

"A New World': Philosophical Idealism in America, 1700 to 1950"
Lecture V

1. *George Herbert Palmer's "Table of influences aiding philosophic advance" (from The Autobiography of a Philosopher, 1930)*

1. Resort to Germany for graduate study.
2. Professors make a specialty of single subjects.
4. Possibility of aiming at a professorship even though not a minister.
5. Philosophic staffs employed in place of Presidents or single Professors.
6. For courses beyond elementary, textbooks and mere criticism of authors abandoned and orderly constructive work expected of Professors.
7. Lectures substituted for recitations.
8. Books reserved in the Library, and large private reading demanded of students.
9. Sabbatical years.

2. *Joseph LeConte's broadly Fichtean conception of creation and its tendencies (from The Autobiography of Joseph LeConte, 1903)*

God may be conceived as self-sundering his Energy, and setting over against himself a part as Nature. A part of this part, by a process of evolution, individuates itself more and more, and finally completes its individuation and self-activity in the soul of man, [in whose immortal life God's plan will eventually be realized].

3. *C. S. Peirce's definition of "university" (from The Century Dictionary, 1899)*

An association of men for the purpose of study, which confers degrees which are acknowledged as valid throughout Christendom, is endowed, and is privileged by the state in order that the people may receive intellectual guidance and that the theoretical problems which present themselves in the development of civilization may be resolved.

4. *Royce's promise of demonstration and his hope of surpassing Emerson*

. . . before going on to set forth an absolute idealism as a demonstrable theory. (*The Religious Aspect of Philosophy* [1885], p. 383)

This way commends itself as avoiding the greatest danger of idealism, namely, fantastic speculative with noble purposes, but with merely poetical methods. (*The Religious Aspect*, p. 337)

Truly the words that some people have thought so fantastic ought henceforth to be put in text-books as a commonplace of logical analysis:—

"They reckon ill that leave me out;

When me they fly, I am the wings,
I am the doubter and the doubt."—

(*The Religious Aspect*, p. 434)

The whole of Emerson's "Brahma"

If the red slayer think he slays,
Or if the slain think he is slain,
They know not well the subtle ways
I keep, and pass, and turn again.

Far or forgot to me is near;
Shadow and sunlight are the same,
The vanished gods to me appear,
And one to me are shame and fame.

They reckon ill who leave me out;
When me they fly, I am the wings;
I am the doubter and the doubt,
And I the hymn the Brahmin sings.

The strong gods pine for my abode,
And pine in vain the sacred Seven;
But thou, meek lover of the good!
Find me, and turn thy back on heaven.

5. *Edward Everett Hale and George Holmes Howison*

What do you think I heard him doing in a lecture the other afternoon? Why, nothing less than showing that our human ignorance is the positive proof that there is a God—a supreme omniscient being. (Hale to Howison, in 1882 or 1883)

Nothing stands alone and isolated in the universe present to genuine thinking; each truth rests on every other and on all. (Howison, in a 1916 essay on Royce)

6. *Royce's argument: a precedent in the Meno*

What I intend by . . . saying that the self which thinks about an object, which really, even in the midst of the blindest ignorance and doubt concerning its object still means the object,—that this self is identical with the deeper self which possesses and truly knows the object,—what I intend hereby I can best illustrate by simple cases taken from your own experience. You are in doubt, say, about a name you have forgotten, or about a thought that you just had, but that has now escaped you. As you hunt for the name or the lost idea, you are all the while sure that you mean just one particular name or idea and no other. But you don't yet know what name or idea this is. You try, and reject name after name. You query, "Was this what I was thinking of, or this?" But after searching you ere long find the name of the idea, and now at once you *recognize* it. "On, that," you say, "was what I meant all along, only—I didn't know what I meant." Did not know? Yes, in one sense you knew all the while,—that is, your deeper self, your true consciousness knew. It was your momentary self that did not know. But when you found the long-sought name, recalled the lost idea, you recognized it at once, because it was all the while your own, because you, the true and larger self, who owned the name or the idea and were aware of what it was, now were seen to include the smaller and momentary self that sought the name or tried to recall

the thought. Your deeper consciousness of the lost idea was all the while there. In fact, did you not presuppose this when you sought the lost idea? How can I mean a name, or an idea, unless I in truth am the self who knows the name, who possesses the idea? (*The Spirit of Modern Philosophy* [1892])

7. *The content of Royce's idealism*

The self of finite consciousness is not yet the whole true Self. And the true Self is inclusive of the whole world of objects. Or, in the other words, the result is, that there is and can be but one complete Self, and that all finite selves, and their objects, are organically related to this Self, are moments of its completeness, thoughts in its thoughts, and, I should add, Will in its Will, Individual elements in the life of the Absolute Individual. ("The Implications of Self-Consciousness," 1892)

This supposed universal knowing consciousness, this "Not-Ourselves," has, under the conditions stated, all the essential characteristics of a real world. It is beyond us; it is independent of us; its facts have a certain correspondence to our sensations. Under the supposition that by nature we tend to be in agreement with this consciousness, progress in the definiteness and extent of our agreement with it may be both possible and practically useful. This agreement would constitute truth. (*The Religious Aspect*)

The Absolute is no creator, for two reasons: "Infinite Power would become finite as soon as there was in existence something outside of it," and "the concept of producing an external thing involves, of necessity, a relation to a Law, above both producer and product, which determines the conditions under which there can be a product at all." (The Religious Aspect)

The World of Divine Life will be in deepest truth not a Power at all, but the Infinite Knowing One, for whom are all the powers, but who is above them all, beyond them all,—no striving good principle that cannot get realized in a wicked world, but an absolute Judge that perfectly estimates the world. In the contemplation of this truth we may find a religious comfort. (*The Religious Aspect*)

8. *The argument's structure*

Total relativity, or else an infinite possibility of truth and error; that is the alternative before us. And total relativity of thought involves self-contradiction. (*The Religious Aspect*)

One version of total relativity: There's no real difference between truth and error, but only a kind of opinion or consensus of men about a conventional distinction between what they choose to call truth and what they choose to call error. (*The Religious Aspect*)

Why total relativity is self-defeating: If there is no real distinction between truth and error, then the statement that there is such a difference is not really false, but only *seemingly* false. And then *in truth* there is the distinction once more. Try as you will, you come not beyond the fatal circle. If it is wrong to say that there is Absolute Truth, then the statement that there is absolute truth is itself false. Is it however false only relatively, or is it false absolutely? If it is false only relatively, then it is *not* false absolutely. Hence the statement that it is false absolutely is itself false. But false absolutely, or false relatively? And thus you must at last come to some statement that is absolutely false or absolutely true, or else the infinite regress into which you are driven makes the very distinction between absolute and relative truth lose all meaning, and your doctrine of total Relativity will also lose meaning. "No absolute truth exists,"—can you say this if you want to? At

least you must add, "No absolute truth exists *save this truth itself, that no absolute truth exists.*" Otherwise your statement has no sense. But if you admit this truth, then there is in fact an absolute distinction between truth and error. (*The Religious Aspect*)

9. Royce's pragmatism

Real v. nominal definition

In a sympathetic exposition of Berkeley: What do you now *mean* by calling [something] real? No doubt it is known as somehow real, but *what* is this reality *known as* being? (*The Spirit of Modern Philosophy*)

Peirce on the "directly idealistic" potential of pragmatism: Since the meaning of a word is the conception it conveys, the absolutely incognizable has no meaning because no conception attaches to it. It is, therefore, a meaningless word; and, consequently, whatever is meant by any term as "the real" is cognizable in some degree, and so is of the nature of a cognition, in the objective sense of that term. ("Some Consequences of Four Incapacities," 1868)

Some bits from The World and the Individual, volume 1 (1899): "What is an idea?" An idea is not a moment of "purely intellectual life." Nor are ideas "merely images." They include a consciousness of how we propose to act. Ideas are "the motor soul of life," packed with will and "active meaning." They embody attitudes and intended behavior. They are, quite simply, "plans of action." Each is the fulfillment, however partial, of a purpose. Ideas are "tools" with a defining "teleological structure" (p. 310). They are "volitional process[es]" that embody both purpose and meaning.

If one attempts to define a world of merely relative truth, this world, as soon as you define it in its wholeness, becomes once more your absolute, your truth that is true. In acknowledging truth we are indeed meeting, or endeavoring to meet, a need which always expresses itself in finite form. But this need can never be satisfied by the acknowledgment of anything finite as the whole truth. For, as Hegel well insisted, the finite is as such self-contradictory, dialectical, burdened with irrationality. It passes away. Meanwhile it struggles with its own contradictions, and will not be content with acknowledging anything less than its own fulfilment in an Absolute Life which is also an absolute truth. . . . I may assert that personally I am both a pragmatist and an absolutist, that I believe each of these doctrines to involve the other, and that therefore I regard them not only as reconcilable but as in truth reconciled. (*Lectures on Modern Idealism*, posthumously published in 1919)

10. *The undermining syllogism confronting common sense*

Everything intended is something known.

The object even of an erroneous judgment is intended.

[Therefore] *The object even of error is something known.*

Or: Only what is known can be erred about. (*The Religious Aspect*)

11. *John and Thomas, A and B*



I have, for instance, in me the idea of a pain. Another man has a pain just like mine. Say we both have toothache; or have both burned our finger-tips the same way. Now my idea of pain is just like the pain in him, but I am not on that account necessarily thinking about *his* pain, merely because what I am thinking about, namely my own pain, resembles his pain. No; to think about an object you must not merely have an idea that resembles the object, but you must *mean* to have your idea resemble that object. (*The Spirit of Modern Philosophy*)

If in fact you suppose, as an ideal case, two human beings, say twins, absolutely to resemble each other, not only in body, but in experience and in thought, so that every idea which one of these beings at any moment had was precisely duplicated by a thought which at the same instant, and in the same fashion, arose in the other being's life,—if, I say, you suppose this perfect resemblance in the twin minds, you could still, without inconsistency, suppose these twins separate from infancy, living apart, although of course under perfectly similar physical conditions, and in our human sense what we call absolute strangers to each other, so that neither of them, viewed merely as this human being, ever consciously thought of the other, or conceived of the other's existence. In that case, the mere resemblance would not so far constitute the one of these twin minds the object of which the other mind thought, or the being concerning whom the ideas of the other were true. (*The World and the Individual*)

I may postulate . . . that I can [later] look back and say: Thus and thus I predicted about this moment, and thus and thus it has come to pass, and this even contradicts that expectation. But can I in fact ever accomplish this comparison at all? And is the comparison very easily intelligible? For when the event comes to pass, the expectation no longer exists. The two thoughts, namely expectation and actual experience, are separate thoughts, far apart in time. How can I bring them together to compare them, so as to see if they have the same object? It will do to appeal to memory for the purpose; for the same question would recur about the memory in its relation to the original thought. How an a past thought, being past, be compared to a present thought to see whether they stand related? (*The Religious Aspect*)

12. Royce's faith in Correspondence

Shall we now give up the whole matter, and say that error plainly exists, but baffles definition? This way may please most people, but the critical philosophy knows of no unanswerable problem affecting the work of thought in itself considered. (*The Religious Aspect*)

13. *His solution*

Let us overcome all our difficulties by declaring that all the many Beyonds, which single significant judgments seem vaguely and separately to postulate, are present as fully realized intended objects to the unity of an all-inclusive, absolutely clear, universal, and conscious thought, of which all judgments, true or false, are but fragments, the whole being at once Absolute Truth and Absolute Knowledge. Then all our puzzles will disappear at a stroke, and error will be possible, because any one finite thought, viewed in relation to its own intent, may or may not be seen by this higher thought as successful and adequate in this intent. (*The Religious Aspect*)

We must conceive the relation of John's thought to the united total of thought that includes him and Thomas. Real John and his phantom Thomas, real Thomas and his phantom John, are all present as elements in the including consciousness, which completes the incomplete intentions of both the individuals, constitutes their true relations, and gives the thought of each about the other whatever of truth or error it possess. In short, error becomes possible as one moment or element in a higher truth, that is, in a consciousness that makes the error a part of itself, while recognizing its error. (*The Religious Aspect*)

Only as actually included in a higher thought, that gives to the first its completed object, and compares it therewith, is the first thought in error. It remains otherwise a merely mental fragment, a torso, a piece of drift-wood, neither true nor false, objectless, no completed act of thought at all. But the higher thought must include the opposed truth, to which the error is compared in that higher thought. The higher thought is the whole truth, of which the error is by itself an incomplete fragment. (*The Religious Aspect*)

The deepest assertion of idealism is not that above all the evil powers in the world there is at work some good power mightier than they, but rather that through all the powers, good and evil, and in them all, dwells the higher spirit that does not so much create as constitute them what they are, and so include them all. (*The Religious Aspect*)

14. *From James's review*

California may feel proud that a son of hers should at a stroke have scored so many points in a game not yet exceedingly familiar on the Pacific slope. Turn and twist as we will, we are caught in a tight trap. Although we cannot help believing that our thoughts *do* mean realities and are true or false of them, we cannot for the life of us ascertain how they *can* mean them. If thought be one thing and reality another, by what pincers, from out of all the realities, does the thought pick out the special one it intends to know? . . . [I] suspect that his idealistic escape from the quandary may be the best one for us all to take.

13. *An assessment*

(i) *Presence to the Absolute v. constitution by the Absolute*

(ii) *What do we perceive besides our own ideas or sensations?* (*Berkeley, Principles of Human Knowledge*)

Even a Scot will admit that I have nothing but representative knowledge of my neighbor's thoughts and feelings. (*The Religious Aspect*)

(iii) *The Red King objection*(iv) *Acquaintance and description*

If I am acquainted with a thing which exists, my acquaintance gives me the knowledge that it exists. But it is not true that, conversely, whenever I can know that a thing of a certain sort exists, I or some one else must be acquainted with the thing. What happens, in cases where I have true judgement without acquaintance, is that the thing is known to me by *description*, and that, in virtue of some general principle, the existence of a thing answering to this description can be inferred from the existence of something with which I am acquainted. (Bertrand Russell, "Idealism," in *The Problems of Philosophy*)

If the subject of discourse had to be distinguished from other things, if it all, by a general terms, that is, by its peculiar characters, it would be quite true that its complete segregation would require a full knowledge of its characters and would preclude ignorance. But the index, which in point of fact alone can designate the subject of a proposition, designates it without implying any character at all. A blinding flash of lightning forces my attention and directs it to a certain moment of time with an emphatic "Now!" (Peirce, from "An American Plato," an unpublished review of *The Religious Aspect* originally intended for *The Nation*)

(v) *Dickinson Miller's theory of error*

Largely through the influence of Professor D. S. Miller, I came to see that any definitely experienceable workings would serve as intermediaries quite as well as the absolute mind's intentions would. (James, *The Meaning of Truth*)

(vi) *An ever-ascending hierarchy of minds?*

What, then, is an error? An error, we reply, is an incomplete thought, that to a higher thought, which includes it and its intended object, is known as having failed in the purpose that it more or less clearly had, and that is fully realized in this higher thought. (*The Religious Aspect*)

(vii) *A consensus, in the future or at the end of inquiry?*

The real is that which any many would believe in, and be ready to act upon, if his investigations were to be pushed sufficiently far. (Peirce, "An American Plato")

Royce on bare possibility: The idea of the barely possible, in which there is no actuality, is an empty idea. If anything is possible, then, when we say so, we postulate something as actually existent in order to constitute this possibility. The conditions of possible error must be actual. Bare possibility is blank nothingness. If the nature of error necessarily and with perfect generality demands certain conditions, then these conditions are as eternal as the erroneousness of error itself is eternal. And thus the inclusive thought, which constitutes the error, must be postulated as existent. (*The Religious Aspect*)

Our experience in this direction warrants us in saying with the highest degree of empirical confidence that questions that are either practical or could conceivably become so are susceptible of receiving final solutions provided the existence of the human race be indefinitely prolonged and the particular question excite sufficient interest. (Peirce, "An American Plato")

This maxim was first proposed by C. S. Peirce in the *Popular Science Monthly* for January 1878; and he explained how it was to be applied to the doctrine of reality. . . . The writer subsequently saw that the principle might be misapplied, so as to sweep away the whole doctrine of incommensurables, and, in fact, the whole Weierstrassian way of regarding the calculus. . . . Nevertheless, the maxim has approved itself to the writer, after many years of trial, as of great utility in leading to a relatively high degree of clearness of thought. He would venture to suggest that it should always be put into practice with conscientious thoroughness, but that, when that has been done, and not before, a still higher grade of clearness of thought can be attained by remembering that the only ultimate good which the practical facts to which it directs attention can subserve is to further the development of concrete reasonableness. (Peirce, "Pragmatism," in James Mark Baldwin's *Dictionary*, 1902)

(viii) *Modal collapse?*

Error, if possible, is eternally actual. (*The Religious Aspect*)

(ix) *How do my intentions exist in the Absolute? Are they present to its consciousness, or is the relation between them more intimate—and more "inward"?*

No accusation is more frequent than that an Idealism which has once learned to view the world as a rational whole, present in its actuality to the unity of a single consciousness, has then no room either for finite individuality, or for freedom of ethical action. (*The World and the Individual*)

[My conception of God or the absolute is] not pantheistic. It is not the conception of any Unconscious Reality, into which finite beings are absorbed; nor of an Universal Substance, in whose law our ethical independence is lost; nor of an Ineffable Mystery, which we can only silently adore" (Royce, in *The Conception of God*)

Howison in The Conception of God: "We do not escape pantheism, and attain to theism, by the easy course of excluding the Unconscious, or the sole Substance, or the Inscrutable Mystery, from the seat of the Absolute. We must go farther, and attain to the distinct reality, the full *otherhood*, of the creation." He worries that Royce has "reduce[d] all particular so-called selves merely to modes of his Omniscient Perceptive Conception," and made God "the only and only real *agent*."

[Absolute pragmatism] recognizes all truth as the essentially eternal creation of the Will. ("The Problem of Truth in the Light of Recent Discussion," in *William James and Other Essays*, 1911)

Royce quotes Tennyson: Oh living will that shalt endure / Flow through our deeds and make them pure.

Could he equally have quoted Emerson? From the heart of God proceeds, / A single will, a million deeds.