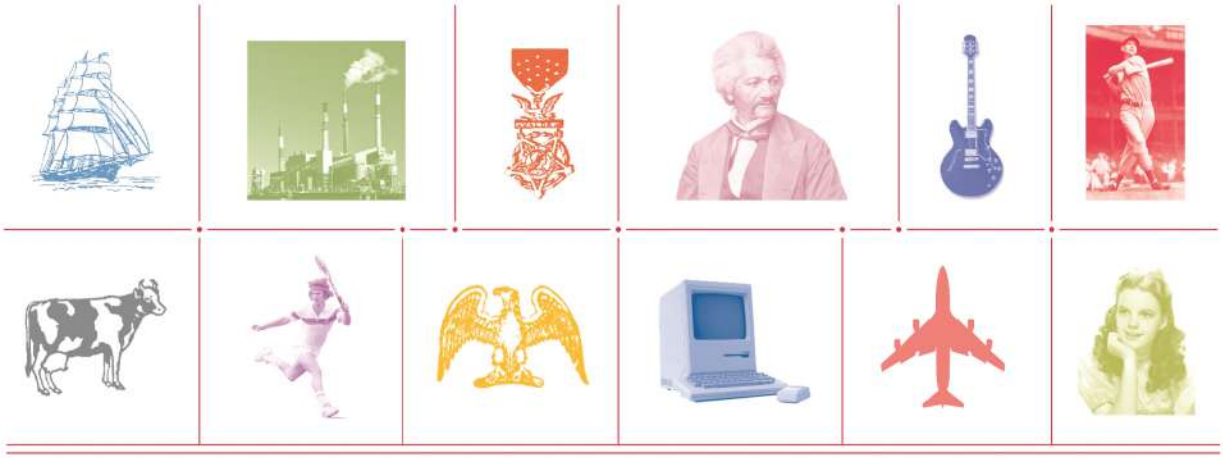
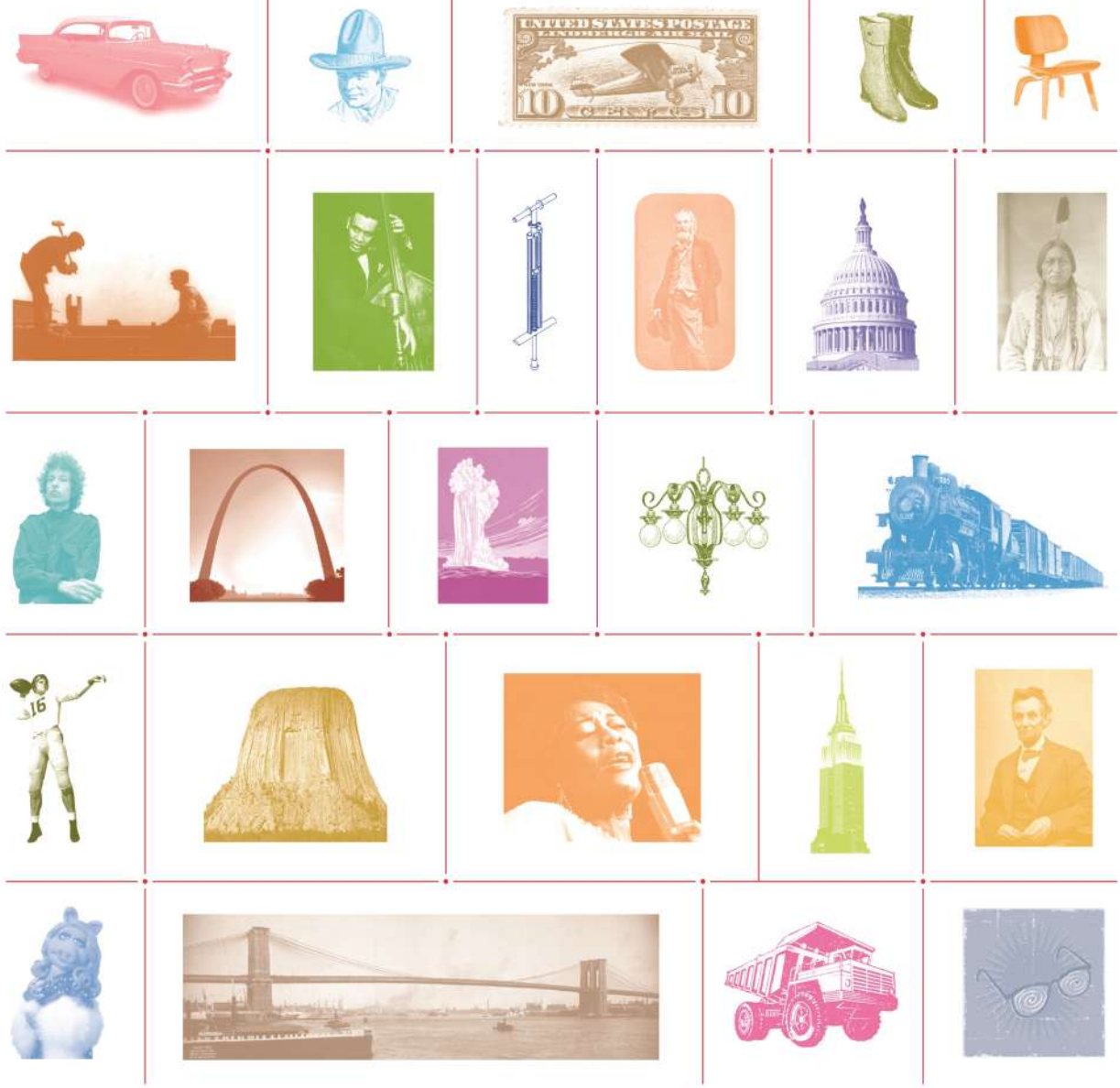
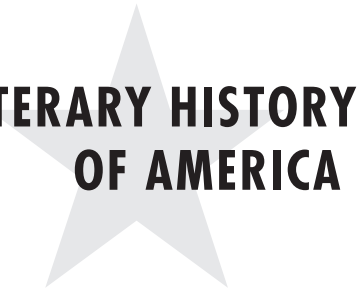


A NEW LITERARY HISTORY OF AMERICA

★ EDITED BY GREIL MARCUS AND WERNER SOLLORS ★





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cal and cultural conflicts in his comic novels *The Milagro Beanfield War* (1974) and *The Magic Journey* (1978).

Increasingly the Southwest is represented as a postcolonial region struggling with the legacies of conquest, and as a borderland, a place where cultures collide and combine. Feminist poet-critic Gloria Anzaldúa, raised on the segregated Texas border, elevated *mestizaje,* or racial mixing, to a metaphor for a new kind of consciousness: "The new *mestiza* copes by developing a tolerance for contradictions, a tolerance for ambiguity. She learns to be an Indian in Mexican culture, to be Mexican from an Anglo point of view. She learns to juggle cultures. She has a plural personality, she operates in a pluralistic mode—nothing is thrust out, the good the bad and the ugly, nothing rejected, nothing abandoned." In the idea of the borderland and the theory and practice of *mestizaje* there may be some hope that the Southwest will come to occupy a different place in the national imaginary. But there are powerful cultural and economic forces at work, with vested interests in maintaining the Southwest as the Land of Enchantment, or the national Rip Van Winkle, as Lummis put it so long ago. Whether Americans will wake up, shake off the mojo of romance, and acknowledge the region's conflicted history, the fluidity of cultural identity and authority, and the ambiguity of meaning remains to be seen.

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LEAH DILWORTH

1885

William James grapples with Josiah Royce's *The Religious Aspect of Philosophy*

The Problem of Error

Whereas Emersonian transcendentalism and Deweyan pragmatism, each in its own manner, regarded German idealism as in need of a transfigurative moment of American appropriation prior to its serving the cultural and intellectual needs of the democratic citizenry of the New World, Josiah Royce maintained that idealism, properly understood, was *already* the mode of thinking of every authentically American citizen: "The signers of our Declaration of Independence were idealists. Idealism inspired us during our Civil War. Idealism has expressed itself in the rich differentiation of our national religious life . . . [U]sing the term 'idealism' in this confessedly untechnical sense, I say that many of our foreign judges have failed to see how largely we Americans are today a nation of idealists."

This allows Royce to turn the Emersonian argument for the need to discover within our own shores the terms of a genuinely American philosophy on its head: idealism, though it originated on European shores, is actually more native to the spirit of the New World than to that of its own historical birthplace. For Royce, this meant that if one could simply succeed in thinking through German idealism to its logical endpoint, one would arrive at the mode of thought that possessed the greatest claim to being a genuinely American philosophy.

In his own lectures, when introducing students to his own undiluted strain of idealism, Royce lapses into eulogies of Kant's transcendental deduction of the categories of understanding:

> The Kantian deduction of the categories is the portal to the dwelling of modern philosophy. Some of you, having made previous efforts to grasp Kant's meaning, may regard that portal as a pretty closely shut door—not only closed, but perhaps locked. And, in fact, the section of Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason* which I have named is notoriously the most difficult passage in a very difficult book. But I do not believe the difficulties in question to be insurmountable. In any case, if we are to consider post-Kantian idealism at all, in any of its more technical aspects, we must make our beginning here at the doorway. Otherwise, if we endeavored to avoid such an entrance to the subject, we should be obliged to view modern idealism as a passing tourist might view a king's palace.

This is, indeed, how Royce was inclined to view even his most distinguished pragmatist philosophical contemporaries—as tourists who dabble in the ideas that they have glimpsed from surveying the palace of German idealism from afar, without ever mustering the courage to properly pass through its doorway and make arduous progress into its interior.

With these lectures of Royce's, and the generation of philosophers they nourished, we find ourselves at the inception of the first serious indigenous tradition of academic philosophy in America. Royce taught his students that in order to cease being intellectual tourists in a post-Kantian philosophical world, they must master the lessons of the transcendental deduction. Showing a much deeper grasp of Kant than many of his philosophical contemporaries, American or European, here is how Royce puts the objection to which the deduction seeks to respond:

> Why might not the genuine natural world simply ignore our categories? If it did so, and experience failed to confirm our ways of conceiving things, what could we do to enforce our conceptual constructions? Present experience, in any case, is not a mere conceptual construction. Why might not the unintelligible happen? Why might not experience break away from the forms of my intellect? Why might not chaos come at any moment? That such chaos does not now occur, what is that but itself a merely empirical fact, neither a priori nor necessary?

The worry to which Royce here understands Kant to be responding is admittedly a skeptical one. But Royce appreciates that it is a new variety of skepticism. Previously philosophy had been gripped by the following Cartesian question: How can I *know* things are as my senses present them as being—is there *really* an exter-

nal world? The skeptic to which Kant, in Royce's reading of him, is trying to respond in the transcendental deduction is preoccupied by a different question: How can my senses so much as *present* things as being a certain way? How can my experience so much as be intelligibly *of* an external world? The Kantian question is focused on the problem of how the senses must be so as to able to furnish testimony. The Kantian paradox lies in its coming to seem a mystery how what impinges on my senses could so much as *appear* to be revelatory of the world.

In order properly to come to terms with this Kantian worry, we need to develop a proper appreciation of Kant's central insight, which Royce formulates as follows: "What experience itself is . . . you cannot learn through experience. *That* you must learn by reflection.—The concept of experience, strange to say, is itself not an empirical concept." This, for Royce, remains the philosophical fulcrum with which he thinks any strict form of pragmatism is unable to come to terms. The contest over the question of who can with most justice lay title to the claim to speak philosophically for America, the Jamesian pragmatist or the Roycean idealist, thus comes to hinge at the pivot of the twentieth century on this question: How ought we to frame our conception of experience—in radical empiricist terms (as James would attempt) or in post-Kantian idealist terms (as Royce would urge)?

In this controversy between William James and Royce, each paints the other as the traditionalist and himself as the revolutionary. James fashions himself as seeking a conception of empiricism sufficiently thought through as to no longer be vulnerable to idealist backlash; Royce styles himself as a post-Kantian destroyer of past philosophy and portrays James as stuck in the old assumptions that the German idealists sought to expose. Descartes and the British empiricists, on Royce's reading of them, take the unity of present experience for granted and rush ahead to frame questions pertaining to the *truth* of this or that experience. Kant's genius, according to Royce, lies in his ability to slow the inquiry down, redirecting focus onto the "very conditions which make the unity of your present experience possible." Royce will emphasize the following point, left largely implicit by Kant: these are as much conditions of the possibility of judging *falsely* as they are conditions of judging truly. What thus figures initially in the Cartesian challenge as an epistemological worry about the relation between claims to *knowledge* and reality comes to look, from the vantage point of Royce's radicalized Kantian problematic, like only an instance of a more general metaphysical worry: a worry about the relation between *any* claim and reality. The question the post-Kantian philosopher must now answer is this: What does it take to have experiences that are vulnerable to the world outside us, as even *false* experiences are? The first concern is thus no longer immediately with truth, but rather with what it is to *stick your neck out in thinking,* with what Kant calls the *objective validity* of judgment.

In his introductory lecture to a course on metaphysics, Royce tries to lead his students from the early modern Cartesian epistemological worry to the genuinely modern idealist metaphysical worry through the following anecdote:

> One day on a train on Cape Cod returning towards Boston, I heard by chance two little boys talking behind me, mere voices in my memory. The little one was appealing to the elder, "What is the sky?" The elder was somewhat materialistic, "There ain't no sky." He had been taught that the sky was appearance and not reality, an optical illusion; there is no solid object there as children often think. He had reached the stage where he knew the vanity of this illusion. But the younger was the deeper thinker of the two, and asked a further question which was technically metaphysical: "What is it that ain't?"

In order to help mark the direction in which we need to move if we wish to pass through this portal and into modern idealism, Royce reformulates the matter in terms of *the problem of error.* How is error so much as possible? How is it that in thinking falsely our thought nonetheless continues to remain answerable to reality? Royce's most famous presentation of this was also his earliest: it figures as the opening step in his "argument from error," developed in chapter eleven of *The Religious Aspect of Philosophy.* It caused a sensation upon publication in 1885. In this argument, Royce claims he can derive his metaphysical position from one indubitable fact: that error exists. The schema of the argument is threefold: first, to establish that that fact is indeed indubitable; second, to reveal the necessary preconditions for the possibility of error; third, to show that any coherent doctrine of empiricism (in presupposing these conditions) entails absolute idealism. The overall strategy is to show that only given the possibility (excluded by any radical form of empiricism) of a certain kind of standpoint ("an absolute standpoint") can a coherent distinction between truth and falsity be drawn.

What captured James's attention was the first step of the argument. James's review of *The Religious Aspect of Philosophy* made Royce famous and led to his later promotion, in 1892, to full professor in the Department of Philosophy at Harvard; during his three decades teaching there, beginning in 1882, T. S. Eliot, George Santayana, and W. E. B. Du Bois would number among his students. Possibly no great philosopher has ever greeted an invitation to move to another university with louder jubilations of relief: "There is no philosophy anywhere in the state of California," Royce had written James some years earlier while teaching at Berkeley. Born in 1855, Royce grew up in the remote Gold Rush settlement of Grass Valley and became homesick after moving to Cambridge (writing a history of California and then, even more surprising to his colleagues at Harvard, *The Feud of Oakfield Creek,* subtitled *A Novel of California Life*). Nevertheless, prior to moving to New England he suffered the effects of an intellectual vacuum while isolated in that God-forsaken, westernmost outpost of the academic world, the University of California.

Much of James's subsequent work would be devoted to arriving at a version of pragmatism able to accommodate the problem posed by Royce in 1885. Particularly stinging for James, who at the time was halfway through completing his mammoth attempt, in *The Principles of Psychology,* to furnish a purely psychological account of thought and consciousness, is the fact that Royce emphasizes the hopelessness of James's line of inquiry. Royce stresses that an "account of judge-

ment as simply a mental phenomenon, having interest only to the person who experiences it and to a psychologist" involves a conception of mental activity (as "mere phenomena") unable to come to terms with the problem. Royce asks: "How can a judgement, as thus described, fairly be called false? As a mere psychological combination of ideas it is neither true nor false." The most such a psychological inquiry can hope to uncover anywhere in this vicinity is what Royce calls the "sense of dependence, whereby the judgment is accompanied, upon an object external to it." This feeling of "dependence on an object," however combined and permuted with psychological materials drawn from the same order of phenomena, can never furnish us with materials, Royce submits, out of which we can construct a viable answer to the Kantian question: How is it possible for a particular state of affairs (in the world) and a particular judgment (in my mind) to stand in such a relation that the former is able to render the latter determinately false?

"The more one thinks, the more one feels that there is a real puzzle here," James wrote:

> 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? And if the thought knows the reality falsely, the difficulty of answering the question becomes indeed extreme.

What is far more astonishing, when viewed in the light of subsequent events, is how James's review of *The Religious Aspect of Philosophy* expresses sympathy for the shape of the philosophical bolt-hole from the problem that Royce proposes: "Our author calls the question insoluble in these terms; and we are inclined to think him right, and to suspect that his idealist escape from the quandary may the best one for us all to take." This attitude proved short-lived. As James's perplexity in the puzzle deepens, so also do his dissatisfactions with Royce's idealist conclusions—and battle is joined.

Only two years later, he writes to Carl Stumpf of Royce's book in the following terms: "The second half is a new argument for monistic idealism, an argument based on the possibility of truth and error in knowledge . . . I have vainly tried to escape from it. I still suspect it of inconclusiveness, but I frankly confess that I am *unable* to overthrow it." James went back and forth for six more years, until expressing in a letter to Dickson Miller a "final" resolve to come to terms with the challenge: "With the help of God I will go at it again this semester, when I settle down to my final bout with Royce's theory, which must result in my either actively becoming a propagator thereof, or actively its enemy or destroyer." The result would be an epic debate between the two most influential American philosophers of the period, lasting for over a quarter of a century, ending only with James's death in 1910.

Fifteen years after his initial laudatory review, James would confess in a letter to Royce: "When I write, 'tis with one eye on you, and one on the page . . . I lead a parasitic life upon you, for my highest flight of ambitious ideality is to become

your conqueror, and to go down into history as such . . . in one last death-grapple of an embrace." Today, unlike those of his pragmatist contemporaries (Mead, Peirce, James, and Dewey), Royce's writings are no longer much read, let alone grappled with. Yet subsequent generations of American philosophers, hardly less than James's own, continue to lead a philosophic life parasitic upon him, and their work is still widely controlled by the ideal animating James's counterattack—to formulate a coherent form of empiricism or naturalism able to do justice to the challenge so forcefully posed by Royce, and which now goes by the name of the problem of intentionality.

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JAMES CONANT

1885, July

Ulysses S. Grant finishes his *Memoirs*

Limits to Violence

Grant wrote his memoirs in a haze of cocaine and morphine, dying of cancer. It was a violent death. He vomited and coughed up blood with such force that he hemorrhaged badly, even killing off chunks of the plum-sized malignant tumor in his throat—and thereby buying himself just a little more time.

It was time that he needed. Only with a completed book manuscript could the bankrupt ex-general rescue his wife and children from financial ruin. The country gawked in morbid fascination at his race against time during a six-month national deathwatch. He finished his work in mid-July 1885. He died a few days later. The manuscript he produced is widely regarded as a masterpiece. It was a miracle of dogged, stubborn determination, the perfect literary match to the old soldier's relentless battle tactics, his *refusal* to stop.

The prose in *Personal Memoirs of U. S. Grant* mirrors the relentlessness of the man. It is crisp, forceful, never pausing to meditate on the damage of the moment but instead moving implacably forward. In an emblematic scene from the Battle of Belmont, Grant is almost killed. "Early in this engagement my horse was shot under me, but I got another one from one of my staff and kept well up with the advance until the river was reached." The near-death moment is almost boring, recounted robotically, and it is lexically subordinated to the—for him—more interesting detail of forward movement. Just so, in his account of the Mexican-