

Jacquelyn Ann K. Kegley

*Josiah Royce in Focus*¹, Indiana University Press, Bloomington, 2008, pp. 214.

Jaquelyn Ann K. Kegley's² book, *Josiah Royce in Focus*, is well written, competently arranged, and worthy of being recommended to all those who have some interest in the philosophy of one of America's classic philosophers, Josiah Royce (1855-1916). The present book confirms³ that she is one of top scholars on Royce. Her book profoundly investigates Royce's thought and panoramically covers almost all its aspects—I say "almost," because the practical thought (ethics, psychology, the self, religion, community, interpretation, philosophy of loyalty, provincialism) rather than theoretical (metaphysics, ontology, epistemology, logic) is on the agenda—, all presented in six long, although not too long, chapters. Most importantly, however, she introduces Royce to those who do not know him as yet and, simultaneously, stimulates those who are already familiar with Royce to re-think his output and look at it afresh, that is from the perspective of new times and new challenges. Below, I would like to present some effects of this stimulation on me and, instead of presenting a "classical" review of the book, I shall share with you some reflections as regards the Royce I have found in Kegley's book. Thus, while reading this book, I was especially sensitive to finding answers to the following questions: (I) How original is Royce and how much can we get from him in our dealing with present challenges and when facing present dilemmas? (II) How singular is, what he once called: "Absolute pragmatism," which, as Royce himself wrote, "differs from that of the pragmatists now most in vogue,"⁴ and whether it is an integral part of American pragmatism, sharing its main assumptions and aims so that it could be put side by side with the pragmatism of William James, John Dewey, George Herbert Mead, and other American pragmatists? (III) How much he (and, perhaps, some other representatives of the philosophical tradition of American pragmatism) is America's "national" philosopher or, to put it in other words, how much (his) pragmatism was intellectually stimulated and spiritually fueled by Americanism or the character of American civilization? If by much, we would have to have some reservations about the universality of such philosophies as pragmatism, at least in its ethical and social dimensions, because, being an articulation of the spirit of one culture, there is no reason to think that it should be implemented into other cultures, unless we take it for granted that it is *better* or *more accurate* in one sense or another.

(I) There are at least four types of perspective while re-reading the output of given author: (i) *ex post*, or from the point of view of today's challenges, (ii) *in statu nascendi*, or from the point of view of its origin and successive evolution till its fruition or completion, (iii) historically, or from the point of view of the epoch at which it was created, along with its in/direct dependencies from other trends and influences upon other movements, and (iv)

¹ Indiana University Press, Bloomington and Indianapolis 2008

² Jaquelyn Ann K. Kegley is Professor of Philosophy and Chair of the Philosophy Department at California State University, Bakersfield.

³ I say "confirms" because Kegley authored also *Genuine Individuals and Genuine Communities: A Roycean Public Philosophy*, Vanderbilt University Press, 1977, and numerous papers on Royce.

⁴ *The Basic Writings of Josiah Royce*. Edited by John McDermott. New York: Fordham University Press, 2005, p. 813.

analytical, or from the point of view of the internal meaning of the ideas articulated by the author's in his/her texts. Kegley skillfully implementing all of them, gives, it seems to me, a definite priority to the first one, and in her book she shows us how much we can get from Royce even now, and every so often on some pages she indicates his novelty in this or that area. Hence, we can learn from Kegley's book that Royce did, within the field of psychology, "new and significant work ahead of Freud (p. 22)"; as regards "the formation of general ideas" he is "a forerunner of phenomenology (p. 22)"; he influenced Peirce as regards "a close connection between logic and ethics (p. 27)"; next, five years prior to James, he wrote about the idea of a stream of consciousness (cf. p. 35); his ideas as regards neuroethics, in the context of memory, are quite contemporary (cf. p. 36); he anticipated ethnology and anthropology (cf. p. 38); and his historic-empirical approach towards religion is "akin to that of modern anthropology (p. 80)." Also, she quotes Frank M. Oppenheim by saying that Royce was "a forerunner of Harry Stack Sullivan's interpersonal approach to psychiatry and George Herbert Mead's gesture approach to social psychology (p. 26)." She also tells us that Royce anticipates phenomenology as regards time and knowledge of the external world (cf. p. 15); that his "ideas resonate well with the current concern for basing philosophical reflections on empirical matters arising out of the psychological and biological sciences (p. 21)"; and that his "views on abnormal consciousness and problems of the self, like his other psychological insights, are valuable to any study of self as well as to an understanding of social and ethical behavior in general (p. 26)"; and, as regards social and political philosophy, "one needs to explore in detail Royce's exposition of the 'conditions for achieving, maintaining, and enhancing a group's consciousness of the meaning of a genuine community (p. 26)'" ; the same is with the relationship between science and religion, on which his views could contribute much to the present debate about the conflict between them (cf. p. 137). In addition to that, she indicates the places in which Royce is more interesting and more profound than others; for example, she claims that his *Sources of Religious Insight* transcends in many ways James's *Varieties of Religious Experience* (cf. p. 86).

She also shows parallelisms with other contemporary thinkers, within pragmatism and outside of it; for example, she says that he developed "a notion of theory and hypothesis testing quite similar to that of Sir Karl Popper (p. 27)," she explains why his philosophy of religion resembles in many places Paul Tillich's thought (cf. pp. 67-72), she claims that the notion of a suffering God has parallels with Charles Hartshorne's process thought (cf. p. 74), and with Alfred North Whitehead, as regards some other aspects of process thought (cf. pp. 74-75).

Characteristically, the book is written with a strong affection for Royce as "a model philosopher (p. 136)," and a Master who can teach us, thinkers and philosopher, an unbiased and yet engaged approach to the problems we deal with today. For example, stressing his expertness on the history of philosophy she does not fail to add, that "[i]t is a travesty today how little contemporary philosophers are aware of this history (p. 17)," and while explaining Royce's awareness of his own methodological assumptions, she concludes: "[i]f only philosophers today were more alert to the assumptions of their methods (p. 47)"; likewise, by referring to Royce's remark that he deals with the history of mind in his *Outlines of Psychology*, rather than with metaphysical issues, Kegley comments: "[o]ne only wishes contemporary psychologists, especially neuropsychologists, would express such caution (p. 25)." In a broader context, namely with Royce's comparing of Australia to California, and his stating that the Australians see the state in commercial terms, rather than philanthropic, she immediately comments: "[t]his observation, I believe, can provide much insight for contemporary politics in America (p. 114)." She uses this method very frequently and on

various occasions. All this makes Royce a living person and philosopher in an old style, that is an exemplary, an authority figure and a sage—rather than an expert in a specific branch of science—, whose ideas and suggestions are not outdated at all. All this attracts Royce to the readers, even if some of them would think about these associations, comparisons, and parallelisms as being too numerous. This is also a part of the issue I touch upon in point II, namely the specificity and singularity of Royce’s philosophy. One can have a feeling that Kegley prefers to interpret Royce as a bridge builder, that is someone who produced a philosophy, which is deep and broad enough to be studied now by many scholars coming from various philosophical schools and many readers coming from sundry backgrounds. She avoids, it seems to me, presenting it as having strictly delineated borders and having definite assumptions.

(II) As regards the second issue, that is the singularity of Royce, I find his Absolute pragmatism underestimated, and his pragmatism overestimated. Royce, in Kegley’s book has been unreservedly included into the camp of pragmatism. Thus, Kegley writes that, “[f]rom the outset, Royce is a pragmatist, but more akin to Peirce than to James and Dewey (p. 14),” although, I have a feeling, that the book shows the Deweyan character of Roycean pragmatism by the special significance put on social issues (building genuine community). She adds, that he “was more empirically based than most of his contemporaries who often dismissed his thought, falsely perceiving his work as that of an abstract idealist (p. 21, cf. p. 67).” Kegley does not mention names, but, let me notice, from my side, that there are some eminent and “classic” historians of philosophy, coming from various philosophical backgrounds, who unreservedly place Royce in the camp of idealism, for example: Frederic Copleston (*History of Philosophy*, vol. 8), B. A. G. Fuller (*History of Philosophy*, vol. 2), Wladyslaw Tatarkiewicz (*History of Philosophy*, vol. 3), and Bruce Kuklick (*A History of Philosophy in America 1720-2000*). It is worthy of notice here, that John Dewey, in “The Development of American Pragmatism,” does not mention Royce as a pragmatist, nor does it H. S. Thayer in his *Pragmatism. The Classical Writings*. Additionally, let me cite George Santayana, Royce’s PhD student, who in a letter (1890) identified (earlier) Royce with idealism too, by saying that, “Royce last year annoyed me a good deal. I took a course he gave in Hegel’s *Phenomenologic* which was appalling, and he seemed to be bent on convincing me to absolute idealism *nolens volens*. But Royce, although sometimes such a bore, is a good and kind man, and very appreciative, and generous to me.”⁵

Without studying these opinions more at this place, let me just say that, in my humble opinion, which I elaborated elsewhere,⁶ a golden mean would be to talk about a philosophical tradition of American pragmatism, in which there would be enough space for Royce’s Absolute pragmatism as a singular system of thought (as well as for Ralph Waldo Emerson’s Transcendentalism, Peirce’s pragmaticism, James’s pragmatism, Dewey’s instrumentalism, Mead’s social interactionism, Richard Rorty’s neopragmatism, and others). Simply, there are some non-pragmatic ingredients in Royce, which make it impossible for me to merge Royce into the camp of the pragmatists (unless a part of the philosophical tradition of America pragmatism), and I will give three examples of this, one referring to the notion of value, the other to the notion of truth, and the third is the ontological status of the Spirit.

⁵ *The Letters of George Santayana. Book One [1868]-1909*, edited by William Holzberger, Cambridge and London: The MIT Press, 2001, p. 111.

⁶ Cf. Krzysztof Piotr Skowronski, *Values and Powers. Re-reading the Philosophical Tradition of American Pragmatism*, Amsterdam-New York: Rodopi, 2009.

First, I notice in his works attempts to understand values objectively, and even absolutely, and by „objective“ I do not mean, as Kegley seems to mean „inter-subjective,“ but rather „not dependent upon any agent.“ Royce, being a disciple (during his studies in Germany) of the fathers of axiology, or the philosophy of values (Rudolph Hermann Lotze and Wilhelm Windelband), must have known or “felt” well the categories crucial to the then philosophy of values, the objective (independent) status of values and their absolute (immutable) character in the first instance, although I will not prejudge at this place, how much Royce was dependent, if at all, on his German teachers. Thus, in *The Philosophy of Loyalty*, he suggests that without a direct reference to objective values, the very cause of loyalty would lack its weight, its fixity, its meaning, and its significance, and without man’s dedication to this worthy cause, the human lot would become pitiable. The cause to which we should be loyal ought to be worthy, good, supremely good, the best, and valuable. He deeply believed that a cause “does not get its value merely from your being pleased with it. You believe, to the contrary, that you love it just because of its own value, which it has by itself, even if you die. That is just why one may be ready to die for his cause.”⁷ This language was applied elsewhere; for example, in his “Pessimism and Modern Thought” he writes that the worth of life should be judged exclusively in reference to the goal and “[t]he goal has worth in itself.”⁸ I would see, at this point, Royce’s Absolute Pragmatism and its reference to values as independent, objective (non dependent upon any agent), and absolute (immutable and, perhaps, eternal) entities, and this, I think, cannot go with the pragmatism we know from James, Dewey, and Mead. An additional thing is, that, at least in my view, he was inconsistent in his philosophy of values by claiming, for example, that “[v]alues do indeed alter with the point of view.”⁹

Second, as regards the problem of truth, it seems un-pragmatic to devote so much intellectual attention to the avoidance of error; it is not that Royce devoted so much energy to the fight against error (and evil), instead of, as most pragmatists do, the fighting for the betterment and melioration. Rather, I have in mind his clear differentiation between error and truth as well as evil and good, which brings immediate association with an old style metaphysics, along with the consequences of these binaries. Namely, if the difference between error and truth is so important, it inevitably suggests that truth can be discovered, rather than invented, constructed, and agreed upon. Here, I should say, and Kegley would agree with me (cf. p. 16), Royce is closer to C. S. Peirce than to any other pragmatist; let me just remind you at this place, that Peirce recognized his difference with the pragmatists (especially James) at this point, and, after concluding that it was a big difference, he re-named his philosophy as pragmaticism.

This leads us to the third ingredient or aspect of Royce’s system of thought, which is ontology, and, more specifically, the ontological status of some of the “entities,” the Spirit in the first instance. It seems to me, that it is crucial to know what ontological and metaphysical position Royce has towards the status of ideas; whether he is Platonism/Hegelian oriented or naturalistic/pragmatism oriented. Is the Spirit and its character dependent (subjective) or independent (objective) on the human mind? What does Royce himself say on this issue? “This theory is,” Royce writes in *The Spirit*, and Kegley quotes this, “that the whole universe, including the physical world also, is essentially one living thing, a mind, one great Spirit, infinitely wealthier in his experiences than we are, but for that very reason to be comprehended by us in terms of our own wealthiest experience (p. 77).

⁷ Josiah Royce, *The Philosophy of Loyalty*, Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 1995, p. 11.

⁸ *Basic Writings*, p. 265.

⁹ Royce, *The Philosophy of Loyalty*, p. 38.

Kegley declares her appreciation of Royce philosophy taken in itself, not as a prophesy or an anticipation of ideas and trends in contemporary humanities, which I mentioned above. Thus, she writes: “I believe that Royce’s philosophy is of a rich, interconnected whole, and his work on metaphysics and epistemology, as well as of logic and philosophy of science, plays significant roles in comprehending that whole (p. 67).” However, Kegley does not discuss metaphysics in her book, saying that: “Royce’s metaphysics will not be discussed here, as others have provided an adequate overview of many of his metaphysical ideas (p. 67).” The problem is, however, that there Royce’s metaphysics/ontology is, as just said above, controversial and interpreted in different ways. It is, indeed, the work of the interpreter, as to which part of the interpreted output he or she chooses to be central. As I see it, Kegley joins a tendency for the interpretation of Royce which marginalizes the role of ontological and metaphysical issues and makes the social dimension of his (later) thought, as bridge building, as “[c]entral to his life and thought (p. 2),” be it amongst conflicting ideas, between scholarly disciplines, various races, and, perhaps most importantly, building communities of loyalty (cf. p. 129). It is not wrong at all, especially that she wants to see Royce as a sage, who encapsulated in his thought so many plots and insights. However, I have a feeling that Kegley reduces the specificity or singularity of Royce’s philosophy and allows his philosophy to dissolve completely in pragmatism—especially in the pragmatism as practiced by Dewey, Mead, and James—so that Royce’s pragmatism would be profounder, wiser, and more prophetic, and this, in fact, is its specificity and singularity. Even Royce’s Absolute pragmatism in its semiotic dimension does not seem close to Peirce, and has been reduced to a democratic interpretation of values and meanings (cf. p. 160).

Let me be more clear about this. I do not criticize Kegley, but rather I propose a different perspective; namely, I think that, as any eminent works of art, eminent philosophical systems of thought should, at least this is one of the ways of dealing with them, be cultivated and cherished in their uniqueness and originality. This does not preclude us from using some of their insights and apply them to the contemporary needs and challenges.

I pay attention to this not only from the point of view of the singularity of Royce’s thought. I pay attention to this also, because, as I do below (III), from the point of view of American culture, and the normative consequences of this. Namely, if the American pragmatists are accused, as they sometimes are, of vindicating and promoting their own national (American) tradition, then, Royce will be accused of the same. This, in turn, might blunt his philosophical message. If, however, he will be seen more universally and uniquely, then, he might avoid the lot of those pragmatists, who are accused of promoting Americanization by the imposition of American values, democracy in the first instance, into the cultures, which are, by nature and by tradition: non-democratic, non-egalitarian, and non-tolerant.

(III) As regards the third issue, that is Royce in the context of Americanism, I find Kegley’s remarks moderate and well balanced, although open to criticism by those, who would undermine the universality of Royce’s message. Classical pragmatism as America’s national philosophy is still an open issue; one may ask about the American context of pragmatist thought, and whether it articulated the spirit of the American people, and, looking at philosophy more broadly, whether nationality or culture is an important source of inspiration for many philosophies. Kegley’s seems to say yes to this, and says (cf. p. 2) that according to Royce, philosophy is national in significance. It is so, because, Royce’s idea of philosophy is to articulate a philosophy of life of the people living in a given place and given time. This gives way to thinking about whether classical pragmatism is not a form of America’s national philosophy in general. Indeed, Royce, for example, saw James’s philosophy (in “Wil-

liam James and the Philosophy of Life”) in this way, labeling James as “interpreter of the problems of the American people,”¹⁰ and saying that “[h]is form of pragmatism was indeed a form of Americanism in philosophy.”¹¹

Kegley’s interpretation of Royce is for sure American and democratic. Throughout her book she presents him as a bridge builder and tries to show us how helpful Royce’s thought can be in dialog and in avoiding conflict, by all people living in peace together. For example, Kegley writes, while discussing issues on ethics, that Royce’s philosophy can tell us “how best to deal with the conflicts between Western individualistic ethics and other views, such as the Confucian familial ethic (p. 46).” I am afraid, there has never been a clear conflict, if at all, between these two; according to the teaching of Confucius, the younger generation should obey and respect the moral and social rules of the elders in a similar way, in not even more strictly, as it took place in the traditional model of family in the West. On the other hand, while talking about religion, she presents her own opinion, according to which, [a]ll religions have work to do today to make their communities more inclusive and more loving (p. 159).” This, it seems to me, evokes more controversy. What, I imagine a representative of a traditional religion may ask is, if the essence of some religions is making communities more exclusive and more strenuous (to use Jamesean term) by cultivating their own specific traditions, perhaps, hundreds years old, even if they are described by those living in the contemporary West, as non-democratic and as non-tolerant? What, if the essence of these traditions is in doing everything to cultivate their own identity, by stressing the difference between them and the others in order to save the sense of self-identity of the members of the traditional group, who do not want to dissolve themselves in the ocean of Western culture?

I agree, and I have expressed this elsewhere,¹² that Royce’s hopes regarding the huge role of loyalty and provincialism are not as old fashioned as they might at first appear. Namely, today, we witness a strong tendency in Europe (and I think elsewhere, but especially in the European Union) to elevate the role of loyalty to one’s province and to one’s native region along with its traditions, language, habits, and customs. I wonder whether Royce’s reflections on the role of provincialism were not, to some degree, prophetic. Local patriotism, or loyalty to local traditions, is a significant current issue faced by many residents who recognize the specificity and the worth of their native province, and for whom this is a source of self-identity and pride. However, this concerns the provinces and loyalties in the democratic West. What, if the tradition of the provinces and the loyalties, is hierarchical, isolationistic, and oppressive? What if, according to these traditions, any sort of emigration, that is abandoning one’s native land (province, state, country) means betrayal? Then, the emigrants would be seen as the people who are disloyal to their traditions and countries by, instead of making their own countries better, leaving them and seeking a better lot elsewhere, and not contributing to the melioration of their native communities. According to the criteria provided by Royce himself, the emigrants who loved their native land, its tradition, culture, and spirit, and, for example, for selfish or egoistic reasons—and I talk about those who are not at the edge of extinction, but rather about those who want to make their lot better by emigrating to a richer country—should deserve being called traitors. If so, “maintaining historical ties to their culture” would be not be seen as “excellent job (p. 107),” as Kegley suggests, but, rather as a lack of patriotism, an abandonment of the country in need, and seen as giving up loyalty to the native tradition.

¹⁰ *Basic Writings*, p. 211.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 218.

¹² Cf. Skowronski, *Values and Powers*, Chapter Four.

Krzysztof Piotr Skowro•ski
Opole University, Poland