

Royce and Religious Naturalism

Royce e o Naturalismo Religioso

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Abstract: The purpose of this paper is to compare and contrast the orientation proposed by the American philosopher Josiah Royce, which puts an infinite, absolute, and saving consciousness at the center of religion and the orientation set forth by a broad range of thinkers who have developed and defended various forms of religious naturalism where it is nature fundamentally in the form of *natura naturans*, not a center of consciousness, that is the focal point of religious concerns. The paper examines the key features of Royce's notion of the Absolute and its relation to the three pivots of the religious problem as Royce saw it: an experienced *fault* lying at the heart of existence, a need for a *beloved community* of interpreters who would be loyal not just to one another but loyal to loyalty itself, and practices of *atonement* that would heal the broken world of human existence in time. I show how it is possible to reconstruct these pivots in religious naturalist terms: 'fault' can be reconstructed as the sense of 'creatureliness,' 'atonement' as 'healing the rift' in human existence by the 'free creation and preservation of values', and the 'beloved community' as a variety of interpretation communities open to the appearance of meaning and value in all the ways they emerge from *natura naturans*. Various ways of reconfiguring other elements of the Roycean position are also developed in the course of the paper.

Key words: Royce. Religious naturalism. *Natura naturans*. Donald Crosby. Schleiermacher. Immanence and transcendence. Absolute. Fault. Community. Atonement. Contingency. Pursuit of security.

Resumo: O objetivo deste artigo é comparar e contrastar a orientação proposta pelo filósofo americano Josiah Royce, que colocou uma consciência infinita, absoluta e salvadora no centro da religião e a orientação expôs a uma ampla classe de pensadores que desenvolveram e defenderam várias formas de naturalismo religioso no qual a natureza é fundamentalmente na forma de *natura naturans*, não um centro da consciência, sobre a qual recai o ponto focal da religião. O artigo examina o aspecto central da noção royceana de Absoluto e sua relação com os três pivôs do problema religioso tal como Royce o viu: uma falha experienciada que repousa no coração da existência, a necessidade de uma comunidade amorosa de intérpretes que seriam leais não apenas um a outro, mas leais a si mesmos, e práticas de redenção que curariam o mundo quebrado da existência humana no tempo. Eu mostro como é possível reconstruir estes pivôs em termos naturalistas religiosos: 'falha' pode ser reconstruída como o sentido de 'creaturalidade',

'redenção' como 'cura da cisão' na existência humana pela 'livre criação e preservação de valores', e a 'comunidade amorosa' como uma variedade de comunidades de interpretação abertas ao aparecimento de significado e valor sob todas as formas que emergem da natura naturans. Várias formas de reconfigurar outros elementos da posição royceana são também desenhadas ao longo do ensaio.

Palavras-chave: Royce. Naturalismo religioso. Natura naturans. Donald Crosby. Schleiermacher. Imanência e transcendência. Absoluto. Falha. Comunidade. Redenção. Contingência. Busca por segurança.

Religious naturalism is a multifaceted attempt to establish the *religious* and not just metaphysical ultimacy of nature. It has a long historical lineage spanning an arc from Taoism, Confucianism, and Zen Buddhism in the East to the Stoics, Giordano Bruno, Spinoza, Schelling, Emerson, Dewey, and others in the West.¹ It offers a direct challenge, on many levels, to the philosophical approach proposed by Josiah Royce in the works of his high maturity and raises questions about at least their descriptive adequacy.² By clearly and emphatically accepting the religious ultimacy

- 1 There is a large literature on religious naturalism, understood in the broad sense in which I am using the term in the present paper, which allows considerable difference in detail while still affirming in various ways the ultimacy of 'nature.' I would like to mention in particular as especially strong developments of the issues the work of Donald Crosby (2002, 2008), Jerome Stone (1992, 2009), Loyal Rue (2000, 2911), and Michael Hogue (2010). They have rich bibliographical resources.
- 2 Frank M. Oppenheim (1987, 2005) has devoted works of careful scholarship to the religious dimensions of Royce's work. They evaluate the religious adequacy of Royce's work in a way quite different from the one put forward in this paper. But, strangely enough, Royce is criticized sharply by Oppenheim himself and, indeed, from a theological position that Royce himself was not able or willing to accept or even saw as the further consequence and implication of the religious vision he himself proposed in the works of his high maturity. In his (1987) Oppenheim states the Royce was "a victim of religious malnutrition" (p. 315) fundamentally because he did not participate in the Eucharist, have a proper recognition of the historical person of Jesus and his mother, and did not insist upon a clear institutional embodiment of the Beloved Community, which remains essentially invisible, and which would be a kind of normative, if not exclusive, carrier of the meanings and affective attitudes of his intellectual vision. It appears to me that Royce's notion of an interpretation community is in itself quite general and does not have, or have to have, any one legitimate and legitimating institutional form or structure with the power of enforcing a belief system. Royce's religious, even 'mystical,' practice of reading the scriptures and discussing them with friends, however, which Oppenheim rightly affirms and approves of, is of course quite similar to the great practice of 'spiritual reading' or 'lectio divina' of the Catholic tradition.

In general, I think that Oppenheim has presented, in addition to an admirable account of Royce's substantive positions, a kind of high church critique of a Roycean set of intellectually informed non-church practices. It is clearly not enough, as Oppenheim is inclined to do, to trace Royce's institutional indifference to his own relatively impoverished religious background. Royce's time in Germany would have opened up to him institutional forms of great intellectual sophistication and religio-aesthetic depth. In an important way, Royce was, and remained, a non-conformist in the deepest sense. Maybe he would even

of nature, religious naturalism, in its non-theistic forms, denies that a properly *religious* consciousness needs to assert a personal, transcendent, and universal ground to the universe, the central thesis of a Roycean philosophy of religion centered on the Absolute, as well of the ‘classical’ and ‘neoclassical’ theisms of the Western philosophical tradition. Religious naturalism’s defining claim is that there is no need, *from a religious point of view*, to demand a focal point ‘outside’ the world or nature to which we owe religious allegiance. Even the pantheistic version of religious naturalism, with which we will not be explicitly concerned here, takes great pains to try to reconcile the tensions of ‘inside’ and ‘outside.’ Nature, on the pantheistic side, is likewise not to be reduced to a mere playground of the Absolute or a staging for another, more important, play. Nor is the Absolute to be restricted to functioning as impassible spectator of the cosmic drama.³

Royce’s two-pronged philosophy of religion involves a constructive *redescription* of the pivotal forms of religious consciousness and a metaphysical *argument* for the necessity of the Absolute. Religious naturalism involves the same type of constructive redescription but wants to replace the Absolute with some variation of the core notion of *natura naturans*, which it derives from a revised descriptive and empirical metaphysics. Religious naturalism, just as theism, grows out of both religious and metaphysical concerns. The religious concerns are rooted in the dimension of natural piety and in the need to find fundamental forms of affective attunement to the ultimate forces of the cosmos. The metaphysical concerns are rooted in an intellectual demand to determine the proper conceptual scheme for making the ultimate cuts at the significant joints of world process. Cosmic feeling and cosmic wonder, existential attunement and philosophical demand, drive the religious enterprise. Heart and head—*cor et intellectus*—are the dynamic matrices within which religious naturalism has evolved. It quiets the restless heart and satisfies the inquiring mind while remaining receptive to all the novelties that an open-ended world process has to offer (and will offer).⁴

Roycean philosophy of religion offers strong and detailed proposals for satisfying heart and mind in an ultimate manner—and attempts to tell us just what this satisfac-

agree with Emerson’s laconic remarks in “Self-Reliance: “I like the silent church before the service begins, better than any preaching,” that is, a place of prayer in the sense of “the contemplation of the facts of life from the highest point of view” (EMERSON, 1992: 145 and 147). Of course, a physical church is not the only locus where these contemplative practices can be performed. They could be performed in a Greek temple, a library, a concert hall, on Monte Subasio, or above the ruins of Tintern Abbey. See Ray Billington (2002) for a fine collection of examples.

- 3 This is the great contrast between pantheism, or Neo-classical theism, in its multiple forms and the classical theism developed, and attacked, in the high philosophical tradition. The work of Charles Hartshorne, David Ray Griffin, John Cobb, Robert Mesle, Lewis Ford, and John W. Cooper on pantheism give differing approaches to, and evaluations of, pantheism. The paradigmatic formulation of classical theism is found in the exquisitely analytical texts of Thomas Aquinas and all the subsequent commentaries on and emendations of them.
- 4 Donald Crosby has explored the issue of novelty in his 2005. There is, of course, a large literature on creativity, especially in the present context dealing with its role in binding together Eastern and Western approaches to the relations between immanence and transcendence.

tion would consist in. Its main lines are well known and they both inform as well as derive from Royce's eloquent and extended analyses of both 'the religious problem' and 'the problem of Christianity.' First of all, human beings, not just philosophical theologians, Royce says, are in "need of salvation." As Royce put it in the *Sources of Religious Insight* (hereafter *SRI*), "Unless you have inwardly felt the need of salvation and learned to hunger and thirst after spiritual unity and self-possession, all the rest of religious insight is to you a sealed book" (p. 33). Salvation here points to an overcoming of an experienced deep 'fault' in one's existential condition, exemplified in a profound 'unknowing' of life's ultimate standard, meaning, and upshot. Further, for Royce, human beings are also 'lost' without their belonging to a community, indeed a 'beloved community' that offers the effective conditions for overcoming their existential and intellectual aloneness. They must share not just a system of appropriate affects, bonded to identical 'objects,' but an interpretation system, with its pivotal concerns and deep symbols. But, Royce points out, the deepest of symbols is also a goad to action and to deeds, which overcome the fault and the separation that mark the finite condition of individuals and communities. These deeds are deeds of 'atonement,' of healing all the forms of 'not-belonging-together' that constantly challenge us, and of committing ourselves to the deep logic of loyalty that will shape, motivate, and sustain a universal beloved community (not just of religious inquirers).

Religion in its highest realizations, Royce's fundamental focus, aims to fulfill the demand for completeness and wholeness in these three aspects on both the experiential and intellectual levels. These levels correspond to the personal and the cosmic dimensions or axes that Donald Crosby has distinguished in his *Interpretive Theories of Religion* (1981) and *A Religion of Nature* (2002; hereafter *RN*). Royce's approach to religion is also double-sided in another sense. Looking backward, philosophy is to learn essential lessons from religion by examining the sources of religious insight and their points of intersection with universal human problems, encapsulated in the three pivots around which religious insight turns: *fault, community, atonement*. Looking forward, however, philosophy will not take on their own terms the answers offered by religion, no matter what their claim to authoritativeness or historical predominance. But the relation is very complicated. A coherent and universal philosophical position, which Royce spent his whole life trying to work out, has to be religiously adequate, to speak to our deepest religious concerns. But our fundamental religious commitments have to be philosophically interpreted. Religion judges philosophy for pertinence and scope. Philosophy judges religion for existential and intellectual adequacy and validity.⁵

Roycean philosophy of religion is haunted, indeed obsessed, with the dream of an existential and intellectual safe-harbor that will redeem the misery of immanence. The misery of immanence for Royce is a mysterious fate, but for religious naturalism immanence is an adventure. Redemption, for Royce, must come 'from above,' from a 'supernatural' sphere of transcendence that has personal form.⁶ Religious naturalism

5 KEGLEY, 2008 is especially clear about this, dealing with the relation between experience and thought in precise and flexible fashion.

6 Oppenheim criticizes in his 2005 the kind of naturalist epistemology that excludes a kind of interruptive 'revelation' with cognitive content from an 'other world' that would be

performs redemptive acts, but ‘expects’ no redemption from ‘above’. True religion, for Royce, is the acceptance of this supernatural sphere and true philosophy is its affirmation and clarification. Religious naturalism, however, rejects the supernatural, and true philosophy strides into the Infinite by moving *within* the finite in all directions (Goethe).

While it has been said that Royce modified the extreme monism of his early works, where finite selves are fragments of the Absolute, in favor of recognizing the ontological reality of individual selves, which is certainly his position in *The Sources of Religious Insight* and *The Problem of Christianity* (hereafter *PC*), there is nevertheless a monism of ultimate meaning and ultimate value in Royce. He resolutely holds the doctrine “that the whole process of the temporal order is the progressive expression of a single spiritual meaning” (*PC* 389). Religious naturalism, looking at world process with sober but not despairing eyes, rejects the notion that the process of the universe has a single spiritual meaning, assuming this could be empirically established. What it sees are multiple orders of meaning and multiple meanings of order. Donald Crosby, whose approach relies on a descriptive, not a prescriptive, empirical metaphysics derived from Dewey and Whitehead, has pointed to the “world’s irreducible plurality” (*RN* 33), the “multiple orders of nature” (*RN* 33), and the distinctive “incommensurabilities among these orders” (*RN* 33). Indeed, he strongly affirms, on pragmatist and process philosophy grounds, that for a religious (and hence philosophical) naturalist there is “no such thing as ‘the’ order of nature” (*RN* 33). Nature is an order of orders or, thinking of nature as *natura naturans*, a dynamic open-ended *ordering* of orders.

The message of religion for Royce, however, is that the single spiritual meaning, which in one sense we have to discover, not only is, but must be, guaranteed in advance. It seems to function as a postulate, not a theorem. Religious naturalism, for its part, lives without guarantees. For the truly religious, in Royce’s conception, the temporal order cannot ultimately fail to realize this spiritual meaning. It is, for Royce, not so much ‘foreseen’ as ‘eternally or everlastingly seen’ by the Absolute. The Absolute as ‘Foreseer’ or ‘Everseer’ is the pivot of the Roycean approach. The Absolute is described in cognitive, intellectualist terms. It is a “world-possessing insight” (*SRI* 113), an “inclusive insight” without which “there is no world” (*SRI* 113). Indeed, “the whole world belongs to it and is its object and essence” (*SRI* 113). It is this inclusive insight that constitutes “a heaven that overarches us” (*SRI* 113). This insight is “all-judging.” It is an “all-seeing view,” indeed, an “all-seeing comprehension of facts as they are” (*SRI* 114).⁷ Royce asks, in a most revealing question, “Is not recognition of

needed to guide humanity on the road to ‘salvation’ and ‘enlightenment.’ But it is clear that the pragmatists whose relations to Royce he charts in great detail do not have the same position nor start from the same paradigmatic, generative experiences. But it should be acknowledged that the Roycean approach is scarcely ‘orthodox’ and in fact takes it upon itself to judge religious concepts for their heuristic fertility and scope. In fact, all of the interlocutors engaged in *Reverence for the Relations of Life* speak in their own philosophical voices. Religion for them, and the forms of religious consciousness, are reconstructed and reinterpreted, precisely what Royce himself does and what I am doing here.

- 7 Frederick Ferré in his *Being and Value* (2001), while defending a Whiteheadian personalistic organicism, nevertheless rejects the necessity of a cosmic integrator. This is precisely one of the pivotal differences between the Roycean postulate and a naturalistic philosophical theology of intrinsically immanent relations.

an all-seeing insight, as something real, not in itself calming, sustaining, rationalising” (SRI 134)? For Royce we are ourselves, however one wants to ultimately interpret the situation, fragments of such an insight, partial realizations of what, in the term, would be a final worldview.

While we cannot avoid undergoing all the experiences of pain and loss that mark the temporal order, which can even involve the wish for utter self-annihilation and the temptation to despair, these are, in the last analysis, parts of the realization of the postulated single spiritual meaning of cosmic process. Philosophy’s job is to tell us how this could be so. It is a kind of *apologia pro vita sua* of the Absolute, realized in thought. Religion’s job is to enable us to participate effectively and affectively in the overcoming of these deep faults in the temporal order, to ‘redeem the time’. On the religious naturalist position, however, philosophy’s job is to describe and analyze the multiple meanings of cosmic process and to explore their religious implications. It does not make apologies for the ways of the universe.

Royce’s approach to religion seems to presuppose, indeed to demand, the reality and metaphysical and religious ultimacy of the Absolute. The religious naturalist position does not presuppose but concludes to the metaphysical and religious ultimacy of nature, understood as *natura naturans*. Religion, for Royce, does not ‘prove’ the Absolute.’ While Royce clearly states that “religion can be experienced and lived apart from metaphysics” (PC 51), it cannot be *understood* apart from metaphysics. And it is the job of the philosopher to understand religion, and to live it in an ‘understanding’ way. For the philosopher understanding offers ‘security,’ cognitive security, on the one hand, but also a needed emotional security, for religious insight arises out of and satisfies ‘felt needs.’ Although *The Problem of Christianity* attempts, Royce claims, to proceed “without presupposing any one view of God or of revelation” (PC 218) there is never any doubt in the reader’s mind of where Royce is writing *from*, although there is enough room for doubt about the ultimacy and necessity of where he is writing *to*: an idealistic version of philosophical theism and the religious implications thereof. But is, one might ask, the Absolute in Royce really a religious problem or a metaphysical problem? While Royce often takes the Buddhist non-theistic position as the counterpole to a properly theistic stance, at least from the point of view of the phenomenology of religion, I think that Royce’s deepest held premise, and not conclusion, is that religion *must* be practiced, in whatever way, within the framework of a personalistic theism. His whole phenomenology of religion and his hermeneutical principles are governed by that premise. But it *is* a premise. And it controls not just the differentiation but the characterization of his three core features of religious need and demand.

In my opinion, Royce’s conception of the God of monotheism is unexceptional and perhaps one of the least original, even if important, aspects of his thought. It follows, with some refinements and modifications, the main lines of classical philosophical theology, but, I must admit, without the *frisson* attendant upon the everpresent possibility and need of negative theology and the mystical languages of ‘unsaying,’ the God of the void, that marks such a tradition of thought.⁸ It lacks the

8 ROYCE (1916, p. 101) does say in his encyclopedia article ‘Monotheism,’ that “the mystics [...] have always held that the results of the intellect are negative and lead to no definite

defining features of *biddeness* and conceptual piety. The Roycean God is a Personal Absolute with the requisite properties ascribed to the Supreme Being: omniscience, omnipotence, omnibenevolence, and so forth. But it is the second-line properties of ‘creator’, ‘redeemer’, ‘inspirer’ and the like that play, I think, a much more ambiguous and yet substantial role in his theological project.

God is the *creator* not so much of the world or universe but of the possibility of truth in the absolute sense of that term. For Royce, the truth of the Absolute is to be determined by the absoluteness of truth, which is at the term not totally accessible to humans and hence must be guaranteed by the Absolute. God as creator and guarantor of truth is certainly derivative from the putative omniscience of God, contrasted with our essentially finite forms of knowing. Such a position leads to the definition of God as an unlimited act of understanding, an infinite and eternal insight, encompassing all possibility and necessity. This is a traditional notion, formulated in a contentious arc from Aristotle, through Aquinas, to Lonergan.⁹ Religious naturalism denies the necessity and the coherence, on empirical and descriptive as well as analytical grounds, of such an insight, although it acknowledges its role as a model or ideal inducing and informing a deep longing, but does not accept it as a fact. These ways have no ground other than *natura naturans*. Its metaphysics is irretrievably descriptive, not prescriptive. It discovers on its own the ways of the world. Religious naturalism does not tell the world how it *has* to be—or base itself upon how we want it to be. In the role of an infinite act of understanding the Absolute is, for Royce, essentially a demand for the transcendent, not subject to the vagaries attendant upon finite acts of understanding and finite assertions of ‘truth.’ For religious naturalism these acts and assertions are all there is. There is no standpoint from which an infinite act of understanding could be established short of the cosmological proofs, which Royce does not accept nor does the religious naturalist. Royce, committed idealist that he is, is not at home in the finitude of knowledge, but the religious naturalist embraces it. The judgment of truth is virtually unconditioned, not absolutely conditioned.

As to omnipotence, Royce clearly thinks that the Absolute will ultimately effect a ‘safe harbor’ for humans, that is, fulfill the role of ‘redeemer’ and, through a pro-

idea of God which can be defended against the skeptics” (cited in KEGLEY, 2008, p. 85). Of course, it is possible that we, theist or not, have no definite idea of God at all, that, as Aquinas said, we know what God is not, not what God is. Michael Sells has explored, with philosophical sophistication, paradigmatic cases of performative religious language and their semantic implications and structures where language ‘breaks’ at the boundary between the ‘sayable’ and the ‘unsayable’ in his (1994). See also Ben-Ami Scharfstein (1993) for a rich collection of examples of the ‘failure of words’ in philosophy and religion. See also INNIS, 2008 for a more explicit discussion of the notion of semantic thresholds between the sayable and the unsayable.

- 9 Bernard Lonergan (1957) is one of the foremost representatives of the tradition of defining God as an infinite act of understanding and of attempting to bring the thomistic tradition of classical theism up to the standards of the demands of scientific intelligence. Charles Hartshorne’s reformulation and defence of the Socinian project in his many works (see, for example, his 1984, but many other places), while accepting in one sense the ‘infinity’ or ‘unlimited’ nature of God’s knowledge, nevertheless rejects the traditional notion of the timelessness of God’s knowledge and hence the problem of God’s knowledge of, and relation to, the future, a problem that has bedeviled all theology in this classical arc.

cess of 'election,' *guarantee* that ultimately 'nothing will be lost'. For the religious naturalist there is no 'safe harbor' that will guarantee anything. Religious naturalism affirms the ultimacy of risk and the possibility of irretrievable loss. Nature does not 'elect' but 'select.' But a religion of nature, which by definition would be open to the whole realm of values, will pass beyond selection to solidarity. In this a religious naturalist position would agree with Nietzsche's embrace of *amor fati* but without his histrionic anti-religious prancing or individualistic self-assertion.

The Absolute as 'inspirer' is derivative from its omnibenevolence, its 'graciousness' in furthering 'good will' and in filling humans or, as Frank Oppenheim has put it, 'minded beings' with the same 'unitive spirit.' Religious naturalism, as formulated, for example, by Gordon Kaufman in his *In the Beginning . . . Creativity* (2004) or by Robert Corrington in his 'ecstatic naturalist' version (see references) accepts the 'gracious' as the 'serendipitous,' the 'unearned' and 'unmerited.' The 'unitive spirit' is an 'event' or 'power' that seems to come from 'without' when achieved but which is really placed upon us as a task: to develop what Royce characterized as sensitiveness and docility.¹⁰ The 'transcendent' properties of the Absolute are at the same time 'immanent,' for Royce paradoxically does not accept any 'disembodied' Absolute, nor does religious naturalism. (T.L. S. Sprigge, in his *The God of Metaphysics*, even recruits Royce for 'pantheistic idealism'). These properties work themselves out in time, in the lives, deeds, and thoughts of individuals and communities. The Absolute is 'in' the world yet not 'of' the world. Transcendence subsumes, without abolishing, immanence. For religious naturalism the very notion of transcendence is redefined. It arises out of, but remains within, the spheres of immanence. It does not 'break into' immanence, but 'breaks out' of it without 'going anywhere'. Immanence and transcendence are two axes within the temporal flux of our lives, not two realities related as autonomous but intrinsically related layers.

Religious naturalism allows a deep mystical and aesthetic strand, which I find almost totally lacking in Royce. The examples of Emerson and Thoreau offer strong counterpositions here in terms of their *religious adequacy*. Ray Billington, in his *Religion Without God*, and Ursula Goodenough, in her *The Sacred Depths of Nature*, examine a vast array of contexts that elicit 'transcendent' experiences or experiences of transcendence, and of the 'numinous' or 'holy,' ways of 'qualifying' our forms of apprehension of the ultimate religious object, *natura naturans*, and its wonderful ways of working. For religious naturalism transcendent experiences and experiences of transcendence are not experiences of 'the transcendent.' These forms of apprehension correspond to what, in another context, Robert Corrington has characterized as 'sacred folds' or Ursula Goodenough as the 'sacred depths' (of nature). Maybe we could characterize religious naturalism as a paradoxical form of non-theistic 'negative theology'. The religious naturalist position sees the religious frame as setting up and releasing specific types of experiences, primarily by embodying its visions in a stream of symbolic images and ritualistic actions and in 'places' that situate and locate them.¹¹ The images are, for

10 See KEGLEY (2008, p. 87).

11 See my 'The Tacit Logic of Ritual Embodiments' (INNIS, 2004) for an analysis and comparison of 'thick' and 'thin' ritual, relying on the work of Michael Polanyi. See also my 'Philosophy and the Play of Life' (INNIS, 2001).

religious naturalism, primarily *cyphers* to be experienced, in Jasper's sense, complex metaphorical constructions, which do not have to be interpreted literally.¹² The ritualistic frame, which can be exceedingly minimal, a type that Emerson, for example, preferred, is to furnish, in the words of Iris Murdoch in her *The Sovereignty of Good*, some "outer framework which both occasions and identifies an inner event" (1970, p. 16). These outer frameworks can be places, spaces, formalized action-sequences, and so forth. Religion, for the religious naturalist, is first and foremost accomplished by 'inner events' in appropriate aesthetic, conceptual, ethical, and ritualistic frames. Did, in fact, religion for Royce in its highest manifestation, not consist in 'inner events' first and foremost that clearly must be embodied and expressed concretely in some form but not identified with the expressions?¹³

The central issue I ultimately want to face here, however, with explicit reference to a schema proposed by Crosby in several of his works, is not the properties of the Absolute. It is rather the problem of whether Royce's phenomenology of the sources of religious insight and his philosophical deconstruction of Christianity imply, even if they do not prove, that the religious quest, so conceived, can be, or maybe even must be, satisfied only by a personalistically conceived Absolute. Religious naturalism sees Royce's categorial scheme, valuable as it is, as limited and biased by his premises. Religious naturalism proposes that *natura naturans*, understood as the ultimate ground of orders, *natura naturata* in all its multiplicity and variety, can fulfill the criteria of supreme religious object and focal point of religious striving. What is the status of Royce's pivotal concepts and distinctions when they are confronted with a rather different schema of concepts which could claim to be more descriptively adequate? And, once we step outside the circle of Royce's conceptual and analytical premises, what is left of his project?

I think that anyone reading Royce's later works will recognize a deep affective undertone to his reflections. They are a kind of conceptual and affective 'dance' with memories, thoughts, and emotions that lay far back not just in Royce's life but in the present state of his psyche. Monotheism in general, and Christianity in particular, made up for Royce a complex 'plenum of perplexity.' But, once again, does his *religious* quest demand the Absolute?

The consolations of philosophy, for Royce, run parallel to the consolations of religion. Royce's 'high road' descriptions of religion—and his 'high road' practices, which avoided the traditional practices of historical Christianity, which Frank Oppenheim has critically drawn attention to—run parallel to his 'high road' conceptual

12 Royce writes in his "Outline and Text of 'Religious Experience and Religious Truth'" (p. 178): "There is no such thing as a passive reception or idea. Every bit of insight is a construction [...] a creation of the person who is to get it. Nobody observes anything without putting himself, with all his own nature and habits into the facts [...]. To perceive facts is to adopt one's own life to one's world, and one's world to one's own needs" (cited in KEGLEY, p. 86). Of course, this is what I am doing in this paper and what religious naturalism itself clearly does and what the great religious traditions, with their 'cypherscripts' have attempted to do.

13 This is precisely one of the points of criticism leveled against Royce by Oppenheim. See note 2.

reconstruction.¹⁴ Royce's heart, I think, was really in his head. He was consumed with an *amor intellectualis Dei* that identified the Absolute as the highest good and the prime exemplar of atoning actions, who by 'grace' leads humankind to realize 'heaven on earth,' the beloved community of loyal persons who share not only universal principles of ultimate commitment but belong to a community of interpretation composed of free inquirers. This, Royce famously and insightfully asserted, is the 'invisible church' of the religious and is not to be identified with any visible sect or institution. Religious naturalism, too, is an *amor intellectualis* but its object is not *Deus* but *natura naturans*, in all its polymorphous diversity and ambiguity. It also is 'carried' by an interpretation community. Both philosophical theism and religious naturalisms are interpretations. They are subject to all the semiotic conditions that define the processes of interpretation. More particularly, the labor of interpretation releases a dynamic stream of interpretants that 'place' the self in a vast web of meaning on the levels of feeling, action, and thought. These distinctions correspond to the major Peircean schema of interpretants: affective/emotional, energetic, and logical.

But are Royce's founding insights and empirical touchstone both descriptively and conceptually adequate or necessary to define what Wittgenstein called a religious form of life? Royce simply *must* have a religion with a transcendent dimension of an intrinsically personal form and with a historical realization, if not essential visibility. But are his three generative ideas, which mark both *The Sources of Religious Insight* and *The Problem of Christianity*, that is, (a) the idea of the lost state of the natural man, (b) the idea of atonement, and (c) the idea of a beloved community, really able to do the work he wants them to do in pointing to the religious necessity of the Absolute?

As a thought experiment, what it would mean to systematically substitute key religious naturalist concepts for Royce's triad? Further, what extra concepts does religious naturalism supply that Royce does not?

In place of 'fault' religious naturalism puts a sense of 'creatureliness,' of existential contingency, of a felt sense of the expressively 'numinous,' of being part of an encompassing and ungraspable whole. This is Dewey's recession into the indefinite, rooted in the primacy of qualitative thought and given its classic exposition in his religiously relevant *Art as Experience*. This sense is not the result of an inference. It is directly felt, as Schleiermacher pointed out in his *On Religion*.¹⁵ Our dependence is not merely or primarily cognitional—that we are ignorant of the right way to live, that we are devoid of standards. It is evidenced by a metaphysical 'shudder.' Royce seems to me to beg the question that we *need* some 'revelation' from a supernatural realm to give us the right standard. Revelation *from* is not the same as disclosure *of*.

14 This is of course not a problem unique to Royce. It belongs to all attempts to reconcile philosophical analyses and religious practices. See once again note 2 above.

15 Friedrich Schleiermacher foregrounded the notion of 'creature consciousness' or the 'feeling of absolute dependency' as the original and fundamental form of religious apprehension. What provoked fierce criticism of such a position was his Spinozistic characterization, at least in the first edition of his classic work, of the ultimate 'object' of such an apprehension: God or the universe. Julia Lamm (1996) has explored the deep influence of Spinoza on Schleiermacher. See also the aesthetic transformation of this feeling of radical contingency in R. W. Hepburn (1984, 2011). I have examined the relevance of Hepburn to this theme in my unpublished lecture 'Aesthetic Intelligibility.'

Buddhism is a religion of *insight*, as is religious naturalism, not a religion of revelation. I think that, in fact, the upshot of Royce's *The Problem of Christianity* is the same. Perhaps some brave Roycean will write another volume, *The Problem of Buddhism*, using Roycean categories. The fundamental religious experience, which so moved and motivated Augustine, namely, that the heavenly bodies proclaim that "we have not made ourselves," is not that that 'something' or 'someone' in particular has made them, but that *we have been made*, that we are not self-originating but have emerged from the deep matrix of *natura naturans*. But the 'making' is not strictly speaking a production or a *creatio ex nihilo* but a creative emergence, a movement into 'visibility' out of a hidden 'ground.' This process is marked by the realization of value and of our 'being grasped' or 'had' by the sense of radical contingency. The fundamental insight for religious naturalism is that there is nothing that *has* to happen. This is a metaphysical position that Royce found hard to accept—at least religiously.

'Atonement' becomes the 'free creation and preservation of value' in all its forms, attempts to 'heal the rift,' due to ignorance and bad will, between humans and nature and between themselves. Atonement, for religious naturalism, is embedded in a narrative, to be sure, what Loyal Rue (2000) has called "everybody's story" or "the universe story" by Swimme and Berry (1992). The primacy of the narrative of creation or creativity that Willem Drees (2002) and Gordon Kaufman (2004, 2008) have proposed as theological focal points demands, I think, a full reconstruction of the notion of atonement. Drees, for example, following the lead of Gerd Theissen, mentions the idea of thinking of Jesus, who plays a decidedly minor role in Royce's interpretation of Christianity, as a "mutation in cultural history. Mutations create new possibilities" (DREES, 2002, p. 91).¹⁶ The lesson of this model or image, presented more in the Gospels than in the Pauline writings, with its core message of solidarity with the poor and the weak, "calls into question the selective process, which drives evolution. The message and example of Jesus is that in the end solidarity does more justice to reality than selection" (p. 91). Both Royce and the religious naturalist would probably agree. Is 'solidarity' here really the equivalent of 'loyalty'? Which is conceptually primary?

The beloved community is clearly a community of solidarity. For religious naturalism it is made up of those willing to wait for, be open to, serendipitous creativity (Gordon Kaufman), to accept and commit to the courage to be (Paul Tillich), or even the courage to create (Rollo May), and so forth.¹⁷ Rather than loyalty to loyalty, which I confess not being able to get my head around, I, too, see religion, as Royce does and Corrington insightfully has developed, as being carried mainly by interpretation

16 Gordon Kaufman, *Jesus and Creativity* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2006) has also attempted to reinterpret the figure of Jesus in terms of creativity and an exemplification of a mutation. See also Gerd Theissen's *Biblical Faith: An Evolutionary Approach* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1985).

17 These positions are by no means the same, but they all point to a central phenomenon of the type of consciousness exemplified in religious naturalism. Without at the moment going into the matter any further, I would like to draw attention to the deep connections between Tillich and May and the whole ambiguous problematic of the theme of the 'God beyond the God of Theism,' which was a central component of Tillich's reflections. Kegley draws helpful comparisons and contrasts between Tillich and Royce in her 2008 book on Royce.

communities that are engaged in the pursuit of meaning and value in all the ways they can appear and emerge from *natura naturans*.¹⁸ Distinctively religious values and forms of experience, embodied in what Frederick Ferré in his *Living and Value* (2001) has called ‘religious world models,’ that is, affect-drenched images and conceptual systems, emerge from the encounter with, and from the expressions of our encounters with, the object of ultimate concern that has to be both personally and cosmically final. But does this mean ‘personally cosmic’ or ‘cosmically personal’?

Crosby in his *Interpretive Theories of Religion* and *A Religion of Nature* has put forth a valuable and nuanced schema that marks such an object. The focal religious object must have the following properties (a) *uniqueness*, being one of a kind, (b) *primacy*, that beyond which one cannot go, (c) *pervasiveness*, connected to everything in a systematic way, (d) *rightness*, a power and standard of judgmental goodness for overcoming ‘evil,’ (e) *permanence*, definitiveness in either a timeless or everlasting sense, and (f) *biddenness*, inexhaustibility in both experiential and conceptual dimensions, a source of inexhaustible mystery. Crosby and others have argued that *natura naturans*, nature as creative process, exemplifies all these properties better than a personalistically conceived Absolute, which comes to shipwreck on the shoals of the problem of evil and its—that is, the Absolute’s—ineluctable anthropomorphism.¹⁹ *Personhood*, which Royce and the whole theistic tradition apply to the ultimate religious object, is conspicuously missing in this schema. The personal character of the ultimate religious object is *not a source*, as it is for Royce, *but a cosmic achievement, and is to be cherished as such*, as an ideal and lure defining our deepest striving to realize value. It exemplifies in paradigmatic fashion the creativity of *natura naturans* as a polymorphously open system of achieved values. Achievements are to be cherished, preserved, and pursued. There is nothing to guarantee them or to foresee or to order them. The cherishing, preserving, and pursuing is the work of agents informed by the both forceful and gentle wind of creativity, which also takes the place of the Logos-Spirit proposed by Royce. In the beginning *as well as at the end*, for religious naturalism, are not personal intellect and will. As Gordon Kaufman has put it, “in the beginning [. . .] Creativity”. But our end is also in our beginning—and in our middle.

In conclusion, religious naturalism, in its metaphysical vision, contends that the present system of nature is not ultimate nor need it be thought of as the result of an act of will, but as one way in which a universal process of creativity has given rise to temporarily stable orders. The point of life is participation in the life of creativity, not participation in the Absolute. As to the conservation of value, the ‘book

18 Robert S. Corrington (see references) has developed a deep, precise, and religiously rich model of religious naturalism, centered on *natura naturans*, which is not able to be engaged in this paper. But it supports the general orientation that lies at the basis of my own approach, without being identical with it. I have instead brought the eminently clear work of Donald Crosby into the discussion by reason of its clear schematization of the properties of ‘the ultimate religious object.’

19 This is the theme of Crosby’s *Living with Ambiguity: Religious Naturalism and the Menace of Evil* (Crosby 2008). I do not want in any way to imply that Royce did not give sufficient weight to the problem of evil. But, in my opinion, Crosby with his distinctions between systemic and moral evils and his deep analysis of the objectivity of values in his 2002 has set the problem in the correct context within the conceptual matrix of religious naturalism.

of life' that constitutes the divine memory, religious naturalism's lesson is that we have to learn to live without it. But life itself is an instance of as well as permeated by values, not just facts. A world devoid of a personal sacred canopy does not have to be devoid of values, as Royce claims. Human life is grounded, for Royce, *must* be grounded, in something that is "never reducible to the terms of any purely human experience" (SRI 147). What is the nature of this demand? It is affective, conceptual, and volitional. Unless, Royce writes, "such a life above our individual level is real, our human efforts have no sense whatever, and chaos drowns out the meaning of the pragmatists and of the idealists alike" (SRI 149). There simply *has* to be "some living whole of experience above the level of any one of our individual human lives" (SRI 150). This *living whole*, for Royce, is both the ground of our hope that our lives will not be wasted and the means of our salvation. "Whether we are saved or lost, we belong to the world's life [...] and unless this life is more than human [...] we mortals have no meaning whatever" (SRI 151). *Natura naturans*, for religious naturalists, is certainly more than human, but in a sense radically different from Royce's, and it is able to give meaning to us mortals.

Paradoxically, when all is said and done, perhaps religious naturalism and Roycean idealistic theism could utter the same appeal, '*Veni Creator Spiritus*,' but with quite different expectations. '*Veni*' presupposes that we still are not yet at our goal. '*Creator*' points to the hidden source of all novelty and achievements. '*Spiritus*' gestures toward the whole realm of spiritual meanings in which we live and move and have our being. Rather than our adapting to Roycean adventures of the Absolute, religious naturalism offers us the task of participating in the Absolute of adventures. Which one is truer to our religious sense, taken in its full empirical scope and multiple dimensions, I submit to your careful consideration.²⁰

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20 I would like to mention that there is a kind of naturalist 'trinity' consisting of origin, logos, and spirit. Granted the everlastingness of nature as the union of *natura naturans* and *natura naturata*, 'origin' refers to *creativity* or *generative principle as source of orders*, 'logos' to *intelligibility and beauty of orders*, and 'spirit' to *conscious, unitive participation* in the depths of nature, which as ultimate are indeed 'sacred.' Such a schema allows a sensitive and appreciative reading and critical validation of the great stream of symbolic artifacts that make up the history of religions. I hope to treat this issue at length at another time in a study entitled 'Divine Beauty: Religious Aesthetics and Religious Naturalism.' Of course, with such ideas we approach the domain treated in Santayana's 'Ultimate Religion.'

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