

"A New World': Philosophical Idealism in America, 1700 to 1950"<sup>1</sup>

Lecture VI

(Draft. Please do not quote without permission.)

I want to begin my final lecture by turning back in time—to 1842, the year in which Emerson gave the lecture on transcendentalism that I mentioned (and quoted from) in Lecture I. You may remember the very simple definition of transcendentalism he gives there: transcendentalism, he tells his listeners, is idealism, idealism as it exists in 1842. That same year, a young minister from the Congregational Church in New Milford, Connecticut, a small town not far from New Haven, published a paper on Emerson's same topic, in a magazine called *The American Biblical Repository*. His view of transcendentalism as a whole wasn't favorable (and that's putting it lightly), but he was particularly scornful of one column in the mass of men and women he saw marching under the transcendentalist banner—"the Pantheistic," he called it—"with whom," he explained, "the name of Mr. Emerson is too intimately connected, to require that it should be concealed."<sup>2</sup> When, four years later, this minister, Noah Porter, became a professor of philosophy at Yale, it's unlikely that he encouraged the young men in his care to read Emerson. He was certainly not doing so after becoming president of Yale in 1871. As president, he imagined being asked the following question: "Why not read the modern Emerson, because some say he teaches a subtle Pantheism, as freely as you read the ancient Plotinus, to whom he refers so often, and with a deference so profound; or as you read those Indian sages, from whom he quotes a striking line now and then?"<sup>3</sup> "Questions like this are not infrequently asked," he said, "and it is not always easy to answer them." "It is safe to say," though, "that whoever the author may be, whether he be . . . Emerson or Plotinus, . . . if he shakes your well-established confidence in God, or leads you to disown the name that is above every name; or if he disturbs the serenity or fervor of your Christian devotion, then he is not an author whom you should read." (He applied the same warning to the "cynical-minded" Thoreau [pp. 70, 119]. "Cynical-minded" probably comes as a surprise, but he was surely thinking of *A Week* and not of *Walden*.) As an educator, Porter had no doubt that Emerson was, compared to Plotinus, the greater danger. Today's young, he said, wouldn't easily be moved by the "effete" Plotinus. But Emerson makes pantheism and anti-Christianity "glow with the interest of current thought, as well as breathe the warmth of men who have the ear and the sympathy of the present generation" (p. 109).

That rising generation included William Torrey Harris, who arrived at Yale College in 1854. He didn't stay at Yale long enough to study moral philosophy with Porter (he left in 1857, in the middle of his junior year), but it was the glow and warmth of modern thought that he was seeking, and Yale's backward-looking curriculum left him cold. While at Yale, outside of class, he'd experimented with vegetarianism, Graham flour, phrenology, graphology, gymnastics, and Swedenborg. After Yale (but perhaps while there: the record of his first meeting with Alcott is foggy), it was transcendentalism. He headed for a time to Emerson's Concord, where he attended Bronson Alcott's Conversations. He filled pages of his commonplace books with selections from Alcott's *Orphic Sayings*.<sup>4</sup>

Harris resolved to seek his fortune in the west, in St. Louis. There, in 1858, at a meeting of a St. Louis literary and philosophical society, he met another New England college dropout, Henry C. Brockmeyer. Brockmeyer had made it through two years at Brown, in Providence, Rhode Island, when the transcendentalist Frederic Henry Hedge was a Unitarian minister in the city. (Hedge, better educated in German idealism than any other New Englander of his day, was the founder, in 1836, of Boston's Transcendental Club. Emerson and Alcott were among its charter members.) Hedge, who eventually became a professor of German literature at Harvard, was one

of the nineteenth century's great promoters of German culture in America. His massive anthology, *Prose Writers of Germany*, first published in 1847 but already in its fourth or fifth edition during Brockmeyer's years at Brown, ran from Martin Luther through the first quarter of the nineteenth century. It was in Hedge's volume that Brockmeyer first encountered Hegel. There was actually rather little of Hegel in the book—just twelve double-columned pages—but here are a few samples of the dramatic pronouncements Brockmeyer found there. They are bold expressions of the synoptic or systematic aspirations I spoke briefly about last week. From such clues as these, if his friend Harris can be believed, Brockmeyer divined or inferred the full extent of Hegel's system. (The first passage below is from the introductory account of Hegel. The ones that follow are translations from Hegel's *Introduction to the Philosophy of History*. Hedge attributes both to "a friend.")

There is one *Absolute Substance* pervading all things. That Substance is *Spirit*. This Spirit is endued with the power of development; it produces from itself the opposing powers and forces of the universe. . . . The process is at first the evolution of antagonistic forces; then a mediation between them.

Reason is the substance of all things, as well as the infinite power by which they are moved; is itself the illimitable material of all natural and spiritual life, as well as the source of the infinite variety of forms in which this material is livingly manifested. It is the substance of all things; . . . it is the infinite power, . . . it is the illimitable material of all essentially and truth; . . . it feeds upon itself, it creates its material, viz. the infinite variety of extant forms; for only in the shape which reason prescribes and justifies do phenomena come into being and begin to live.

[History is] the rational and necessary course of the spirit which moves the world,— spirit whose nature does indeed ever remain one and the same, but which, in the existence of the world, unfolds this its one nature.

The essence of spirit is freedom.

The history of the world is the exhibition of the process by which spirit comes to the consciousness of that which it really is.

The history of the world is the progress in the consciousness of freedom.

The Oriental world only knew that *one* is free; the Greek and Roman world knew that *some* are free; but we know that all men, in their true nature, are free—that man as man is free.

Harris later recalled that Brockmeyer "was even at that time, a thinker of the same order of mind as Hegel." (It is here that Harris goes on to say that "before reading Hegel, except the few pages in Hedge's *German Prose Writers*, had divined Hegel's chief ideas and the position of his system."<sup>5</sup>) At their first meeting, Brockmeyer informed Harris that "Hegel was the great man among modern philosophers, and that his large logic was the work to get." Harris immediately sent to Germany for a copy. He'd studied German while at Yale, but when the book arrived, he couldn't make anything of it. It wasn't until 1866 that he read the three-volume work through to the end, this time in an English translation prepared by Brockmeyer himself. It didn't help much. "I am sure I read every word of it," Harris wrote of his post-war reading of the translation, but "it was all over my head." He could follow nothing at all in the second and third volumes, he confessed, or "even remember the words from one page to the other."

I've taken us to Civil-War-era St. Louis because that is where we find George Holmes Howison, who arrived there from Massachusetts in 1864. Howison was the philosopher who, in Cambridge twenty years later, hadn't quite found his footing—the potential leave replacement James forgot. He taught mathematics at Washington University in St. Louis from 1864 to 1872. In the end, by the way, Howison did just fine (I mention this now because my wife, who was in the audience at last week's lecture, was concerned to know what became of him); in 1884, he took up the first named chair in philosophy at the University of California, Berkeley, and had a long and influential career there. (Oxford's Jonathan Barnes will be giving the next set of Howison Lectures there in April.) In fact, of the "St. Louis Hegelians" I've mentioned so far did just fine. Brockmeyer, who had been a Union colonel in the Civil War, became lieutenant governor of Missouri and acted for a time as governor. (Missouri was a border state, sending soldiers and regiments to both sides.) Harris became superintendent of schools in St. Louis, then moved back to New England and became superintendent of schools in Concord (where he helped Alcott run the Concord School of Philosophy), and went on to serve, for seventeen years, as U.S. Commissioner of Education. And even better, perhaps, than all of that: he at last came to understand Hegel. Indeed, if we can trust the 1873 report of a visit to St. Louis by an admittedly cheeky correspondent for New York's *Scribner's Monthly*, he and his friends came to understand great deal more. Brockmeyer and Harris formed a club—the Kant Club—"whose members," the correspondent writes, "had a supreme contempt for the needs of the flesh and who, after long days of laborious and exhaustive teaching, would spend the night hours in threading through the mysteries of Kant." "In 1858," the correspondent continues, "Mr. Harris claims they mastered Kant, and between that period and 1863 they analyzed, or, as he phrases it, obtained the keys to Leibnitz and Spinoza." Hegel, as we know, took longer; when Howison joined the club in 1864, they were plowing through Hegel's *Phenomenology*. But eventually even Hegel's *Logic* was subdued: the recollections of incomprehension I quoted earlier are from the preface to Harris's triumphant *Hegel's Logic*[,] *A Book on the Genesis of the Categories of the Mind*[:] *A Critical Exposition*, published in 1890. Harris had become America's foremost expert on Hegel, and in 1901, when Howison published his only book, *The Limits of Evolution*, he identified Harris ("our own National Commissioner of Education") as one of two men (the other was "the Master of Balliol," Edward Caird) who might bring Hegel's project in the *Logic* to completion, purifying it of "sundry slips and gaps" and elaborating "a complete system of our experiential ascent out of inadequate to adequate categories."<sup>6</sup>

Between Boston and St. Louis in the post-war years, transcendentalists and Hegelians shuttled back and forth. Alcott visited the Kant Club twice. Emerson came in 1867, invited not because the Hegelians wanted to listen to him, he complained, but because they wanted him to listen to them. In the year of Emerson's visit, Harris founded the *Journal of Speculative Philosophy*, the first journal of philosophy in the United States, where the young Royce had tested the waters before releasing *The Religious Aspect*. Harris sent copies of the journal's first two issues to Emerson. "It is a brave undertaking," Emerson wrote in a letter of thanks, "& I shall think better than ever of my country-men if they shall sustain it. I mean [that is, intend] that you shall make me acquainted in it with the true value & performance of Hegel, who, at first sight is not engaging nor at second sight satisfying."

Howison returned to Boston in 1872, to teach philosophy at MIT. That same year, Brockmeyer's translation of Hegel's *Logic* also came to town. It was brought there by two young businessmen from Quincy, Illinois, "who had become enthusiastic hegelians and,"—here I'm quoting from the recollections of William James, a member of the group who gathered to study the translation—"knowing almost no German, had actually possessed themselves of a manuscript translation of the entire three volumes of *Logic*, made by an extraordinary Pomeranian immigrant

named Brockmeyer."<sup>7</sup> The following year, Thomas Davidson, another member of the St. Louis circle, also moved to Boston. Davidson began hosting the study group described by James. "I saw most of him," James recalled, "at a little philosophical Club that used to meet every fortnight in his rooms on Temple Street in Boston." The club's other members, as listed by James, were "W[illiam] T[orrey] Harris, G[eorge] H[olmes] Howison, J[ames] E[liot] Cabot [later Emerson's amanuensis, editor, and literary executor], C[harles] C[arroll] Everett [Unitarian minister, professor of theology at Harvard, and later dean of its Divinity School], B[orden] P[arker] Bowne [who was soon to begin a distinguished career at Boston University], and sometimes G[eorge] H[erbert] Palmer [the Harvard philosopher introduced in Lecture V]." The roster of regular members can be pretty neatly divided into the somewhat older and better established monists, or thinkers sympathetic to monism (Harris, Cabot, Everett) and the somewhat younger, less established, and soon-to-be-declared pluralists (Davidson, James, Howison, and Bowne).<sup>8</sup> "Current thought" was already a larger thing than Noah Porter perhaps imagined, roomy enough for generational divisions of its own. This generational split makes it reasonable to conjecture that the club's meetings were the starting point for the pluralistic idealism—the *personal idealism* of Howison and the *personalism* of Bowne—that is my main topic this afternoon.

### 1. Bowne and Howison

Bowne and Howison have many things in common, but there are four closely joined commitments I will emphasize: (i) condemnation of monistic idealism as an open or disguised form of pantheism, destructive of human freedom and individuality; (ii) a belief, derived from Kant, that the spontaneously acting subject of experience constitutes the world in space and time, which is therefore "ideal" or "phenomenal"; (iii) a denial, formed this time in opposition to Kant (and to other "agnostics," such as Herbert Spencer), that the world beyond the natural or ideal world—the real world that is its source and sustainer—cannot be known; and (iv) confidence that this real world includes not only an infinite God, but finite selves who are in some way independent of him—"relatively independent," as Bowne for example proposes (this being the positive side of the condemnation in (i)).<sup>9</sup>

Let me first document (i). "Idealistic monism," Howison writes, "is in the last resort irreconcilable with personality. By its unmitigated and immitigable determinism, with its one sole Real Agent, it directly annuls moral agency and personal freedom in all the conscious beings other than its so-called God" (*The Limits of Evolution*, p. x).<sup>10</sup> Monistic idealism is a "pantheism [that] necessarily represents what it calls God as the sole *real* cause in existence. Every other being exists but as a part or mode of the eternal One" (p. 8). "*We are not ends, we are only means, and transient means at that. We are only stage supernumeraries—nay, worse, only stage properties—of the eternal drama, and not at all its proper personages. We are only here as appurtenances of the real *dramatis personae*—only as marks and false shows*" (p. 291). The "Higher Pantheism" of recent idealism "signalise[s] a return to the elder views of the Orient" (p. 345) "Philosophised monism" may be coherent, and it may give us "clear proofs of its pantheistic Cause," but it is "incapable of providing any genuine freedom for the souls that are his parts" (p. 346). Echoes of William Ellery Channing's dissatisfaction with the occasionalism of Jonathan Edwards are unmistakable. They are even clearer in two passages I've yet to quote. In the first, Howison writes that "pantheism means, not simply the all-pervasive interblending and interpenetration of God and other life, but the sole causality of God, and so the obliteration of freedom, [and] of moral life" (p. 81). In the second, Howison takes aim at the pantheistic image of God—God as "Omnipresent Meddler" (p. 360)—he turns to Benjamin Jowett for support. "The abasement of the individual before the Divine Being is really a sort of pantheism," Jowett writes in the passage Howison quotes, "so far that in the moral world God is everything and man nothing." "There is want of

proportion in this sort of religion," Jowett continues. "God who is everything is not really so much as if he allowed the most exalted free agencies to exist side by side with him" (p. 361).

Howison realizes that the pantheists of the nineteenth century, religiously cool by the Calvinist standards of the eighteenth century, don't *mean* to abase us, but he must have been sensitive to the similarities, because in a book reacting mainly to the nineteenth-century phenomenon, he has this to say:

There is no escaping from the reasoning of an Augustine, a Calvin, an Edwards, except by removing its premise. That premise is the utter finitude of the "creature," resting upon the conception that the Divine functions of creation and regeneration, more especially creation, are operations by what is called "efficient" causation, that is, causation by direct productive energy, whose effects are of course as helpless before it as any motion is before the impact that starts it. Creation thus meant calling the creature into existence at a *date*, prior to which it had *no* existence. It was summoned into being by a simple *fiat*, out of fathomless nothing; and quite so, it was supposed, arose even the human soul, just as all other things arose. (p. 331)

In Edward's view, you will recall, we're created out of nothing at every moment.

It is time we all understood how finally at variance with the heart of Christian faith and hope is any doctrine of evolution that views the *whole* of human nature as the product of "continuous creation,"—as merely the last term in a process of transmissive causation. (p. 51)<sup>11</sup>

After he arrived in Berkeley in 1884, Howison founded the university's Philosophical Union. Lectures to the union soon became one of the most visible events in American academic life. In 1895, Royce, hometown boy made good, returned to speak to the union on "The Conception of God." It was a big event: Howison arranged for himself to comment, along with Royce's old teacher LeConte. For Howison, Royce was America's leading representative of modern, Orientalizing pantheism. The proceedings were published, and in his editorial introduction, Howison raised what he took to be their central question: "*Can the reality of human free-agency, of moral responsibility and universal moral aspiration, of unlimited spiritual hope for every soul,—can this be made out, can it even be held, consistently with the theory of an Immanent God?*" (pp. xxx-xi).<sup>12</sup> His personal answer was an emphatic no. "If the Infinite Self *includes* us all, and all our experiences,—sensations and sins, as well as the rest,—in the unity of one life, and includes us and them *directly*;" he wrote in his commentary, "if there is but one and the same final Self for us each and all; then, with a literalness indeed appalling, He is we, and we are He; nay, He is *I*, and *I am He*" (pp. 98-9). "What [then] becomes of our ethical independence?—what, of our *personal* reality, our righteous *i.e.* reasonable responsibility—responsibility to which we *ought* to be held? Is not He the sole real *agent*?" (p. 99). Are we not reduced to "modes of his eternal thinking and perceiving?" (p. 99). The first edition of the proceedings was warmly reviewed by Charles C. Everett, Howison's old companion in the "fortnightly club" that met in Boston in the 1870's. He said that reading Royce and Howison was a bit like watching a tightly contested game of chess; he expressed disappointment that after Howison's firm declaration of "check," readers were ushered out the door.<sup>13</sup> Everett got his wish for more in 1898, when a revised edition of *The Conception of God* appeared. Royce's "supplementary discussion" was the main reason why a volume that had been 84 pages in its first edition swelled to 354 in its second. And if you're worried that readers had no chance to learn how Howison might respond to Royce's latest move, you can put your mind to rest: Howison took advantage of his role as editor to insert bracketed footnotes of quarrelsome commentary into Royce's own text.

When Howison took aim at Royce, standing (as Howison saw it) in the front lines of this new battle—not the old Battle of Gods and Giants, but a new battle, among the Gods themselves—he saw Emerson standing behind him. In *The Conception of God*, a moment before Howison identifies—in italics—the central question of the volume, he cites the essays of Emerson ("in his theistic moods," p. xxx) as one expression of the new idealism.<sup>14</sup> And in *The Limits of Evolution* he says this (p. 8):

The doctrine of a Cosmic Consciousness . . . reduces all created minds either to mere phenomena or, at best, to mere modes of the Sole Divine Life, and all their lives to mere effects of its solitary omnipresent causation:—

When me they fly, I am the wings.

You'll recognize the quoted verse as one of the three lines from Emerson's "Brahma" repeated by Royce in a passage I talked about last week. By quoting it, Howison alludes both to Royce's argument from error and to its poetic source.

Bowne condemns monistic idealism as pantheism in the following passage from his *Metaphysics*.<sup>15</sup> (He is sometimes thought to have Royce specifically in mind here; I am not so sure.)

It is no doubt fine, and in some sense it is correct, to say that God is in all things; but when it comes to saying that God is all things and that all forms of thought and feeling and conduct are his, then reason simply commits suicide. . . . Suppose the difficulty overcome which is involved in the inalienability of personal experience, so that our thoughts and life might be ascribed to God. What is God's relation as thinking our thoughts to God as thinking the absolute thought? Does he become limited, confused, and blind in finite experience, and does he at the same time have absolute insight in his infinite life? Does he lose himself in the finite so as not to know what and who he is; or does he perhaps exhaust himself in the finite, so that the finite is all there is? But if all the while he has perfect knowledge of himself as one and infinite, how does this illusion of the finite arise at all in that perfect unity and perfect light? There is no answer to these questions, so long as the infinite is supposed to play both sides of the game. We have a series of unaccountable illusions and an infinite playing hide-and-seek with itself in a most grotesque metaphysical fuddlement. The notion of creation may be difficult, but it saves us from such dreary stuff as this. How the infinite can posit the finite, and thus make the possibility of a moral order, is certainly beyond us; but the alternative is a lapse into hopeless irrationality. We can make nothing of either God or the world on such a pantheistic basis. Accordingly, we find writers who incline to this way of thinking in uncertain vacillation between some "Eternal Consciousness" and our human consciousnesses and without any definite and consistent thought concerning their mutual relation, but only vague and showy phrases. The illusion is completed by taking thought abstractly and forgetting the personal and volitional form of concrete thinking. The infinite thought as conception of course embraces all things, but it must embrace them as what they are. On the side of the infinite we have not a resting thought, but a thinker and a doer. And on the side of the finite spirit also we have no mere conceptions of the divine understanding, but thinkers and doers also; and in that fact they have an inalienable individuality and personality. (pp. 102-3)

In his lectures on *Personalism* he writes that<sup>16</sup>

the conception of the many as made out of the one, or as resulting from any fission or self-diremption of the one, or as being parts of the one,—its "internally cherished parts,"—is seen at once to be an attempt of the uncritical imagination to express an unpicturable problem of the reason in the picture forms of the spatial fancy. When these reflections are continued, we reach the result that the unpicturable many must be conceived as unpicturably depending on the unpicturable one. (p. 279)

The quoted phrase is an allusion to the *Microcosmus* of Bowne's teacher Hermann Lotze (also Royce's teacher [see *The Religious Aspect*, pp. 11-12]), who speaks of "the full reality of an infinite living Being, of whom all finite things are inwardly cherished parts." (I'm quoting from the English translation of 1888.<sup>17</sup> Bowne is directly translating Lotze's German, *innerlich gehegten Teile*.) Lotze goes on to say that in all action, "the Infinite acts only on itself." It is both the only agent and the only patient. Bowne continues as follows:

This result has been perhorresced by many able thinkers in recent times as committing us to a destructive and pernicious pantheism, and they have taken refuge in an impossible pluralism. Some have gone so far as to hold that the many have always existed, as the only means of rescuing finite personality. But surely this is to throw out the child with the bath. (pp. 279-80)

The thinkers "perhorrescing" or shuddering at this result include James and Howison. Howison is also among those who believe that the many have always existed, as I'll later explain. (I think there's little room for doubt that when he wrote this passage, Bowne had Howison in mind.) From this passage alone, it may seem that Bowne doesn't himself suppose that monistic idealism is a pantheism, but as we already know from the *Metaphysics*, he does. "The dangers against which these thinkers protest are indeed real," he confirms, "and their pernicious character is clearly seen in the Vedanta philosophy of India" (p. 280). For Bowne, as for Howison—and indeed for Royce and Emerson—modern idealism is orientalizing.<sup>18</sup> Bowne declares that relief cannot be sought in a "despairing pluralism"—despairing because, in affirming the eternal and unerasable existence of the many, it precludes divine creation. "It would be easy to fall [back] into pantheism at this point," he says, "by emphasizing the dependence of the finite spirit, or by taking that dependence in an abstract or absolute sense" (p. 280). But the right way out is to "find in our experience a certain selfhood and a relative independence" (p. 281). This relative independence "constitutes our personality" (p. 281).

The argument for (ii) is stated very fully by Bowne, though Howison gives a crisp statement of the basic idea, which is that the "varying flood of serial experiences" has to be "connected," and that only an "act of the soul" can do the job (*The Limits of Evolution*, pp. 300, 301). Bowne's statement is more general: "Every . . . successive thing, in itself," he writes, "is made up of mutually external existences, and these attain to any abiding existence only through the activity of some non-successive being which is able to unite the successive existences into the thought of something fixed and permanent. Every such successive thing must be phenomenal, for, like the symphony, it exists and can exist only for and through intelligence. Or if we prefer to say the thing exists, then the claim is that it exists only through intelligence" (p. 115). This should sound familiar: it's Edwards's old argument for the Diminished Reality of Body—Bowne calls it the "Phenomenality of the Physical World" (p. 123)—with a new, more everyday hero: not the arbitrary will of God, but the "constitutive and synthesizing intelligence" of the human mind. For Bowne, as for Edwards, "changeless existence cannot be found" in the natural world (p. 103). Nature is "Heraclitic" (p. 120); everything in it is "change or flow" (p. 98). "There can be no real unity in anything existing in space and time," Bowne writes, "for in that case everything would be

dispersed in infinite divisibility" (p. 103). Because "successive existence is not identity" (p. 103), the identity of bodies is merely "formal"—"imposed" rather than "real" (p. 98). "On the impersonal plane, this problem of change and identity admits of no solution" (p. 123). "We find the problem solved only in the unity of conscious self, which is the only concrete unity that escapes the infinite dispersion of space and time" (p. 103). "The process, the succession . . . need intelligence to sum it up and inform it with meaning, so that it becomes anything intelligible and articulate for us" (p. 126). "Metaphysics [thereby] shows that neither matter, force, nor motion has any such existence as common sense attributes to them" (p. 151). "Nature is phenomenal, existing only in and for intelligence" (p. 153). In the following very pregnant paragraphs, Bowne sums up the argument and uses it to show that bodies have no causal power. (Here Bowne seems at the very limit of his powers as a writer, but his words, whether or not they're under his control, reach backwards to Edwards and forward to present-day four-dimensionalists or "worm-theorists.")

We came to the phantasmagoric flux of Heraclitus, which is the destruction of both thought and thing. We also saw the impossibility of making any use of the world of rigid identity. . . . In the view before us [a common-sense impersonalism] all this is overlooked, and it is assumed as a matter of course that both change and identity can be united in the impersonal. But when this is seen to be impossible, we no longer have one cause or one being, or indeed any cause or being whatever, but simply a causing in which nothing causes and nothing is caused, and a movement in which nothing moves and nothing is moved. We have a kind of metaphysical vermiform peristalsis, or peristaltism, in which nothing worms itself along from nothing to nothing, and is mistaken for something along the way. A moving body without continuity and identity would not be a moving body, but only a succession of optical phenomena; and if there were no observer, not even this could exist. The impersonal changing cause is in this case. Its unity and identity are not in the flow itself, but in the observing mind; and when that is removed, there is nothing articulate left. . . . (pp. 190-1)

All that we bring away from these crude notions is the conviction that causality must be affirmed, but that it cannot be conceived in the mechanical and temporal form. (p. 191)

The world of space objects which we call nature is no substantial existence by itself, and still less a self-running system apart from intelligence, but only the flowing expression and means of communication of those personal beings. It is throughout dependent, instrumental, and phenomenal. (p. 278)

These passages raise many questions, but I have time to consider only one, the same one I raised for Edwards in Lectures I and II: if these are good arguments for the Diminished Reality or Phenomenality of Body, aren't they also good arguments for the Diminished Reality or Phenomenality of Finite Mind?<sup>19</sup> This is an aspect of a more general question: can Bowne avoid saying that it is *God* who collects successive bursts of being into organized, continuing wholes? Bowne has a profound answer to this question, one that it will take some time to develop.<sup>20</sup>

Bowne is an empiricist. (He describes his empiricism as "transcendental." See for example pp. 215 and 259 of *Personalism*. He is careful to note, however, that on crucial points he sides with the rationalists. See p. 307, for example.) He is an empiricist regarding the justification of our beliefs, and an empiricist regarding the origin of our conceptions. Philosophy, he says, is "an attempt to give an account of experience" (p. 4). "Positively, philosophy has the function of formulating and systematizing life and experience so as to bring out into clear consciousness our aims and principles" (p. 9). "Experience itself, with ourselves as its subject, is the primary fact; and anything we affirm beyond this fact must be for its explanation" (p. 89). "For us the real can



never be primarily anything but the contents of experience and whatever we may infer from them" (pp. 107-8). Experience is also the source of all of our conceptions. "Concepts without immediate experience are only empty forms, and become real only as some actual experience furnishes them with real contents" (p. 258). He is a *transcendental* empiricist because there are categories or forms "which the mind gives to its experience." Yet "the mind is not to be understood through them. Rather they are to be understood through the mind's living experience of itself" (p. 105).

Unlike the "formal" identity of bodies, which has to be constructed, "identity is given as the self-equality of intelligence throughout experience" (p. 103). Our causality is also given in experience. It is "verified in self-consciousness, as something actual and not merely formal" (p. 107). So we know *by experience* that the argument for Diminished Reality cannot possibly apply to us.<sup>21</sup>

Here Bowne is extending a point I made last time. I suggested that we know power not insofar as we perceive it, but insofar as we exercise it. Bowne thinks that our own exercise of power is the source of our notion of power. He also thinks that our experience of our "self-equality" in the face of succession is the source of our notion of identity. (I use the word "notion" advisedly, to recall the Berkeleyan precedent.) Neither our power or our identity is "picturable." (For the notion of "picturability," see pp. 234, 261.) They are not objects of experience. "We ourselves are invisible" (p. 268). But our power and identity are experienced. "Personality can never be construed as a product or compound; it can only be experienced as a fact. It must be possible because it is given as actual. When we attempt to go behind this fact we are trying to explain the explanation. We explain the objects before the mirror by the images which seem to exist behind it. *There is nothing behind the mirror.* When we have lived and described the personal life we have done all that is possible in sane and sober speculation. If we try to do more we only fall a prey to abstractions. This self-conscious existence is the truly ultimate fact" (pp. 264-5). (See also p. 324, on the invisible world of powers.)

He then does two things. The first is hinted at in the last passage quoted: he joins to this empiricism a militant anti-abstractionism. (Once again, Berkeley is an instructive precedent. Bowne was one of very few nineteenth-century idealists who happily admitted Berkeley's influence.) Abstractionism is what empiricists typically rely on to extend the application of concepts beyond their slender basis in experience. But Bowne, like Berkeley, is very strict. "The conceptions of impersonal metaphysics are only the abstract forms of the self-conscious life, and . . . apart from that life they are empty and illustory" (p. vi; for other passages narrowing our powers of abstraction see, among many others, pp. 199 and 261).

Early in the last century, M. Comte, the founder of French positivism, set forth his famous doctrine of the three stages of human thought. Man begins, he said, in the theological stage, when all phenomena are referred to wills, either in things or beyond them. After a while, through the discovery of law, the element of caprice and arbitrariness, and thus of will, is ruled out, and men pass to the second, or metaphysical stage. Here they explain phenomena by abstract conceptions of being, substance, cause, and the like. But these metaphysical concepts are really only the ghosts of the earlier theological notions, and disappear upon criticism. When this is seen, thought passes into the third and last stage of development, the positive stage. Here men give up all inquiry into metaphysics as bootless, and content themselves with discovering and registering the uniformities of coexistence and sequence among phenomena. (p. v)

The aim of these lectures is to show that critical reflection brings us back again to the personal metaphysics which Comte rejected. We agree with him that abstract and

impersonal metaphysics is a mirage of formal ideas, and even largely of words, which begin, continue, and end in abstraction and confusion. Causal explanation must always be in terms of personality, or it must vanish altogether. Thus we return to the theological stage, but we do so with a difference. At last we have learned the lesson of law, and we now see that law and will must be united in our thought of the world. Thus man's earliest metaphysics reemerges in his latest; but enlarged, enriched, and purified by the ages of thought and experience. (p. vii)

A passage on p. 314 shows how aggressive his anti-abstractionism is—so aggressive that it leads him to deny that a physical fact or analogy can rightly represent "any intellectual fact or process whatever." (The striking fact is that it disputes what Emerson has to say about nature as a language. Bowne is another writer clawing past Emerson. Emerson's concrete types and symbols for mental and spiritual life, borrowed from nature, turn out to be abstractions! Emerson thinks these are all we have. Bowne thinks we have something else, *right* representations—"notional" in Berkeley's sense—that do not "picture" what they represent, and succeed precisely for that reason.)

Bowne's anti-abstractionism disposes of bodies as causes. "Experience certifies only volitional causality as real" (p. 215).

Our experience of our own power and identity does, however, allow us to conceive of God. This gives a new, unintended meaning to Bowne's declaration that "we cannot believe in God without believing in man" (p. 299). And now we come to the second thing Bowne does, at least implicitly. *He denies that we can turn back and deny of ourselves properties we are able to conceive of only because we find them in ourselves.* So we must be exempt from the argument for Diminished Reality. We can't be forced out by the Absolute, because if we go, the Absolute goes with us. Hume makes a comment that I think Bowne would have appreciated: "Ideas always represent the objects or impressions from which they are deriv'd, and can never without a fiction represent or be apply'd to any other" (*Treatise of Human Nature* 1.2.3.11). Hume is using his own particular vocabulary, but I think both of Bowne's fundamental points are present here. The application of our ideas or notions can only be extended so far. And they will always represent the things from which they were derived.

The following passage, from Bowne's 1902 Deems Lectures, published as *Theism*, sums up the line of thought I've just presented.<sup>22</sup>

The view that identifies conservation with perpetual creation has no difficulty when applied to the physical system. Here form and law are the only fixed elements we can find; and metaphysics makes it doubtful whether there can be others. In that case the physical order becomes simply a process which exists only in its perpetual ongoing. It has the identity of a musical note, and, like such a note, it exists only on condition of being incessantly and continuously reproduced. But we cannot apply this view to the world of spirits without losing ourselves in utterly unmanageable difficulties, at least on the realistic theory of time. The identity of the phenomenal process exists only for the beholder; and to reduce the finite spirit to such process would cancel its selfhood altogether and make thought impossible.

We seem, then, shut up to distinguish creation from preservation; and the nature of this distinction eludes all apprehension. We affirm something whose nature and method are utterly opaque to our thought. The only relief, such as it is, lies in falling back on the ideality of time. We replace the notions of creation and conservation by the notion of dependence on the divine will. The mystery of this fact we have seen in treating of

pantheism, and we have also seen that thought cannot move without affirming at once the dependence and the relative independence of the finite spirit. On the possibility of such a relation thought cannot pronounce; it can only wait for experience to reveal the fact. The puzzle about the identity of the dependent has the same solution. The identical spirit has not to maintain its identity across different times, but only to identify itself in experience. This self-identification is the real and only meaning of concrete identity; and it is to be judged or measured by nothing else. Experience is the only test of meaning and possibility in this matter. The abstract categories of time, continuity, and identity do not go before and make experience possible; but experience is the basal fact from which these categories get all their meaning and by which they are to be tested. Apart from this experience they are self-canceling abstractions.

Howison doesn't make the empiricist argument I've just reviewed, but he too has a reply to the parity objection. It is a rationalist reply. (Howison doesn't say—though he doesn't deny—that our conceptions originate in experience, but his test of truth in metaphysics is "the inconceivability of the opposite" (p. 23).) Howison's reply is suggestive but less developed than Bowne's. (Howison published much less than Bowne. He was also a more reactive writer; most of his papers seem "occasional." Howison's only book is a collection of papers, filled with references to others. In this respect, Bowne's many books are majestically limited. They are wide and almost undisturbed spaces, ready for positive development. Howison's one book has a copious index, including many proper names. I haven't seen a book by Bowne that has an index.)

It runs as follows. Howison is sure that he exists (the appeal is to the *cogito*, p. 357 of *The Limits of Evolution*), and equally sure "that in order to the solidifying of associations in *any* consciousness there must be some *principle*—some *spring*—of association, of unification, of synthesis, in that consciousness itself" (p. 19). But why that consciousness as opposed to some other consciousness? The lesson of Hume, he says, is not that the self is a bundle of perceptions, but that "without an Abiding and Active in us the transitory and sensible is impossible" (p. 178). "Each mind," he insists, "no doubt organises its own self-contents, directly by its own *a priori* formative consciousness, for spontaneity is meaningless unless it is individual; and Nature is, in so far, a product of individual's efficient causality" (p. xxi). But why "its own"?

Howison's reply is that self-consciousness is essentially *social*. He uses this point negatively, against Royce, as we saw at the close of last week's lecture. Royce's Absolute, like all monistic Absolutes, is left "without genuine personality; for his consciousness is void of that recognition and reverence of the personal initiative of other minds which is at once the sign and the test of the true person" (p. x). "It is the essence of a person to stand in a relation with beings having an autonomy, in whom he recognises rights, towards whom he acknowledges duties" (p. 52). Here he makes positive use of it. "That a mind is conscious of itself as a *self*, means at the least that it discriminates itself *from* others, but therefore that it also refers its own defining conception *to* others,—is in relation *with* them, as unquestionably as it is in the relation of differing *from* them. It cannot even *think* itself, except in this relatedness to *them*; cannot at all *be*, except as a member of a reciprocal society. Thus the logical roots of each mind's very being are exactly this recognition of itself through its recognition of others, and the recognition of others in its very act of recognizing itself" (p. 311; see also p. 353 and 355). "Our self-thought being is intrinsically a *social* being; the existence of each is reciprocal with the existence of the rest, and is not thinkable in any other way. We all put the fact so, each in the freedom of his own self-defining consciousness. The circle of self-thinking spirits indeed has God for its central Light, the Cynosure of all their eyes: *he* is if *they* are, *they* are if *he* is [in other words, *he* is only if *they* are]; but the relation is freely mutual, and he only exists as *primus inter pares*, in a circle and indissoluble."

Unlike Bowne, Howison hardly touches on the doctrine of continuous creation, but that's because he was troubled enough by *creation*, even if it takes place only once. "The Creator," he writes, "cannot, of course, create except by exactly and precisely conceiving."<sup>23</sup> If God creates something, Howison reasonably assumes, he must be responsible for *all* of its details, small as well as large. (The same assumption plays a crucial role in Malebranche's argument from continuous creation to occasionalism.) In Lecture V, we took note of Royce's strange view that if God were a creator, he would be finite, because some law above his will would be required for his will to take effect. Howison makes a more plausible assumption along the same general lines: if God says, for example, *let there be light*, he cannot leave its *color*, or its *quality* or *direction*, up to someone else. God can't decide to create a man without deciding exactly what the man will look like and what he will do, and where and when he will do it. For Howison, *sheer* creation is as threatening to finite initiative as *continuous* creation is for Malebranche and Edwards. Hence he concludes that finite spirits are uncreated—a result confirmed by the fact that they must exist beyond time in order to unify or synthesize the sensory appearances that do exist in time.

So we have two complementary answers to the parity objections. The first is empiricist and the second is rationalist and communitarian. I hope it is clear enough how the commitments I've identified as (iii) and (iv) flow from them.

Howison and Bowne both had long university careers. But Bowne felt more fortunate as a teacher. When Howison was congratulated on having many students who were teaching at distinguished universities (among them Arthur O. Lovejoy), he replied sourly, "Yes, but not one of them teaches the truth."<sup>24</sup> Howison's truth wasn't easy to swallow. It was the view that each of us is on "the same *dead level*" as God (p. 339). Each of us is eternal, uncreated, autonomous, and even infinite, though our infinity isn't of the same character as God's. (Our infinity "embosoms finitude and evermore raises this toward likeness with God," p. 374.) This is what Bowne had in mind when he spoke of those who go so far as to say that the many have always existed.<sup>25</sup> It is, as Howison says, "an *uncompromising Pluralism*—an absolute democracy" (p. 339).

Bowne had reason to feel more fortunate. Many of his students and colleagues were loyal to his views. (He was also fortunate that when he was tried for heresy by the Methodist Episcopal Church (now folded into the United Methodist Church) in 1903, some of the bishops on the jury that speedily acquitted him had been his students.) The most prominent among them was Edgar Sheffield Brightman. Brightman studied with Bowne during Bowne's last years at Boston University. He himself taught at the university from 1919 to 1953, where he was the first holder of the Borden Parker Bowne chair. Brightman repeated Bowne's argument for the Diminished Reality of Body.<sup>26</sup> He argued, as Bowne had, that "if we are to be guided in our thinking by the facts of experience rather than by unverifiable concepts of a substance that can never be present in any experience," we must conclude that "substance is person or self" (*Person and Reality*, p. 199; see also p. 189: "a personalistic view of substance banishes . . . the unempirical definition of substance"). He also followed Bowne's method, which he described as a "search for empirical coherence" (*Person and Reality*, p. 178). (He also speaks of "the criterion of empirical coherence" [pp. 182 and 183]). The aim of the method, in Bowne's words, is to "set forth a general way of looking at things which . . . will be found consistent with itself and with the general facts of experience."<sup>27</sup>

Brightman was loyal to Bowne but he recognized that others weren't. The fact of disagreement—and of disagreement among idealists in particular—unsettled him, so much so that he embarked on a series of irenic or conciliating projects. In a paper on "Modern Idealism," published in the *Journal of Philosophy* in 1920, Brightman identified four different kinds of idealism. He then tried, and failed, to find a common element.<sup>28</sup> Ten years later he tried a

different, more political strategy. He met with another idealist, Mary Whiton Calkins—she was a student of Royce and Münsterberg and a representative monist, he was of course a representative pluralist—and they drafted a platform.<sup>29</sup> He reported on the results of their negotiations in the same journal in 1933.<sup>30</sup>

The attempt to define idealism may be brought to a close by a document which has some historical interest in this connection. It is a "Platform of Personalistic Idealism" on which Professor Mary Whiton Calkins and I agreed May 25, 1929. It defines positions which may be held by those who affirm all four types of idealism.

I will present only the metaphysical planks in the platform.

#### PLATFORM OF PERSONALISTIC IDEALISM

1. The universe is completely mental in nature.
2. Every mental existence is either a self, or else a part, aspect, phase, or process of a self. The term "person" is used for selves capable of reasoning and ideal valuations.
3. The physical universe may be regarded as the direct experience and willing of one cosmic person, or as a system of infra-human selves, or as a system of ideas in the minds of finite persons.
4. The total universe is a system of selves and persons, who may be regarded either as members of one all-inclusive person who individuates them by the diversity of his purposing or as a society of many selves related by common purposes. (pp. 434-5)

Note the recurring appearances of the word "or." It is a mark of political compromise. It provides a way of arriving at agreement even if a (simple, non-disjunctive) "common element" can't be found.

Brightman came to realize that the method of coherence allows for—and perhaps even predicts—disagreement. It isn't a method that can establish certainties (*Person and Reality*, p. 214).<sup>31</sup> He wrote that

the personalistic theory of substance . . . is not advanced as something absolutely certain or completely demonstrated. It is advanced as the most coherent and most adequate hypothesis available to present insight on the basis of the whole of empirical evidence and what it implies and involves. The basic justification for a theory of substance stands—with full recognition of human limitations and cosmic mystery. (*Person and Reality*, p. 215)

I think Brightman may have recognized that the method of coherence lends itself to a more *social* or, if you like, more political way of proceeding in philosophy. The method of coherence can of course be practiced by a heroic individual, no less than the method of intuition (as practiced by Emerson in *Nature*, or by Thoreau in *Walden*) or the method of demonstration (as practiced by Royce in *The Religious Aspect*) can be. But the *socialized* prosecution of the method is arguably more coherent with both the method, and the metaphysics Brightman arrived at by its means.<sup>32</sup>

Like his teacher Bowne, Brightman was fortunate in his students. One of the last was Martin Luther King, who became a graduate student at Boston University in 1951. In "My Pilgrimage to Nonviolence" (1958), King describes his encounter with Brightman and with personalism:

I studied philosophy and theology at Boston University under Edgar S. Brightman and L. Harold DeWolf. Both men greatly stimulated my thinking. It was mainly under these teachers that I studied personalistic philosophy—the theory that the clue to the meaning of ultimate reality is found in personality. This personal idealism remains today my basic philosophical position. Personalism's insistence that only personality—finite and infinite—is ultimately real strengthened me in two convictions: it gave me metaphysical and philosophical grounding for the idea of a personal God, and it gave me a metaphysical basis for the dignity and worth of all human personality.

Just before Dr. Brightman's death, I began studying the philosophy of Hegel with him. . . . There were points in Hegel's philosophy that I strongly disagreed with. For instance, his absolute idealism was rationally unsound to me because it tended to swallow up the many in the one. But there were other aspects of his thinking that I found stimulating. His content that "truth is the whole" led me to a philosophical method of rational coherence.

The King papers include his final exam from his course with DeWolf, who was himself one of Brightman's former students. Here is an excerpt.<sup>33</sup>

Brightman modified Bowne's personalistic system by positing a finite God. Bowne was in every sense of the word a theistic absolutist. Brightman, on the other hand is a theistic finitist. For him God is a struggling God . . . . His power is finite, and his goodness infinite.

In the closing words of his doctoral dissertation, *A Comparison of the Conceptions of God in the Thinking of Paul Tillich and Henry Nelson Wieman* (1955), King endorses personalistic pluralism. By a *qualitative* pluralism, King means a pluralism that recognizes several fundamentally different *kinds* of things; by a *quantitative* pluralism, he means a pluralism that recognizes distinct individuals within a kind.

Wieman holds to an ultimate pluralism, both quantitative and qualitative. Tillich, on the other hand, holds to an ultimate monism, both qualitative and quantitative. Both of these views have been found to be inadequate. Wieman's ultimate pluralism fails to satisfy the rational demand for unity. Tillich's ultimate monism swallows up finite individuality in the unity of being. A more adequate view is to hold a quantitative pluralism and qualitative monism. In this way both oneness and manyness are preserved.

King's substantive conclusions are interesting. They justify me in offering him to you as a very late representative of the tradition I've been charting. But his acceptance of the method of coherence is also interesting, and I want to conclude with some reflections on it.

The first is that his acceptance of the method may enable us to see why King was not, as I've argued Thoreau was, a strictly ethical idealist. Metaphysical idealism may have allowed him to achieve a wider "reflective equilibrium."

The second is that the method, because it doesn't convey certainty, left King with a difficulty. He discusses it in the final exam from his course with DeWolf. In it, incidentally, what he elsewhere calls a method of rational coherence is described as a method of empirical coherence:

To my mind one of the most important problems confronted by present personalists is that of the relationship between Personalism and theology. This problem grows up mainly because of the emphasis, by many personalists, on the method of coherence. The problem boils down to this: Can one hold to an empirical method of coherence and at the same time make absolute decisions? Certainly religion demands such absolute decisions . . . . Theoretically we can never make a claim to absolute certainty. This is certainly the emphasis of a method of coherence and that I accept. But while we cannot be theoretically certain about any issue, we are compelled to act. And certainly we have a right to act and accept any belief until one better is found if it does not contradict experience. So that along with a "theoretical relativism" we have the perfect right to adopt a "practical absolutism."

My third and final reflection is that King's acceptance of the method of coherence might help us better understand the influence on him of Thoreau. I quote again from "My Pilgrimage to Nonviolence":

When I went to Atlanta's Morehouse College as a freshman in 1944 my concern for racial and economic justice was already substantial. During my student days at Morehouse I read Thoreau's *Essay on Civil Disobedience* for the first time. Fascinated by the idea of refusing to cooperate with an evil system, I was so deeply moved that I reread the work several times. This was my first intellectual contact with the theory of nonviolent resistance.

I don't want to deny the importance of the thought that King expresses here. But Thoreau's "Civil Disobedience" is, in its epistemology, strongly individualist, and if I'm right in thinking that the method of coherence calls naturally for social or collaborative application, King's epistemology is fundamentally at odds with Thoreau's. I suggested in Lecture III that Emerson's way out of Calvinist pantheism was to deny the personality of the Oversoul. I suspect that one effect of this denial, in Thoreau as in Emerson, was to expand the epistemic authority of the individual. (In Thoreau's case, I should speak not of his *denial* of personality to the Oversoul—that makes him seem too much of a metaphysician—but of his *refusal to affirm* the personality of the Oversoul, or of his willingness to say no more than that the Oversoul is law. However I spell out the details, the Oversoul was, for both Emerson and Thoreau, understood *nomologically* rather than personally.) King's political practice was also less individualist than the practice Thoreau recounts in "Civil Disobedience." In both of these ways, King seems to me to be closer to Royce, who, in an essay on a California squatter's riot, has this to say about transcendentalism:<sup>34</sup>

The cultivated Radicals of the anti-slavery generation, and especially of Massachusetts, were a type in which an impartial posterity will take a huge delight; for they combined so characteristically shrewdness, insight, devoutness, vanity, idealism, and self-worship, To speak of them, of course, in the rough, and as a mass, not distinguishing the greater names, they were usually believers in quite abstract ideas; men who knew how to meet God "in the bush" whenever they wanted, and so avoided him in the mart and the crowded street; men who had "dwelt cheek by jowl, since the day" they were "born, with the Infinite Soul," and whose relations with him were like those of any man with his own private property. This Infinite that they worshipped was, however, in his relations to the rest of the world, too often rather abstract . . . . From him they go a so-called Higher Law. As it was ideal, and, like its author, very abstract, it was far above the erring laws of men, and it therefore relieved its obedient servants from all entangling earthly allegiances. If the constitution upon which our only hope of better things also depended, was contradicted by this Higher Law, then the constitution was a "league with hell," and

anybody could set up for himself, and he and the Infinite might carry on a government of their own.

These Radicals were, indeed, of the greatest value to our country. To a wicked and corrupt generation they preached the gospel of a pure idealism fervently and effectively. If our generation does not produce just such men, it is because the best men of our time have learned from them, and have absorbed their fervent and lofty idealism into a less abstract yet purer doctrine. The true notion, as we all, of course, have heard, is, that there is an ideal of personal and social perfection far above our natural sinful ways, and indeed revealed to us by the agencies of spiritual life, and not by baser worldly means, but not on that account to be found or served by separating ourselves, or our lives, or our private judgments, from the social order. . . . He is the best idealist who casts away as both unreal and unideal in vain private imaginings of his own weak brain, whenever he catches a glimpse of any higher and wider truth all this lesson we, like other peoples and generations, have to study and learn. The Transcendentalists, by their very extravagances, have helped us towards this goal; but we must be pardoned if we learn from them with some little amusement. For when we are amused at them, we are amused at ourselves, since only by these very extravagances in our own experience do we ever learn to be genuine and sensible idealists.

Royce made these remarks in 1885, the same year *The Religious Aspect* was published. Here, as there, he's trying to surpass Emerson, though once again Emerson isn't named. The image of meeting God "in the bush," and the opposition between the bush and the busy street, are from Emerson's poem "Good-Bye," to which Royce also alludes in other places. The words quoted next are from James Russell Lowell's *A Fable for Critics* (1848), a satire of contemporary writers that begin with Emerson; the words are attributed not to Emerson but to "Miranda," Lowell's stand-in for Margaret Fuller, Emerson's close friend and collaborator. (Royce had to go to some effort to make "men" the subject of the two quoted pieces. In the poem, they are spoken by Miranda.)<sup>35</sup>

In opposition to Emerson, Royce is recommending the method of coherence—a *socialized* method of coherence, in epistemology and in politics. And *if* this method is indeed more coherent with pluralistic personalism than with monistic personalism, then at the end of his life, finally Royce brought everything into adjustment, by accepting a metaphysics that was very much like Howison's or Bowne's. "This essentially social universe," he wrote in 1913, "this community which we have now declared to be real, and to be, in fact, the sole and supreme reality,—the Absolute,—what does it call upon a reasonable being to do?"<sup>36</sup> This sounds very much like what Howison had already written in 1898:

Ethics for [me], as for Professor Royce, can have no valid presuppositions except such as find their place in a totally coherent, totally embracing theoretical view. ("The Real Issue in 'The Conception of God,'" 1898)

[The] Divine republic of autonomous Persons . . . is itself the only sufficient condition of knowledge. ("The Real Issue")

The equivalent word 'true,' can have no valid meaning except as marking the *a priori* collective consensus of an absolutely total society of minds, independent and yet disinterested and harmonizing. ("The Real Issue")



This is a very attractive package: personalism, or the fundamental reality of persons; the method of coherence (or what we now know as "reflective equilibrium"); and a way of proceeding in philosophy and politics that aims at consensus or agreement rather than heroic and isolated certainty. It seems surprising that it sank so suddenly. Why it sank is a question for another occasion—a big question, if only because the story of one movement's fall is always the story of another movement's rise. (The story of idealism's fall, in particular, would also be a story of its differentiation from other movements. Many elements in the idealist "package" I've identified are also found in naturalism and pragmatism. What they do away with, above all, is the stern division between mind and body: that is certainly idealism's weak point—the one that worries Santayana in the essays I go on to quote.) I hope I've persuaded you that American idealism doesn't rest, as Santayana alleged, on the "conceited notion that man, or human reason, or the human distinction between good and evil, is the centre and pivot of the universe."<sup>37</sup> Whether the *specifically* human is central or pivotal was, as we've seen, a matter for debate, even within the party of the gods. But the idealists may be guilty of a lesser charge, also brought against them by Santayana: that they take what is *in fact* a "small and dependent part" of the world, whether or not they know it, and make it "the central and universal power."<sup>38</sup> The idealists would rightly wonder whether Santayana himself is any better off, since to judge that mind is small and dependent is to exercise its power, and thereby to grant it a kind of centrality after all. Whether this methodological or epistemic centrality carries with it a metaphysical centrality is a further question, but it is one we can answer, it seems to me, only by examining the arguments for and against it, whenever they are made.

Kenneth P. Winkler  
February 28, 2012

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<sup>1</sup> This is the last in a series of six lectures, honoring Isaiah Berlin, delivered at Oxford University in January and February, 2012. For the opportunity to give them, I'm grateful to the benefactors and electors of the Sir Isaiah Berlin Visiting Professorship in the History of Ideas, to the Faculty of Philosophy, and to Corpus Christi College. The present lecture was delivered on February 21. This document isn't an actual transcript of my talk—it was prepared before I spoke (and lightly edited afterwards), and contains more than I was actually able to cover—but it is written as if to be spoken. It is more loosely structured than a formal paper would be. Some of the footnotes are reminders to myself; others raise issues that call for further, more disciplined thought. This is, above all, a draft piece of work, and I ask that it not be quoted or cited without my permission.

<sup>2</sup> "Transcendentalism," in *The American Biblical Repository*, second series, 8 (1842), pp. 195-218, p. 196.

<sup>3</sup> *Books and Reading: Or, What Books Shall I Read and How Shall I Read Them?* (New York: Scribner's, 1883), pp. 108-9. To be fair, Porter does include Emerson in some of his lists of recommended authors (pp. 321, 389, 391). He thinks it's permissible to read him Emerson so long as he won't shake your faith in God. If you can read him and simply admire his genius, fine (p. 108). But how will I know beforehand whether I'll be safe? It seems that the prudent course is not to read him.

<sup>4</sup> Many of the biographical details in this paragraph are from Kurt F. Leidecker, *Yankee Teacher: The Life of William Torrey Harris* (New York: Philosophical Library, 1946). Also useful is J. H. Muirhead, "How Hegel Came to America," *The Philosophical Review* 37 (1928), pp. 226-40. *Scribner's Monthly* for 1873 (New York: Scribner and Company, 1874), in "The Heart of the Republic," has Harris meeting Alcott in 1856, before he left Yale, and this is consistent with everything Leidecker says (though he doesn't say it himself). Leidecker also states that Harris met Theodore Parker while at Yale.

<sup>5</sup> *Hegel's Logic . . . A Critical Exposition* (Chicago: S. C. Griggs and Company, 1895). The first edition appeared in 1890. Harris's book appeared in a series of critical expositions edited by George Sylvester Morris, the absolute idealist who was John Dewey's teacher. Dewey writes of him: "It is not for me to expound the idealism which won the ardent loyalty of Morris. But I may comment upon it from the standpoint of the impressions left upon a student. It was, all the way through, an objective and ethical idealism. He effected in himself what many book-scholars would doubtless regard as impossible, a union of Aristotle, Fichte and Hegel. The world, the world truly seen, was itself ideal; and it was upon the ideal character of the world, as supporting and realizing itself in the energy of intelligence as the dominant element in creation, that he insisted. That the struggle of intelligence to realize in man the supreme position which it occupies ontologically in the structure of the universe was a moral struggle, went without saying. The teleological metaphysics of Aristotle thus found a natural complement in the moral idealism of Fichte." (My source is *The Life and Work of George Sylvester Morris*, where Dewey's reminiscence is quoted.)

<sup>6</sup> G. H. Howison, *The Limits of Evolution and Other Essays Illustrating the Metaphysical Theory of Personal Idealism* (New York: Macmillan, 1901), p. xxvi.

<sup>7</sup> Quotations from James are from "Thomas Davidson, Individualist," as it appears in *Essays, Comments and Reviews* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997), pp. 88-9. In the version

published in *Memories and Studies*, only the deceased members of the club, Cabot and Everett, are identified. (There may be reason to doubt James's testimony regarding Bowne. Was Bowne regularly in Boston in 1873? Or is James talking about a group that met for many years?) The Illinois businessmen James mentions were Samuel H. Emery and Edward McClure. According to Franklin Sanborn, in his *Recollections of Seventy Years*, Emery and his brother-in-law McClure became Alcott's tenants in Orchard House in 1879. They had Harris as a guest there, and the following year (says Sanborn) Harris bought the property. Emery was the moderator of the first public sessions of the Concord Summer School. In 1888, after Alcott's death, Orchard House was held by three trustees: Harris, Emery, and Sanborn. (This is according to an 1889 letter by Sanborn quoted in his *Recollections*. While wandering around the internet I ran across an architect's document saying that Alcott sold the property to Harris in 1885, and that Harris sold it in 1893. No doubt I could get all this straight by visiting Orchard House.)

<sup>8</sup> The somewhat older and (considerably) more established group: Harris, born in 1835; Cabot, 1821; and Everett, 1829; the younger and less established group: Davidson, 1840; James, 1842; Bowne, 1847; and Howison, a late-starting outlier, 1834. Everett may be more difficult to place than my division suggests. In grouping him with those whose sympathies are monistic, I'm guided by his admiration for Hegel (the chief authority in his 1869 *The Science of Thought: A System of Logic* [Boston: William V. Spencer, 1869]) and Fichte (the subject of his *Fichte's Science of Knowledge: A Critical Exposition* [Chicago: S. C. Griggs, 1884], an entry in the same series as Harris's book on Hegel's *Logic*), and by the verdict of Josiah Royce in his "Professor Everett as a Metaphysician," *The New World* 9 (1900), pp. 726-41. Royce concludes there that "an Idealism Professor Everett's philosophy certainly was. As to the problem of the One and the Many, he inclined rather, as we have seen, to emphasizing unity as against any abstract pluralism. On the other hand, he fully recognized that a truly significant unity must do justice both to finite individuality and to finite freedom of choice, while in their turn these latter must be defined with no abstract insistence upon their separateness as existent facts. They must be harmonized with the divine unity without losing their reality" (p. 740). For Everett's desire to reconcile divine immanence ("the final and highest thought of religion," p. 324) with finite individuality, see "The Philosophy of Browning," in *Essays Theological and Literary* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1901), pp. 304-27, pp. 324-7. This volume also includes (on pp. 219-47) an appreciation of "The Poems of Emerson" that addresses Emerson's idealism. It was first published as a pamphlet in 1887 by Houghton Mifflin in Boston.

There may be further evidence of my hypothesized generational divide in a lecture Howison gave to the Concord School of Philosophy in the summer of 1882. He says there that absolute idealism, "the doctrine of a one and only Infinite Person, manifesting his eternal consciousness in an incessant system of persons, the complete expression of whose conscious lives into definite and adequate particularity forms the sensible universe of experience and the world of moral order that is perpetually being inorbed therein," was "wrought to its completest form by Hegel" (*Concord Lectures on Philosophy* [Cambridge: Moses King, 1883]). He then observes that "this view of things, which is at present taking such a hold in Scotland, England, and America, is in Germany, if not dead, at any rate dormant," making the present situation in Germany "one of metaphysical non-conviction, of halt, of transition" (p. 30). The lecture was published as "Some Aspects of Recent German Philosophy" in the *Journal of Speculative Philosophy* in 1883. A revision of parts of it then appeared as "Later German Philosophy" in Howison's *Limits of Evolution*, pp. 101-78. There Howison dates the turn away from absolute idealism to 1865. The subtitle of the final version is revealing: "Monism Moving towards Pluralism, through Agnosticism and Its Self-Dissolution" (p. 101).

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By 1902, when John Dewey wrote the entry on "Pluralism" ("the theory that reality consists in a plurality or multiplicity of distinct beings") in James Mark Baldwin's *Dictionary*, the club's younger generation had come into its own. One aim of pluralism, Dewey explains there, is to account for "the possibility of real variety, particularly in the differences of persons, as monism appears to lend itself to a pantheistic view, regarding all distinctions as simply limitations of the one being," as well as for "the possibility of freedom, as a self-initiating and moving power inherent in every real *qua* real" (volume 2, p. 306). He then says that "the term pluralism," used in German by Wolff and Kant, "is very recent in English":

Bowne uses the term incidentally in *Philos. of Theism*, 57; James has probably done more than any one else to give it currency, in his *Will to Believe* (see Preface in particular); and Howison employs it to denote the substantially distinct existence of free ethical personalities (*Limits of Evolution*, and in Royce's *Conception of God*, xiv).

Bowne's use of the term in the passage indicated really is incidental. Dewey includes him, I assume, because he is, like James a Howison, a well-known pluralist in the sense defined.

<sup>9</sup> They also share a "positivistic" interpretation of natural science, as the recording and classifying of regularities, sequences, or concomitant variations. They reserve genuine *explanation* (which they take to be teleological, or teleological at bottom) for causes in the world beyond.

<sup>10</sup> All quotations in this paragraph are taken from Howison, *The Limits of Evolution*.

<sup>11</sup> Here, "continuous creation" isn't quite what it is for Edwards. It is the constant injection of novelty into the evolutionary process. (Edwards would agree that novelty is constantly injected, but for him it always tends to take the same old form: *ape, ape, ape, ape*, rather than *ape, ape, ape, ape, man*.) The creation of a species is a long-continued process. As Bowne writes in *Studies in Theism* (New York: Phillips and Hunt, 1880), "evolution is but the continuous activity of God realizing an unfolding plan" (p. 297).

<sup>12</sup> My references to *The Conception of God: A Philosophical Discussion concerning the Nature of the Divine Idea as Demonstrable Reality*, by Josiah Royce, Joseph LeConte, G. H. Howison, and Sidney Edward Mezes, are to the second edition (New York: Macmillan, 1898). Note that the title page repeats the claim of demonstrability of which I made so much in last week's lecture. The first edition was published in Berkeley in 1895 by the Executive Council of the Union; the title page of that edition says nothing about demonstrability.

<sup>13</sup> The brief review appeared in the 1896 number of Everett's journal *The New World*. Everett portrays Howison as pleading for "morality and personality," in opposition to an argument that is resolutely metaphysical. Howison objects to this portrayal, because it pits Royce the rigorous metaphysician against Howison the sentimental moralist, in "The Real Issue in 'The Conception of God,'" *The Philosophical Review* 7 (1898), pp. 518-22. (Howison refers to Everett on p. 518.) As I later explain, Howison believes that his case against Royce is no less metaphysical than moral.

<sup>14</sup> He also cites the essays of Carlyle, along with a slew of modern poets.

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<sup>15</sup> New York: American Book Company, 1910. The earliest version of Bowne's *Metaphysics* was published by Harper and Brothers in 1882.

<sup>16</sup> Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1908. These lectures on Bowne's "ism" were delivered in 1907, the same year James delivered the lectures published as *Pragmatism*.

<sup>17</sup> Hermann Lotze, *Microcosmus: An Essay concerning Man and His Relation to the World*, two volumes, translated by Elizabeth Hamilton and E. E. Constance Jones (Edinburgh: T. and T. Smith, 1888), volume 1, p. 380.

<sup>18</sup> As it is also for James. See *A Pluralistic Universe* (New York: Longmans, Green, 1909), p. 182.

<sup>19</sup> I should briefly acknowledge one further question: if we accept what Bowne has said so far, how will he prove there is an infinite mind? His reply is that "it would be incredible that we should know things by ideas essentially unrelated to them; and as the ideas by which the things are constituted are independent of us, there must be a supreme intelligence behind the things which makes them the bearer or expression of the ideas" (p. 118). Even though we apply these "ideas," forms, or categories, we do not invent them. We know this because they figure in necessary truths that are beyond our control (pp. 139-40). "The object itself," in other words, "must have an affinity for some forms rather than others" (p. 139), and because we can't be the source of this affinity, the object must owe to its affinity and its existence to "the infinite consciousness and will" (p. 143).

<sup>20</sup> He also has a quick answer, which is that the successive can only exist for the non-successive (*Personalism*, pp. 149, 122). But this gets us no more than *some spirit or other*; it doesn't guarantee that the non-successive synthesizing spirit is finite.

<sup>21</sup> Needless to say, Bowne denies "Kant's doctrine of phenomenalism with regard to the self" (p. 88). Bowne has to say that our experience of the self is not successive.

<sup>22</sup> Bowne, *Theism* (New York: American Book Company, 1902), pp. 228-30. For more on relative independence see p. 216. *Theism* is a revision of Bowne's *Philosophy of Theism* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1887), where Bowne's appeal to the ideality of time is more tentative: "How these two facts [our self-hood and our dependence on some absolute existence] coexist," he writes on p. 202, "is perhaps the deepest mystery of speculation. Possibly the ideality of time might serve to relieve the difficulty involved in distinguishing creation and preservation." In *The Immanence of God*, published three years after *Theism* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1905), Bowne seems to want to replace the doctrine of continuous *creation* with a doctrine of continuous *dependence*: "We are . . . in God's world, and all things continuously depend on him" (p. 28).

<sup>23</sup> "Personal Idealism in Its Ethical Bearings," pp. 445-55, p. 448.

<sup>24</sup> Quoted in James McLachlan, "George Holmes Howison: The Conception of God Debate and the Beginnings of Personal Idealism," *The Personalist Forum* 11 (1995), pp. 1-16, p. 2. McLachlan is quoting from John Wright Buckham and George Malcolm Stratton, *George Holmes Howison: Philosopher and Teacher* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1936), p. 13.

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- <sup>25</sup> Bill Mander has suggested to me that Bowne may also have been thinking of McTaggart.
- <sup>26</sup> Edgar Sheffield Brightman, *Person and Reality: An Introduction to Metaphysics*, edited by Peter Anthony Bertocci, Jannette Elthina Newhall, and Robert Sheffield Brightman (New York: Ronald Press, 1958), pp. 179-84.
- <sup>27</sup> Bowne says this twice: at the end of the preface to *Theory of Thought and Knowledge*, and at the end of the preface to *Metaphysics*, where the words are quoted.
- <sup>28</sup> "Modern Idealism," *Journal of Philosophy* 17 (1920), pp. 533-50. For the confession of failure see p. 539.
- <sup>29</sup> Mary Whiton Calkins (1863-1930) taught at Wellesley College from the mid-1880's until 1929. She was the first woman to complete the requirements for a Ph.D. at Harvard. The Department of Philosophy put her forward for a degree, but it was denied, because she was a woman. Years later, she was offered a Radcliffe Ph.D., but she refused it, saying that she had earned a Harvard Ph.D. and would accept nothing else. Calkins went on to become one of three people to be president of both the American Philosophical Association and the American Psychological Association. The others were James and Dewey.
- <sup>30</sup> "The Definition of Idealism," *Journal of Philosophy* 30 (1933), pp. 429-35.
- <sup>31</sup> There are anticipations of this methodological humility in Bowne. See for example his *Studies in Theism* (New York: Phillips and Hunt, 1880), pp. 286, 323-4. I need to study Bowne's meta-methodology more closely.
- <sup>32</sup> Though consensus would be the *end* of the socialized method of coherence, conflict or confrontation would be perfectly acceptable as means. I need to think more about what I say here, perhaps in connection with Peirce's essay "The Fixation of Belief."
- <sup>33</sup> I don't know whether King agreed with Brightman that God is finite, but a finite God is one with whom we can very easily *concur*—a God (to recall a familiar image from King's writings) whose co-workers we can be. I've been told that King borrowed the image of "*responsible co-workers with God*" from Joshua Loth Liebman, *Peace of Mind* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1946), p. 173, but the more basic image of human beings as God's co-workers is Biblical—and its influence, before Liebman, was widespread.
- <sup>34</sup> "An Episode of Early California Life: The Squatter Riot of 1850 in Sacramento," pp. 298-348 in *Studies of Good and Evil* (New York: Appleton, 1898). The quoted passage appears on pp. 324-6. This essay was originally published in the *Overland Monthly* in 1885.
- <sup>35</sup> The words "league with hell" are generally identified with the abolitionist William Lloyd Garrison.
- <sup>36</sup> *The Problem of Christianity: The Real World and the Christian Ideas* (New York: Macmillan, 1913), p. 296.

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<sup>37</sup> "The Genteel Tradition in American Philosophy."

<sup>38</sup> *Three Philosophical Poets: Lucretius, Dante, and Goethe*, Harvard Studies in Comparative Literature, volume 1 (Cambridge: Harvard University, 1910), p. 61.