

Royce and Bernstein on Evil

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This article has a twofold purpose. On the one hand, it aims to reconstruct Josiah Royce's views on evil. On the other hand, it intends to examine these Roycean views within the framework of Richard Bernstein's work, particularly his books *Radical Evil: a Philosophical Investigation* and *The Abuse of Evil*. I conclude that, despite some shortcomings regarding his notion of evil, Royce's philosophy should be recovered as a classical voice in order to fight against the abuse of evil.

“Realization of the evil men can do and have done to men is integral to any intelligent appraisal of human history.”
– Sidney Hook (1974, 30)

1. Introduction

On the first pages of *The Abuse of Evil*, Richard Bernstein relates how after the 9/11 terrorist attacks, evil unexpectedly became a concept of immense political significance. Just a few days before then, he had finished writing *Radical Evil: A Philosophical Investigation* where a very old philosophical, theological, and practical issue is examined, namely the problem of evil. Though universal in its scope, *Radical Evil* mainly refers to the intellectual (and political) history of Europe turning on the atrocity of the Nazi Holocaust. The core of his interpretation is grounded in two related axes: on the one hand, the enormous impact of Auschwitz on philosophy, and on the other hand, the impossibility to accept a healing theodicy. Unsurprisingly, Bernstein's research is focused exclusively on European thinkers.

However, as Bernstein writes, the political and intellectual context abruptly changed after 9/11, particularly in America, where evil became practically synonymous with terrorism.¹ Consequently, after 9/11, war against evil and war against terrorism acquired the same meaning. In the face of this new situation, a philosophical investigation on evil centered only on Auschwitz without making reference to terrorism would be regarded as incomplete by contemporary (especially American) readers. Thus, Bernstein wrote *The Abuse of Evil* as a complement to *Radical Evil*. Despite the vastness of the topic, one

could say that the former was a philosophical project serenely written (a historical and philosophical balance where the horror of the twentieth century and Auschwitz plays the central role). By contrast, *The Abuse of Evil* is an intellectual response to the immediate challenges of the present as well as an attempt to rethink evil within this new frame. Another major difference between both books is related to their respective sources: in *The Abuse of Evil* Bernstein relies mainly on classical pragmatism, America's native philosophy, rather than on European thinkers.

Why does Bernstein turn to classical pragmatism in this time of terror? He thinks that the new circumstances were favourable to a political American monster. In other words, one of Bernstein's theses is that absolutism, a political consequence of the war against terror, corrupts both politics and religion. Such absolutism is grounded in Christian fundamentalism, which in Bernstein's opinion is one of the central mentalities of America. Classical pragmatism (or "pragmatic fallibilism," as he labels it) constitutes another fundamental American mentality, too. Bernstein accurately relies primarily on Dewey and James (but also Peirce and Mead are within this vein looking for a political (and religious) alternative to fundamentalism.

Although Bernstein's account of this "clash of mentalities" is coherent, there is a classical American figure that is lacking in his reconstructive approach: Josiah Royce. For both *Radical Evil* and *The Abuse Of Evil*, Royce's philosophy arises as a relevant work in connection with Bernstein's purposes. First, taking *Radical Evil's* issues and developments, Royce's philosophy is connected with Bernstein's contemporary pragmatism to the extent that both deal explicitly with the problems of evil and theodicy as well as with their links with German idealism. Second, within the frame of *The Abuse of Evil*, Royce thinks that face to face interaction (what he calls "wise provincialism") constitutes an indispensable political element (here Royce's viewpoint converges with the other classics', namely Peirce, James, Mead, and Dewey). This is an essential issue for Bernstein and his attempt to recover dialogue as the center of politics.

I develop two hypotheses regarding Royce's and Bernstein's conceptions of evil. First, that Royce is at war with himself concerning his conception of evil, but not because of his usual characterization as a Hegelian, but because of shortcomings in his distinction between "evil as sorrows" and "evil as griefs;" meanwhile, I sustain that Bernstein's pragmatism is useful in order to refine Royce's view on evil. Second, that Royce's philosophy has a dimension that could be recovered by Bernsteinian contemporary pragmatism: he maintains something similar to what could be called Bernstein's idea of the astuteness of evil (to do evil in the name of good) starting from his concept of "man the destroyer."

In the first section of this article (The Problem of Evil: Royce at War with Himself?), I refer to different aspects of Royce's conception of evil, while in the second section (Philosophy After Auschwitz: Bernstein on Evil I), I mainly deal

with Bernstein's conception of evil as developed in *Radical Evil*. In the third section (Philosophy After 9/11: Bernstein on Evil II), I present the main theses of Bernstein's *The Abuse of Evil*. Finally, in the fourth section (Royce and Bernstein: Pragmatism and the Many Faces of Evil), I make a comparison between both authors' conceptions of evil and, after that, I formulate some conclusions.

2. The Problem of Evil: Royce at War with Himself?

In *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, James subtly describes a picture that points out a role played by evil in the world:

In the Louvre there is a picture, by Guido Reni, of St. Michel with his foot on Satan's neck. The richness of the picture is in large part due to his being there – that is, the fiend's figure being there. The richness of its allegorical meaning also is due to his being there – that is, the world is all the richer for having a devil in it, *so long as we keep our foot upon his neck* (James 1984 [1902], 50 James' italics)

The picture illustrates two issues that are essential for James's pragmatist conception of religion: first, the unambiguous acknowledgement of the actuality of evil; second, the vital role that the struggle against evil plays (or should play) for human beings. Moreover, within this framework, these issues relate to typical Jamesian conceptions: from a metaphysical point of view, they are related to his rejection of monism or, in other words, the rejection of the idea of a "block universe," i.e. his dismissal of a redemptive Absolute; from a practical point of view, they are the guarantee against any temptation to take "moral holidays."

It is also well known that these Jamesian issues, as well as his whole work, were mainly conceived *against* two outstanding philosophies: Hegel's philosophy (and Hegelianism) and the philosophy of his junior colleague at Harvard, Josiah Royce. For James, both (Hegel and Royce) are philosophically responsible for the two central shortcomings that the very idea of Absolute entails: the illusory or transient character of evil, from a metaphysical point of view; and the surrendering of finite subjectivity, from a practical viewpoint. Meanwhile, within a religious framework, one can paraphrase James's philosophical core with a Bernsteinian flavour: they (Hegel and Royce) succumb to the temptation of theodicy.

This Hegelian Royce, James's Royce, is the canonical one. For the classical pragmatists from James to Mead and Dewey, Royce's philosophy has always been the clear limit of pragmatism.² I am afraid this situation is not substantially better among contemporary pragmatists. Royce's philosophy therefore seems to represent a particular (and non-pragmatist) vein within classical American philosophy. For several reasons which I will refer to below, I consider

this view to be mistaken. Thus, one of the important tasks of Royce's scholars nowadays consists in assimilating his philosophy to pragmatist tradition helping to blow up his canonical image, on the one hand, and attempting to contribute to the vigorous revival of pragmatism rescuing Royce's ideas, on the other hand.

Then, when one carefully considers Royce's thought, outstanding similarities with other classical pragmatists, particularly with James, tend to appear. Regarding the problem of evil, for example, Royce explicitly departs from the hypothesis of the illusory/transient character of evil, on one hand, and from its practical consequence (moral holidays), on the other. Meanwhile, in a similar way to James's conception, he makes a sharp differentiation between religion (which mainly addresses states of emotional dependence) and morality (which refers essentially to self's agency and reason).

I introduce Royce's philosophy, in general, and his conception of evil, in particular, through Jamesian issues (highlighting their resemblances) for several reasons. First, because James's conception of religion is indispensable for the development of Royce's thought and also because he has answered several times to James' criticisms, especially during the mature period of his thought. Second, because integrating Royce's thought with pragmatism is a fruitful way to coherently connect the latter with idealism. Third, because some relevant parallelisms between Royce's and Bernstein's pragmatisms can be coherently traced, although Bernstein does not refer either to Royce or to pragmatism in *Radical Evil*. Both, for example, refer the core of the problem of evil to German idealism and also both attempt to overcome the problem of evil without appealing to traditional theodicies.

Before developing my interpretation of Royce's texts, I would like to briefly point out two general remarks: first, the conception of idealism within Royce's thought; second, his conception of pragmatism. Regarding the former, he defines himself as an idealist in several works. Particularly clear statements can be found in *Metaphysics*, when he says

You know I hold to an idealistic view of the world first for reasons which saw in connection with the idea of interpretation. The world is essentially the interpretation of experience. Secondly... the world is the expression of the idea.... The world consists in the truth of ideas about it, while this truth has the character of being the fulfilment of ideal purposes (Royce 1998, 273).

In other words, the world is, for Royce, teleologically structured. He also maintains that this conception is the consequence of applying the "reflective method." This position, however, does not entail any commitment to Hegelianism. As I intend to show below, there is no instance where Royce refers to the Absolute as healing in the way of external theodicies.

Meanwhile, Royce's view of pragmatism is generally an important issue for scholars interested in classical American thought. One of the interests

revolves around Royce's conceptions of pragmatism. Sometimes he strongly departs from it (especially from William James) and sometimes he maintains that he has started his philosophical career as a "pure pragmatist" (Royce 1904, 116). In my view, the systematic appeal to the primacy of the practical (using Bernstein's words) is the core of Royce's pragmatism. He has always highlighted the pre-eminence of "the ethical interpretation of the universe" (Royce 1899, ix) in his conception, an approach that Randall Auxier calls Royce's conception of "moral philosophy as first philosophy" (Auxier forthcoming, 3).³

Within this framework, I present five relevant aspects of Royce's thought on evil, taking some developments of his works. A first relevant issue is Royce's rejection of *external* or *transcendent* theodicies. This has been a permanent view ever since his first works. For example, in *The Religious Aspect of Philosophy*, he writes:

We do not say then that evil must exist to set the good off by way of external contrast. That view we long since justly rejected. We say only that the evil will is a conquered element *in* the good will, and is as such necessary to goodness. Our conception of the absolute unity in God's life, and that conception alone, enables us to apply this thought here. No form of dualistic Theism has any chance to apply this, the only satisfactory theodicy. (Royce 1958 [1885], 456)

The picture in the Louvre reappears here. For Royce, as well as for James in the *Varieties*, evil should exist as conquered. Similar statements can be found in other Royce's works, particularly in *The World and the Individual*. Regarding *transcendent* theodicies, two issues are relevant for my purposes: on the one hand, Royce's unambiguous rejection of the traditional ways to justify evil; on the other hand, his negation of the idea that *immanent* theodicies entail linear conceptions of progress. Royce sustains the first view in a central article of *Studies of Good and Evil* called "The Problem of Job." There he emphatically writes that

This talk of medicinal and disciplinary evil, perfectly fair when applied to our poor fate-bound human surgeons, judges, jailors, or teachers, becomes cruelly, even cynically trivial when applied to explain the ways of a God who is to choose, not only the physical means to an end, but the very *Physis* itself in which path and goal are to exist together. (Royce 1899, 9)

Thus, it is impossible to coherently conceive a merciful, omnipotent and omniscient God. For Royce, if God exists at all it is only in an immanent way. Meanwhile, his dismissal of the idea of linear progress is clearly stated in an early article entitled "Pessimism and Modern Thought":

The most probable view of the universe as a whole would seem then to be the view, according to which growth and decay go on forever in cyclic rhythm. At any time in the past or future we should expect to find much such a universe of striving and imperfection as we now find, the forms infinitely various, the significance wearily the same. (Royce 1920, 183)⁴

Consequently, Royce's thought regarding evil entails a rejection of dualism between God and the individual as well as a rejection of the traditional idea of progress that attempts to justify present evil in the name of a redemptive future. On the other hand, Royce's satisfactory theodicy is immanent, i.e. redemption is linked to an action of the individual, to a willing process. A second relevant issue concerns Royce's conception of the Absolute. In connection with his dismissal of traditional theodicies, the concept of the Absolute plays a central role within Royce's philosophy – and it is one of the aspects most widely discussed in the literature. Royce also uses different labels (Universal Consciousness, Spirit, World-Spirit, Logos, and Community of Interpretation) with similar meanings or purposes. The relevant point for my paper is that this kind of conception of this is always present in Royce's philosophy (even within his mature thought, which some authors interpret as a period of *pragmatization*). Moreover, these concepts are conceived of by Royce as central in order to deal with the problem of evil. One early introduction of this concept can be seen in "Pessimism and Modern Thought":

This sense of oneness with universal consciousness is a very simple experience: you can know it easily if you will but do a sacrificing act with purely unselfish motives, or if you will but give yourself up to the enthusiasm of a great popular cause, or if you will sit down and comfort a fellow-being in distress. (Royce 1920, 185)

Here Royce depicts an essential feature of his thought: even the most abstract concept has practical consequences. Meanwhile, a more traditional formulation of the conception of the Absolute can be found within *World and the Individual*:

One is the Absolute, because in *mere* multiplicity there would be no finality of insight. *Many* is the Absolute, because in the interrelationships of contrasted expressions of a single Will lies the only opportunity for the embodiment of wholeness of life, and for the possession of Self-consciousness by the Absolute. (Royce 1904, 336)

The usual criticism to Royce's philosophy is that the Absolute pervades finite subjectivity. In other words, supplementing every action and individual in a totality, the Absolute grasps the real meaning of things that are beyond the individual. This issue, however, is outside the scope of the present article. I

maintain that in Royce's conception of evil there is a shortcoming which is independent of his metaphysics.

A third relevant aspect concerns conceptions denying the *philosophical* problem of evil. Particularly in *The Sources of Religious Insight* and *The Problem of Christianity*, Royce criticizes religious or moral conceptions (mainly Santayana's, James's and Russell's) which sustain that there is not a philosophical problem of evil, and that the core of the relationship with evil consists in "getting rid of it." Royce vehemently opposes this position arguing that even if this strategy *worked* for the present (and for him that is not the case) it would be useless in dealing with the past. Thus, for Royce moral and religious conceptions must deal with what he calls "the hell of the irrevocable," i.e. every mischievous and harmful act that has been committed. This topic is particularly important in relation to Royce's conception of atonement, i.e. expiation is only possible to the extent that one acknowledges the evil one has done (or vicariously the evil others have done) and attempts to give sense to it.

The fourth aspect of Royce's thought on evil refers to its victims. Regarding this topic, he writes in "The Problem of Job":

... while the black, unfathomed ocean of finite evil spreads out before our wide-opened eyes – well, at such times this trivial speech about useful burns and salutary medicines makes me, and I fancy others, simply and wearily heartsick. (Royce 1899, 9)

He specifically refers to the massacre of the Armenians by the Turks, saying that "They deserve either our simple silence, or if we are ready to speak, the speech of people who ourselves inquire as Job inquired" (Royce 1899, 9). Then, the victims of political oppression are worthy of either our silence or Job's words. I will address this issue again in Section 4.

These four aspects of the problem of evil depict the complexity of Royce's thought on the subject. For my paper, however, the most relevant is a fifth aspect dealing with Royce's conceptions of sorrow and evil in *The Sources of Religious Insight*. For my purposes, then, this is the core of Royce's work. *The Sources of Religious Insight* is perhaps his most beautifully written and profoundest book, where he shows a phenomenology of evils, particularly through his conceptions of sorrow and idealization. The book is based on the idea that there is a gradual difference in richness between primary and higher forms of religious insights, from individual experience to the church. Moreover, Royce tries to understand how religious insights arise and which their scopes and shortcomings are. Insight is defined as

... knowledge that makes us aware of the unity of many facts in one whole, and that at the same time brings us into intimate personal contact with these facts and with the whole wherein they are united. The three

marks of insight are breadth of range, coherence and unity of view, and closeness of personal touch. (Royce 1940 [1912], 6)

Sorrow, as defined by Royce, is not a hindrance to religious insight but one of its most fruitful paths. To understand how sorrow works, Royce points out that a characteristic of human beings is that they do not aim to get rid of evil (in the way I have referred to before) but to destroy it. In Royce's words: "Man is always the destroyer of ill" (Royce 1940 [1912], 219). This fact, however, has a paradoxical effect: "Man the destroyer of evil thus appears, in much of his life, as a destroyer who is also largely moved by a love of destruction for its own sake" (Royce 1940 [1912], 216). This is a fundamental feature of evil: destruction is necessary (we must destroy evil), but this destruction frequently corrupts our good faith and our good actions and, therefore, the tragic consequence arises: "The natural estimate of the plain man, when he loves the heroes of old, seems to imply that one of the chief ills that man ought to destroy usually takes the form of some other man" (Royce 1940 [1912], 218). I will address this issue again in Section 4.

However, for Royce, not every evil deserves to be destroyed. He distinguishes between "griefs" and "sorrows." The former are physical pain, on the one hand, and natural and socio-political catastrophes ("pestilence, famine, cruelty of oppressors") on the other. They are not sources of religious insight and deserve to be completely destroyed, i.e. they should get out of existence. Meanwhile, sorrow (within Royce's conception) is an evil that does not deserve to be simply swept out of existence: "by sorrow, then, I here mean an experience of ill which is not wholly an experience of that which as you then and there believe ought to be simply driven out of existence" (Royce 1940 [1912], 240). These evils, in Royce's view, can be idealized and give new meanings to the sufferer's life. His examples mainly refer to individuals who are able to keep defending a good idea (or "cause" in Royce's thought) despite meeting serious "adversities" (in his words of *The Sources of Religious Insight*). Regarding this distinction Royce writes:

And because they are often very deep and tragic ills [griefs], which we face only with very deep and dear travail of spirit, they hint to us how, from the point of view of a world-embracing insight, *the countless and terrible ills of the other sort* [sorrows], *which we cannot now understand, and which, at present, appear to us merely as worthy of utter destruction, may still have their places, as stages and phases of expression, in the larger life to which belong.* (Royce 1940 [1912], 236, my italics).

As Royce accurately writes in *The Sources of Religious Insight*, a theory of evil implies or relates to a theory of reality. Then, does Royce's view of evil cohere with his philosophical conception? Or, like Bernstein's Kant, is Royce at war with himself? One possible answer may revolve around a variety of approaches

to Royce's treatment of ontology. Regarding this issue, recent interpretations within the literature (Auxier and Tunstall) defy the traditional ones (Smith and Oppenheim) pointing out that the core of Royce's interpreters and critics lies in a misunderstanding of his metaphysics. Against the ontological commitment that the conception of Absolute entails (point in which both critics and allies of Royce converge), these new approaches highlight the *fictionalist* character of Royce's metaphysics.⁵ A detailed answer to this question, however, is beyond the scope of this paper. I shall leave aside a discussion of Royce's metaphysics. My point is that, independently of Royce's conception of metaphysics, he is at war with himself, i.e. there are fruitful elements in his conception (the idea of the irrevocable, the acknowledgment of the actuality of evil, and his conception of "man the destroyer"), but there are two shortcomings in his position: his inadequate treatment of griefs, on the one hand, and the dubious analogy between griefs and sorrows that he establishes, on the other hand. I will address this again in Section 4.

3. Philosophy After Auschwitz: Bernstein on Evil I

In *Radical Evil*, Richard Bernstein examines how evil has been thought of in some modern and contemporary philosophies. Particularly, he attempts to understand how the expression *radical evil* was conceived of from Kant to Arendt and how this label and the meanings of evil have changed through the horrors of the twentieth century, especially those of concentration camps that the very word Auschwitz typifies. To put it differently, Bernstein accurately thinks that philosophical reflection must have transformed itself forever after the inconceivable Shoah. For the purposes of my paper, Bernstein's view on evil can be summarized by four features.

The first one is the meaning of Auschwitz. Bernstein sustains that Auschwitz inexorably forces us to re-think evil. Arendt's first impressions when she heard about the existence of concentrations camps are quoted in *Radical Evil*:

"Something happened there to which we cannot reconcile ourselves. None of us can." (Arendt, 1994: 134) Arendt like many others – especially the survivors of the camps – felt that what happened in the camps was the most extreme and radical form of evil. "Auschwitz" became a name that epitomized the entire Shoah, and has come to symbolize other evils that have burst forth in the twentieth century. (Bernstein 2002, 1)

The crucial point for both Arendt and Bernstein was that any kind of reconciliation with this fact was simply impossible. Following this path, Bernstein sharply divides his book into two parts: *before* and *after* Auschwitz.

We therefore have an essential breakdown in moral and philosophy turning on Auschwitz.

A second feature arises from the previous one: the end of theodicy. In Bernstein's words: "After Auschwitz, it is obscene to continue to speak of evil and suffering as something to be justified by, or reconciled with, a benevolent cosmological scheme" (Bernstein 2002, 228). Consequently, after Auschwitz we have lived in a post theodicy age. As pointed out by Bernstein, a rich tradition of philosophers has attempted to reconcile world evils with the idea of a universe created by a merciful God. This schema has been irremediably fractured by Auschwitz. Within this frame, a post theodicy time entails no longer considering evil as a problem for philosophers aiming to reconcile evil with the existence of an omnipotent, omniscient and benevolent God, but as a multifaceted problem for human beings.

Meanwhile, a third feature that Bernstein sustains is that evil resists total comprehension. This idea is in the core of many conceptualizations on evil in the works of Kant, Royce, and Bernstein. In the end of *Radical Evil*, for example, Bernstein writes:

Interrogating evil falls in the space between two extremes. We cannot give up the desire to know, to understand, to comprehend the evil that we confront. If we did, we would never be able to decide how to respond to its manifestations. But we must avoid the extreme of deluding ourselves that *total* comprehension is possible. (Bernstein 2002, 228)

Why does evil resist total comprehension? Bernstein grounds his position in the experiences of survivors such as Jorge Semprún and Jean Améry, who maintain that we must speak and write about the camps but that this intellectual task is always transcended by what has happened there.

A fourth feature is that dealing with evil is an open process. Bernstein maintains that evil should not be reified:

This is the temptation to think that evil is a fixed ontological feature of the human condition, and there is nothing to be done except to learn to live with it and resign ourselves to his brute existence. (Bernstein 2002, 229)

Moreover, he emphasizes that dealing with evil entails being open to new forms developed by socio-historical processes.

For Bernstein, these characteristics revolve around two fundamental lessons taught by Arendt's work on the features of evil. First, the conception of the banality of evil, i.e. it is not necessary to have evil motivations in order to do evil. Arendt's paradigmatic example is Eichmann, a bureaucrat who claimed in his trial that he was just following orders and whose primary motivation was to move up the hierarchy. Second, that the core of totalitarianism lies in the

transformation of human beings. In Bernstein's words: totalitarianism "... seeks to make human beings as human beings superfluous" (Bernstein 2005, 71).

Then, which is the core of evil in Bernstein's conception? All the features he mentions are relevant. First, that evil resists total comprehension and, therefore, that a conceptualization of evil is better than a theory of evil; second, the idea of the banality of evil depicts an important feature regarding how evil sometimes works: through banal motives. Bearing in mind the purposes of my work, however, they are not the aspects of evil I would like to highlight. Bernstein, following Arendt's work, shows us that one of the essential features of evil is to take human beings as superfluous. I think that this feature can be directly related to the main consequence of theodicy, i.e. to take human beings as superfluous. In other words, theodicy takes human being as superfluous to the extent that actual sufferings and oppression are justified in the name of a perfect cosmological order. Thus, it can be inferred that to fight against evil and to avoid the temptation of theodicy are parts that can be coherently related in the same philosophical conception.

4. Philosophy After 9/11: Bernstein on Evil II

Analysing 9/11 and its political consequences, Nancy Frankenberry wrote an insightful article where she reproduces a brilliant speech by Senator Robert Byrd before the House of Representatives:

There is no debate, no discussion, no attempt to lay out for the nation the pro and cons of this particular war. There is nothing.... We are truly "sleepwalking through history." In my heart of hearts, I pray that this great nation and its good and trusting citizens are not in for the rudest of awakenings. I must question the judgment of any President who can say that a massive, unprovoked military attack on a nation which is over 50% of children is "in the highest moral tradition of our country." This war is not necessary at this time. (Robert Byrd, quoted in Frankenberry 2005, 45)

For many thinkers, this absence of significant debate and discussion in the prolegomenon to war was the triumph of a particular American view: the fundamentalist or absolutist mentality. Regarding evil, this mentality appeals to fear instead of intelligence and reflection as a way to overcome it. As never before in history, discourse on evil left aside thought in the name of an urgent necessity for action. However, this was not the only American mentality. Looking for central features of American mentalities Bernstein relies on Menand's book *The Metaphysical Club*, whose central hypothesis is that pragmatism arises as a fallibilist answer to the absolutism of Civil War.

In Bernstein's words:

Menand's thesis is that the pragmatic thinkers undertook to develop a more flexible, open, experimental, and fallible way of thinking that would avoid all forms of absolutism, stark binary oppositions, and violent extremism. And in their individual and collective way of doing this, they helped to reshape the ways in which Americans thought and acted. (Bernstein 2005, 23)

Looking for inspiration in the classical American tradition, Bernstein's conception of mentality is the contemporary equivalent of James's idea of temperament. Before the absolutist temperament that presents a sharp definition between good and evil, Bernstein unambiguously attempts to recover one of the central cores of classical tradition: fallibilism. The core of Bernstein's criticism of absolutism addressed its confusion of moral subjective certitude with moral objective certainty. In Bernstein's words:

But why is the appeal to certainty so seductive when it comes to issues of choice, decisions and action? It is because of the belief that unless we do possess this certainty we will not have any basis for justifying our choices, decisions and actions. This is the faulty inference that must be exposed and rejected. (Bernstein 2005, 65)

Bernstein accurately maintains that "the strength of one's personal conviction is never sufficient to justify the truth of our beliefs" (Bernstein 2005, 62). I want to highlight that Bernstein points out a relevant feature of evil, namely the idea to do evil in the name of good. I call it evil's astuteness. While World War II teaches about the totalitarian attempt to make human beings superfluous as a characteristic of evil, War against Terror depicts the impudence to do evil in the name of good.

5. Royce and Bernstein: Pragmatism and the Many Faces of Evil

Analysing discourses on evil in *Radical Evil*, Bernstein writes:

I agree with Hannah Arendt, Hans Jonas, and Emmanuel Levinas ... that Auschwitz signifies a rupture and a break with tradition, and that "after Auschwitz" we must think both the meaning of evil and human responsibility. Although we should not underestimate the rupture that has occurred, we can still interrogate and learn from earlier thinkers who have grappled with trying to understand the meaning of evil. (Bernstein 2002, 4)

I intend to develop a similar (but more modest) task in connection with Royce's philosophy. A first reason to justify this endeavour is that both (Royce and Bernstein) belong to a common tradition: pragmatism. Consequently, this is an

attempt to relate classical and contemporary pragmatism. A second reason is that both have written on evil more than any other pragmatists either classical or contemporary.

However, taking Bernstein's framework seriously I sustain that Royce's philosophy can be seen as trapped within two contradictory tendencies. A first tendency is a clear "pre-Auschwitz" vein within Royce's thought. He does not deal correctly with evil as a socio-political catastrophe. He proposes either an *unphilosophical* silence (for example, in relation with the Armenian massacre) or the words of Job, on the one hand; he falls in the temptation of theodicy when he proposes the analogy between sorrow and grief, on the other hand. To put it differently, despite his rejection of external theodicy, Royce is still looking for a reconciliation that Arendt (and Bernstein) accurately rejects. Thus, within this vein of Royce's thought, theodicy poses a threat.

Meanwhile, a second tendency is constituted by the relevant aspects of Royce's philosophy, particularly considering his conception of evil. I shall highlight three of them: first, his strong emphasis on the actuality of evil; second, his statement that evil is not totally intelligible; and third, his conception of the irrevocability of deeds and especially of evils. For my purposes, however, the most relevant aspect of Royce's philosophy is his distinction between "man the destroyer" and "man the creator." I shall briefly analyse both tendencies.

Regarding the first tendency, I have said above that Royce sustains that evils are griefs and sorrows. Griefs, in Royce's conception, are those evils that deserve to be completely destroyed or put out of existence (his examples are physical pain, famine, cruelty of oppressors). Before those natural and socio-political catastrophes we can answer in Royce's view, with the words of Job or with a simple silence. In my view, both are inadequate answers for socio-political catastrophes. The words of Job are addressed to God not to men (and their socio-political circumstances):

27:2 As God liveth, who hath taken away my judgment; and the Almighty, who hath vexed my soul; 27:3 All the while my breath is in me, and the spirit of God is in my nostrils; 27:4 My lips shall not speak wickedness, nor my tongue utter deceit. 27:5 God forbid that I should justify you: till I die I will not remove mine integrity from me. 27:6 My righteousness I hold fast, and will not let it go: my heart shall not reproach me so long as I live.

Moreover, as Bernstein accurately says, the God of a post-theodicy is not the Almighty but a suffering God:

Jonas's myth about a suffering, becoming, caring, and limited God emphasizes the human responsibility we now bear to combat the type of radical evil epitomized by Auschwitz. The disgrace of Auschwitz is not to be blamed on an all-powerful deity. (Bernstein 2002, 234)

But there is still something else. Even if we thought of an Almighty God we can sustain Job's words against Him before natural catastrophes but never before socio-political catastrophes. In this case, we should blame our fellows. On the other hand, silence is an *unphilosophical* answer before socio-political catastrophes, it entails that we have neither conceptual resources to deal with those facts nor the possibility to think in order to avoid them when they arise.

Another alternative within Royce's view is an unacceptable analogy that allows evils to find a redemptive place within the whole. A grief (I point out again that socio-political catastrophes are, for Royce, under this label) cannot be idealized as a sorrow can be. Royce, however, writes the following:

And because they are often very deep and tragic ills [griefs], which we face only with very deep and dear travail of spirit, they hint to us how, from the point of view of a world-embracing insight, *the countless and terrible ills of the other sort* [sorrows], *which we cannot now understand, and which, at present, appear to us merely as worthy of utter destruction, may still have their places, as stages and phases of expression, in the larger life to which belong.* (Royce 1940 [1912], 236, my italics)

Thus, even those griefs that deserve to be utterly destroyed could have a place in the Absolute. In this sense, theodicy poses a threat. I think that taking some of Arendt's and Bernstein's insights, Royce's distinction could be refined in the following way: griefs, sorrows and inconceivable evils. Evils as griefs would be evils that deserve to be put out of existence; evil as sorrows would be those evils that can be idealized; meanwhile, inconceivable evils would be those evils that cannot be idealized, cannot be simply destroyed and evils about which we must think. Following a Bernsteinean path, Auschwitz is a paradigmatic example of an inconceivable evil.

Concerning the second tendency, Royce makes a relevant distinction in *The Sources of Religious Insight* between "man the destroyer" and "man the creator," a distinction of particular interest in relation with evil. I have quoted above some paragraphs of Royce's *The Sources of Religious Insight* where he sustains that man is (and must be) the destroyer of evil but that there exists a risk in this undertaking: the predominance of man's love for destruction. In other words: usually, as he insightfully conceives, there is a love of destruction that prevails over the desire to destroy evil. His solution to this dilemma is through the idea of "man the creator," i.e. that one needs to supplement the destruction with the creation of senses. Independently of this solution, I want to point out that Royce's "man the destroyer" is a concept that allows visualizing the extreme dangers of non-instrumental violence, the dangers of violence for its own sake, and this Roycean view relates to Bernstein's conception of evil in *The Abuse of Evil*.⁶

Let's remember that Bernstein says that one of the contemporary faces of evil is its abuse. In the name of the eradication or annihilation/extermination of

evil, there is a sort of primacy of action over reflection that closes research, on the one hand, and gives place to the predominance of fear, on the other hand. Within this context, and bearing in mind Bernstein's attempt to recover pragmatism as opposed to absolutism as an American intellectual tradition, I think that Bernstein's conception of "the abuse of evil" and Royce's conception of "man the destroyer" resemble each other.

Both views share several features: firstly, Bernstein conceives "the abuse of evil" as a way to justify evil actions in the name of good. Royce had the same intention when he coined the expression "man the destroyer." Initially "man the destroyer" seeks to eradicate evil doing good. Consequently, they pursue the same end: to do evil in the name of good. Secondly, Royce sustains that the result of the action of "man the destroyer" is that other men are his victims, meanwhile, the same account is true regarding Bernstein's "the abuse of evil." A third common feature is that "the abuse of evil" as well as "man the destroyer" refers to phenomena that systematically put aside reflection in the name of inevitable action; finally, considering those convergences, one can infer that Royce's "man the destroyer" prefigures Bernstein's "abuse of evil."

Thus, while part of Royce's work is to fight against the ghost of theodicy, his conception of "man the destroyer" depicts some features that Bernstein points out as fundamental for the newest face of evil: its abuse. With this conception, Royce shows a socio-political outlook that is lacking in a great part of his work. Perhaps these are Royce's contributions to a conception of evil and religion beyond theodicy and after Auschwitz. To put it differently, Royce's work is significant for Bernstein's attempt to recover pragmatism as a significant philosophical tradition for today.

6. Conclusion

Bernstein's purpose in *The Abuse of Evil* was to recover pragmatism as a relevant mentality for our contemporaries. Within this frame, the present article has two purposes: firstly, to point out the scope and shortcomings of Royce's view on evil, establishing how Bernstein's pragmatism helps us to refine the conceptualization of the former; secondly, to highlight how Royce's conception of "man the destroyer" prefigures Bernstein's conception of "the abuse of evil." In other words, Royce's philosophy could be recovered too to fight against the abuse of evil.

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NOTES

1. I am fully aware that the political situation (and the political language) has changed during Obama's term. I think, however, that two facts make my analysis still relevant: firstly, absolutist mentality is still strong in America and we should analyze it; secondly, the problem of evil is an issue that, from a philosophical point of view, always deserves to be examined.

2. Cf., for example, Mead's late article (Mead, 1929) "The Philosophies of Royce, James and Dewey in their American Setting."

3. Auxier writes the following: "I have indicated that ethics is "First Philosophy" for Royce, and metaphysics is a derivative branch of the analysis of values, proceeding on the basis of postulates. Metaphysics cannot discharge these postulates; that work depends upon moral philosophy, which is through and through practical. The case for the Absolute cannot be made *without* metaphysics, but also cannot be completed *by* metaphysics. Royce proceeds to a practical and moral justification for accepting the irrevocability of the past, saying that "no view of life is more practically useful, for people who have wills at all, than just this belief in the absolutely irrevocable nature of all our deeds" (Auxier forth, 97).

4. This article was published in 1881.

5. For example, Royce writes that "such ills we remove only in so far as we assimilate them, idealise them, take them up into the plan of our lives, gives them meaning, set them in their place in the whole" (Royce 1940 [1912], 235) and "In the presence of these idealized evils, man the destroyer becomes transformed into a man the creator" (Royce 1940 [1912], 236).

6. This issue is beyond the scope of this work. However, I think that this interpretation of Royce as a *fictionalist* is problematic. See, for example, that Royce writes in *The Problem of Christianity*: "Any philosophy is inevitably a doctrine which counsels us to bear ourselves towards our world *as if* our experience were such and such. But I do not believe that the "Philosophy of the 'As if'" is, as Vaihinger asserts, merely a system of more or less convenient fictions. For if there are absolute standards for the will (and, in my own opinion, there are such standards), then the world of the will is no world of fictions" (Royce 2001 [1913], 349).

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