these temporal transitions, seeking what it is not yet, or, positively expressed, what its unique relationship to reality fully constitutes. Accordingly, Royce defines hope as a central existential mode: “this dwelling in hope rather than in fulfillment, in search for a lost self rather than

in enjoyment of a present self..., this dwelling constitutes the inner finite life of every one of us” (Royce 1969, 434). So much for one aspect of the ethical dimension.

(2) I would like to develop the epistemic dimension further, following the suggestion that the structure of the self is characterized by a lack, and for this purpose I rely on what one might call Royce’s negative method. It might be said that the aim of the process of “wandering” is, both in theoretical and practical terms, to determine oneself as a concrete, i.e., real, individuality, whereby the concept of the individual forms a kind of boundary concept (Clendenning 1970, 340–345). This is, in part, because individuality is defined by the predicate of uniqueness, and since positive knowledge about an object can only be obtained through the application of general concepts and categories; the unique determinateness of an individual as such can never occur as an object that is known. What can be known are always objects of a certain type or class. Royce is very clear about this impossibility; it underpins the paradoxical initial condition of our will-to-know the individual real, a condition that can never be completely overcome: “And, finally, our experience, whether internal or external, never shows us what we, above all, regard as the Real, namely, the Individual fact” (Royce 1899, 297). What remains are conceptual approximations achieved by excluding all that the sought object *prima facie* is not, thereby progressively restricting the range of possible determinations. Royce designates this as “*Determination by Negation*” (*ibid.*, 296), noting that the full determination of the real functions as an “ideal” and as “a limit toward which we endlessly aim.” This mode of seeing things echoes Kant’s considerations of “dem Grundsatz der durchgängigen Bestimmung” in his *Kritik der reinen Vernunft* (Kant 1990, B 599).<sup>5</sup> It culminates in the thesis that the complete determination of a thing cannot be found as an empirical fact and instead serves as a principle (or rule) of reason: “um ein Ding vol-

<sup>3</sup> For the importance of temporality in Royce’s ontology see Auxier 2013, 38–40.

<sup>4</sup> See Kegley, Jacquelyn Ann K. “*Josiah Royce in Focus*.” (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2008), 14f., 28f.

<sup>5</sup> Kant, Immanuel. 1990. *Kritik der reinen Vernunft* (Hamburg: Meiner, 1990), B 599.

Iständig zu erkennen, muß man alles Mögliche erkennen, und es dadurch, es sei bejahend oder verneinend bestimmen. Die durchgängige Bestimmung ist folglich ein Begriff, den wir niemals in concreto seiner Totalität nach darstellen können" (ibid., B 601).

In other words, the individual is not given as an object of theoretical knowledge in the perspective of the "world of description," but as a point of reference for ethical attitudes in the "world of appreciation" (Royce 1892, Chapter 12). In order to avoid a dualistic misunderstanding, it should, however, be immediately noted that the theoretical insights of the "world of description" are not separable from the perspective of the "world of appreciation"; rather, they must be interpreted under its set of presuppositions: "Hence, the World of Description, taken by itself, is never the whole truth. It needs to be interpreted in terms of the World of Appreciation" (Royce 1901, 156). That's why the individual person emerges primarily as object of the practical attitude of "love" (Marcel 1956, Chapter 3), but also of "hope," "desire," and "will," (Royce 1899, 297) which are all implied in the relation of love.<sup>6</sup> The reverse, however, cannot be claimed. Against this background, we strive to be uniquely related to what Royce calls the whole as the "Inbegriff" of possible meaning: "*to be is to be uniquely related to a whole*" (Auxier 2013, 46).

Taking the ethical and epistemic dimension together, it seems obvious to characterize the human condition very fundamentally by a negative factor, by something that is lacking, whereby the missing element itself functions as a productive resource. To assess this finding properly, it is essential to keep the hidden logical architecture in view. In his late article on "Negation" Royce distinguishes two kinds of negative relations. Fundamentally, there is the reciprocal, symmetric "not-relation" that holds between a "proposition and its contradictory" (Royce 2001a, 94): if A is not B, then B is not A. As we have just seen, this form of

negation is foundational for the theory of determination. Yet it does not by itself exhaust the terrain Royce addresses. The relevant field is shaped by "not-relations" that are non-symmetric and that occur not only in dyadic, but also in more complex relational structures. Lacking something, in this sense, is a second type of "not-relations." From the mere fact that A is not B and B is not A, the lack evidently carries a positive quality, since its fulfillment is the aim of a desired action (ibid., 100). This additional determination, which is far more complex, rests on the fact that the symmetrical kind of negation does not appear in isolation, but rather in contexts where it functions as an implicate of evaluative practices. Against this backdrop, it can be seen that the "negativity" (Royce 1892, 230) in the fabric of existence is not simply a symmetric form of negation; rather, it comprises asymmetrical structures that, in diverse modalities and contexts, cause unrest, irritation, and generate conflict, which in turn drive thought and action productively beyond their own factual situation. This is an insight that Royce finds primarily in Hegel and Schopenhauer and which he appropriates in his own creative way. In his 1892 lectures on modern philosophy, he says: "The spiritual life isn't a gentle or an easy thing. It is indeed through and through and forever paradoxical, earnest, enduring, toilsome; yes, if you like, painfully tragic" (ibid.). This basic idea is expressed in various ways in Royce's understanding of the human condition: In anthropological terms, we are fundamentally "needy creatures" (Royce 1912 11); in epistemic terms, we are defined by what is meant by the concepts of "narrowness" and "ignorance"; and in ethical terms, we are, among others, in conflict with our own "selfishness," so that some interpreters even argue that Royce understands ethical subjects as "moral failures" (Tunstall 2021, 93–108).

The list of attributes could easily be continued. But even without doing so, we have gained some coordinates that allow us to interpret Royce's ethics functionally as a strategy to deal with conflict and crisis. It articulates a perspective of hope whose pragmatic orientation is

<sup>6</sup> When we speak of love, we articulate both a desire (*eros*) and a volitional decision directed toward the other (*agape*). It is also tied to hope, because love looks to the future and desires a good that is not yet present.

evident in its position between resignation—the path of Schopenhauer—and optimism—the path of Hegel. Royce takes a middle ground between them. In this regard, I would like to examine some features of the ethical standpoint more closely, bearing in mind that the existential mode of wandering furnishes the frame of reference, a frame that remains operative in ethics as well.

### III. Managing the Human Condition: Loyalty

As has already been evident in the foregoing considerations, Royce contends that we each strive to become an individually determined self. The self is not realized at a specific moment, but is an ongoing ethical task grounded in the experience that the complete meaning of our concrete being is something we lack. What this means Royce has repeated across numerous writings, reaching into his late Oeuvre. Throughout these various versions, a core thesis is discernible, one that he first elaborates in his early articles and later more systematically in *The World and the Individual*. It states: “From this point of view, the Self is not a Thing, but a Meaning embodied in a conscious life” (Royce 1901, 269). In following the theses’ articulation, it becomes apparent that the formulation “a Meaning embodied in a conscious life” is to be understood, in Royce’s sense, as the formation of a life-plan: “By this meaning of my life-plan . . . I am defined and created a Self” (ibid., 276). This further reinforces that the self is to be understood as the temporal totality in which the formation of a life-plan proceeds. Royce contends that this formation is directed toward the establishment of a “unity of life” (Royce 1908, 341).

Taken in itself, this thesis may invite us to reflexively subject it to the well-known postmodern critique of conceptual devices of closure in which unity-concepts of various kinds occupy a prominent position. Regardless of how the moments of truth in this critique are assessed, Royce’s thesis would be misconstrued if one ascribed to it a naïve closing function concerning the openness

and plurality of experience. As we will see, it functions in a different way since it primarily opens up a horizon of problems rather than dogmatically asserting any fixed concept of unity. Royce’s starting point is not unity but the opposite of it. It is, for example, the experience of a disordered diversity of sensations and impressions, or the driving forces of a capricious desire that leads to all kinds of object choices, from wild to absurd, or it is the experience of a permanent conflict between different demands that all want to assert themselves at the same time. The fictional starting point is therefore a kind of psychological, epistemic, or ethical anarchy, i.e., a deeply critical constellation in which the structures of possible orders of conduct either are completely lacking or are still *in status nascendi*, in a state of infancy, so to speak: “every one of us is, ‘by nature’, a mass of contradictions” (Clendenning 1970, 549). With this concession in mind, Royce nevertheless advances a premise that can certainly be debated: that we do not wish to remain in such a diffuse and contradictory constellation, but rather we want to organize its aspects within an ordered schema. The felt lack thereby constitutes a motivating factor for transcending it. Thus, the so-called “unity of life” seems to be an elementary practical and theoretical “need.”

The question of the strategies that are needed in order to deal with this situation constructively is therefore not just a theoretical one. Whatever the complete answer may be, it will always involve acts that reduce complexity by synthesizing the various aspects of the experience at hand, thereby organizing them into unities of meaning. Such a synthesis may take the form of a judgment and consists of what Royce calls “insight,” more precisely understood as “unity of many facts in one whole” (Royce 1912, 5). One might think of the classical form of judgment, in which the so-called “whole” is constituted by the conjunction of subject and predicate. Royce is likely to draw on this classical notion, though his concept of “insight” is more complex. It comprises three features: “breadth of range, coherence and unity of view,

and closeness of personal touch.” (ibid., 5f.). Orientation of conduct, of thought and action, would probably not be possible if it were not directed toward processes in which a sense of the meaningful structure of existence emerges and is transformed into an insight with a concrete meaning. It should be emphasized that the act of synthesis, by which the complexity of the given situation is substantially reduced, exceeds empirical facts, for it frames the situation within a structure not supplied by the contradictory aspects of actual experience and, in the contending dynamics, introduces an ideal, unifying element.

The notion of a life plan exemplifies this, since it presupposes that the diversity of experiential flow is continually organized into a form bearing the contour of a coherent “plan,” thereby constituting the ideal function of unification that surpasses mere factual multiplicity, – the production of an autobiography or a curriculum vitae would be impossible without it. In any case, acting in this way is a need: “We need to give life meaning, to know and control ourselves, to end the natural chaos, to bring order and light into our deeds, to make the warfare of natural passions subordinate to the peace and power of the spirit. This is our need. To live thus is our ideal” (ibid., 31). Note the justificatory structure. In a pragmatist style, Royce does not offer an ultimate grounding for his thesis; instead, he appeals to the practical needs that mark human beings’ interest in a reliable orientation to the world. It is well known that Royce’s systematic treatment of this topic can be found in his theory of loyalty and community. And even within these contexts, the basis for justification stays the same: Loyalty “is founded ... upon a study of man’s own inner and deeper needs” (Royce 1911, 68). I won’t go into it in detail here, but I will very briefly highlight two points:

(1) Considerations of loyalty – which is generally understood as “*willing and practical and thoroughgoing devotion of a person to a cause*” (Royce 1908, 16f.) – assume that, taken on its own, the individual would be at the mercy of deeply conflicting impulses. It only becomes an eth-

ical subject in a multi-stage process of loyalty formation, which is in principle a social process: (a) It is fundamental that the subject perceives itself in the light of the perspectives of others and determines itself practically based on these perceptions. This finds its elementary expression in the behavior of imitation, to which Royce devotes numerous studies.<sup>7</sup> (b) Under this assumption, forms of loyalty emerge that more or less resemble conventional morality. Here the bond to others mostly remains uncritical and external to one’s own reflected choice. For example, one belongs to a political party or a church without inquiring into whether one genuinely believes what is said and done. (c) Only in the reflective, critical, and active “devotion” to a “cause” does the subject constitute itself as genuinely ethical. This has to do with a fact that Royce very briefly indicates in a letter to his colleague Frank Thilly. There he assumes that the principle “loyalty to loyalty” is not on the same level as, for example, the formulation “justice to justice,” since it is intrinsically linked to “the very essence of self-consciousness” (Clendenning 1970, 533). This statement is important since it draws attention to the fact that the formation of genuine loyalty should not be reduced to its normative dimensions but should also be taken in its descriptive functions as referring to the emergence of self-consciousness itself. In my reading this indicates that the structure of loyalty expresses the structure of self-consciousness, and, conversely, that the latter expresses the former. Royce’s statement thus denotes the process by which subjects project themselves toward another whom they are not, and through this ongoing relation they successively discover their practical identity. Viewing things this way is natural to the matter, since for Royce the ethical formation of the self is fundamentally bound to its relation to a cause that is always a social reality, even if it’s just a relation between two persons, like in the case of friendship or a love relationship. Only in active appropriated relations to others, whose

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<sup>7</sup> Cf. Kegley 2008, 145–147.

contexts must be expanded further and further to finally include the “ideal community,” it is possible to become an ethical subject and to interpret reality as being organized in different kinds of order.

From this it is clear, that a central function of loyalty, in both ethical and epistemic terms, is to bind the individual to a cause and thereby establish a practical reference point toward which the various impulses and desires can be focused. The resulting unification of the disparate is thus to be conceived as processual on one hand and as grounded in the commitment to the pertinent matter of the cause on the other. In an existentialist register, one may even claim that practical engagement constitutes the only mode through which the unity of the life plan is realized within the temporal flow. Its unity is not given; it is “an ideal to be attained by hard work,” formed in the course of a “struggle for unity” (Royce 1908, 124).

Apart from practical engagement and its inherent struggles, there are no means by which a coherent self can be developed. So, it is apparent that the ethics of loyalty does not rest on a dogmatic notion of unity; rather, it should be understood as a kind of art that encompasses the skills required to lead a life as a temporally extended practical synthesis—a synthesis of the ever-changing aspects of the stream of individual and social experience. As a form of art, loyalty-oriented practice is concerned with (a) identifying and (b) creatively promoting tendencies that render the diffuse diversity of reality in more or less coherent orders, and with transforming the conflicts among competing ethical standards – virtue, duty, happiness – into cooperative relations (Royce 2001b, 147), thereby fostering a higher level of unity among them: “Loyalty, again, *tends* [my italics] to unify life, to give it center, fixity, stability.” (ibid., 22). Moreover, from the perspective of loyalty as an art, it is evident that the logic of Royce’s ethics cannot be reduced to deductive inferences alone. Considering Peirce, one might argue that, even within ethical methodology, abductive, inductive, and deductive inferences constitute a logical cycle. The art of loyalty must

draw on all phases of this cycle. I fear, however, that the initial and most creative abductive phase, which the late Peirce likens to the playful attitude of musement, is not given sufficient weight in Royce. I will revisit this, but first one must ask how the existential mode of wandering is inscribed in the process of loyalty formation. For one thing is sure: loyalty cannot claim a separate realm of existence for itself that bears no marks of wandering.

(2) If it is true that – as Royce stated in his letter to Thilly – “the very essence of self-consciousness” is expressed in loyalty that has become reflected, then this has an important consequence. It means that the paradoxical, crisis-ridden structure of our being-in-the-world cannot simply be eliminated by the strategies of ethics. Such a claim would amount to a contradiction. If, indeed, loyalty and the structure of consciousness are mutually corresponding notions, and if, likewise, the structure of self-consciousness is marked by something that is lacking, is inevitably fraught with conflict and is susceptible to crises, then loyalty cannot be understood as the complete elimination of crisis and conflict. As we have seen, the formation of loyalty is a necessary strategy for grappling with the ethical trials of the human condition; it acts to transform conflict into cooperation, struggle into peace, and to narrow perspectives into a broader view, at once on individual and social levels. But this does not mean, that it can escape the matrix of finite existence, for which the process of wandering with its in-between mode of being is constitutive. Against this backdrop, the achieved cooperation, peace, and breadth of view are not only contextually limited; they are further shaped by the traces of former struggles and may serve as occasions for future crisis. They are, in short, provisional. Thus, the link between loyalty formation and the crisis-prone texture of existence is subtler than a simple and one-sided negation of elimination, as Royce writes: “There could not be loyalty in a world where the loyal being himself met no adversities that personally belonged to and entered his own inner life” (Royce 1912, 253).

Finally, I will briefly deepen this statement with respect to the relation between the moral distinction of good and evil. Drawing this distinction rests on the general premise that the ethical life unfolds within a logical framework in which positive and negative elements are integrally bound. Accordingly, nothing pertaining to ethical life exists whose determinations do not first require development from a counter-concept, and the determinations of that counter-concept are thus constitutive moments of the self in its pursuit of concrete individuality. Within this framework, affirmative and negative propositions are not autonomous categories but interdependent, paired elements of discourse (Royce 2001a, 95). Royce makes this point very clearly in his first major work, *The Religious Aspect of Philosophy*. There we read: “The moral insight condemns the evil that it experiences; and in *condemning and conquering this evil it forms and is, together with the evil, the organic total that constitutes the good will*. . . . The good act has its existence and life in the transcending of experienced present evil” (Royce 1885, 434). For Royce – and in contrast to some representatives of the so-called analytic ethics – the good is not a foundational term immune to further analysis. The good is instead a term that can be analyzed; concretely, its scope includes all aspects of experienced evil that the good will seeks to overcome or has already overcome. Put differently, the logical elements of the concept of the good necessarily incorporate corresponding elements of the concept of evil, so the meaning of the former can be developed only by integrating the relevant semantic dimensions of the latter. In this fashion, Royce transforms the abstract opposition between “good” and “evil” into a hierarchically interwoven relationship.

Proceeding in this way serves both hermeneutic and logical functions: The hermeneutic function is that we can understand the so-called evil only, if at all possible, when we are able to integrate its phenomena into broader meaning-structures. An action is, for example, not characterizable as “evil” unless it can be construed as such

within a comprehensive evaluative context. Yet that is not all. The decisive logical claim is that Royce posits a “logical necessity” of certain forms of evil for the growth of ethical and religious insight, which he, for example, labels “sorrows.”<sup>8</sup> The background architecture seems plain: it is only through the negative that the determinations of the positive are realizable. Theologically, one might even utter that “the divine will also must be made perfect through suffering” (Royce 1912, 253). The same truth surely holds for the ethical self. Applying this approach to the discourse of loyalty, the initial expectation is confirmed: the more enlightened and more comprehensive forms of loyalty are precisely those that strive to overcome, or have already overcome, its opposite, which threatens to disrupt them. It may even be said that the more enlightened and comprehensive forms of loyalty are the more strenuous or even the more wounded forms. Anyhow, their “struggle for unity” appears to be more severe than in other cases. The unity of the self, which develops as the practical synthesis of one’s life-plan gets realized in the flow of time, can thus be achieved only through conflict and, as a specific stage in the ongoing process of “wandering.” It remains inherently provisional. In other words, whatever stage one reaches could, and likely will, give rise to new crises and conflicts.

#### IV. Conclusion

We see, that on the one hand, Royce conceives his ethics as a strategy for dealing with the precariousness of the human condition; on the other hand, however, the art of loyalty does not eliminate this characteristic of the human condition, it rather develops its determinations by relentlessly struggling with and working through actual conflicts and crises – and for Royce it is clear that no particular form of loyalty at a given moment can exhaust the

<sup>8</sup> To speak of “sorrow” is, according to Royce, already an assimilation and idealization of the experienced event. Cf. Royce, Josiah. 1912. *The Sources of Religious Insight*. New York: Charles Scribner’s Son: 239f.

semantic potential of the general concept. That seems to be why he needs the notion of the Absolute as a kind of hidden logical function that is presupposed in our ways of dealing with the particular syntheses of meaning we realize in our individual and social lives. From what I have said it appears that Royce, unlike James, does not tolerate “moral holidays.” Reading his works one may rather get the impression of a picture of human existence as a persistent, restless, and often strenuous engagement with reality – a view which, at least in this regard, resembles to that of existentialism. In any case, the handling of the ethical task of loyalty formation seems to permit no interruption, neither individually nor socially.

If this interpretation is correct, it may account for the fact why Royce does not systematically develop the function of abductive inference in his art of loyalty. As his expositions repeatedly indicate, he assumes that the exercise of an art occurs within the medium of the imagination and requires creativity. A precondition for creativity in all kinds of activity, however, are mental states in which deliberate, intentional action is bracketed, interrupted, or deferred. Such states may be described as a form of cognitive hovering, or playfulness, as Peirce discusses in his famous treatment of musement. Now, Royce is well acquainted with the phenomenon of play, but he treats it almost exclusively from the perspective of psychology oriented to childhood.<sup>9</sup> Nonetheless, the processes at work in play can be understood in a more categorical sense and therefore apprehended as a distinct attitude toward reality, which is not confined to a particular developmental stage. If one follows this line, it would lead to a much tighter integration of the relations between ethics and aesthetics than Royce himself allows, a methodological weakness about which he was well aware.<sup>10</sup>

<sup>9</sup> Cf. Royce, Josiah. 1903. “*Outlines of Psychology. An Elementary Treatise with some Practical Applications.*” New York: Macmillan Co.: 319–342.

<sup>10</sup> Cf. Royce’s letter to Richard Cabot from June 1912, in: Oppenheim, Frank M.; Bristol, S.J. (ed.). 2001. “*Late Writings of Josiah Royce.*” Vol.1. (Bristol: Thoemmes Press, 2001), 20f.

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