

**CONVERSATIONS ON
IRVING STREET**
JOSIAH ROYCE'S
CONTRIBUTION TO
SYMBOLIC INTERACTIONISM

by

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Edited by

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and

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Cover design by Vernon Press.

Cover image: Josiah Royce (1855-1916), The Royce Society.

This book is dedicated to my Father (who I think about everyday),
my Mother (who always makes me laugh),
my sister (whoshares my love for the social sciences),
and Kayla, who has supported me every step of the way.

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ABSTRACT

The focus of this monograph is the contribution of Josiah Royce's academic work (1913-1917) to the development of classical symbolic interactionist thought. This research centers on critically evaluating the works of Royce and assessing how his ideas and social philosophy were significant contributions to both symbolic interactionist thought and sociological theory. An effort is also made to understand the philosophical influences that shaped Royce's social and philosophical thought. The data for this project came from library resources ranging from books and articles to numerous archives.

The major concepts of George Herbert Mead (*Mind, Self, and Society*) and Herbert Blumer's core synthesized components of classical symbolic interactionist thought (*Symbolic Interactionism: Perspective and Method*) are compared and contrasted with Royce's social philosophy.

The results of this research demonstrate that Royce's later academic works (1913-1917) closely resemble the basic ideas of Mead. Royce's constructs of the theory of signs, interpretation, the doctrine of signs, and the mind closely correspond to Mead's concepts of language and meaning, defining meaning, the generalized other, and the mind. There is also a strong correspondence between Royce's concepts and Blumer's synthesis of the three basic premises and eight root images that outline the theoretical core of symbolic interactionist thought.

In sum, this research provides a holistic approach to Royce's academic work and the social philosophy that shaped symbolic interactionist theory. It also provides a historical sketch that places his contributions into their proper socio-historical time frame and investigates the development of his ideas. This monograph thoroughly explores the sociological constructs of an American philosopher whose contributions to the development of symbolic interactionism has been largely unnoticed.

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FOREWORD

Let us assume that David R. Maines (2001: 8) is correct in considering a theoretical perspective "... as an array of concepts and ontological claims that prefigure inquiry and analysis." Employing such a definition, one can probably agree with James F. Short, Jr.'s assertion that the theoretical framework Herbert Blumer dubbed *symbolic interactionism* is one of the "... three most important theoretical perspectives in sociology" (1980: xi). One may even find oneself in general accord with both Don Martindale's statement that "... symbolic interactionism has had an influence upon almost every contemporary sociologist" (1981: 347) and with Maines' bold assertion that "... the entire field of sociology, without being aware of it, has been moving in the direction of symbolic interactionism" (2001:2).

Few would deny Manis and Meltzer's (1978: 440) claim that symbolic interactionism is the most sociological of all the social psychologies. Fewer still would deny that interactionism has been, and indeed remains, a most important theoretical perspective within American sociology and that both its audience and practitioners increasingly come from a growing number of nations.

This book by young scholar Darrick Brake wishes to make a contribution to interactionism by broadening our understanding of its intellectual origins. Brake's master's degree, upon which this book is based, was written at Central Michigan University, an institution whose sociology department has long been a real stronghold of symbolic interactionism. Brake has been exposed to the thought and research of several scholars long concerned with enhancing their understanding of the social, intellectual, and philosophical underpinnings of their own theoretical framework. He seeks to become a part of this larger effort at self-understanding by focusing on an intellectual forerunner of symbolic interactionism whose writings have received insufficient attention.

A number of symbolic interactionists have pointed to the perspective's philosophical/intellectual antecedents. After all these years, the list provided by Manis and Meltzer remains perhaps the best available: (1) evolutionism, (2) German idealism, (3) the Scottish moralists, (4) pragmatism, and (5)

functional psychology (1978: 1-3). It is the fourth listed of these antecedents, pragmatism, that captures Darrick Brake's attention.

Pragmatic philosophers who are said to have influenced symbolic interactionism are Josiah Royce (see Joas, 1993; Cook, 1993), Charles S. Pierce, William James, John Dewey, George Herbert Mead, J. A. Tufts, Ella Flagg Young, Edward Scribner Ames, James Rowland Angell, and Addison Weber Moore (Reynolds, 1987: 17; Reynolds, 2003: 46; Deegan, 2001: xxv). The last six of these philosophers were all members of the dominant Chicago school of pragmatism. James was on the faculty at Harvard University for a lengthy time, and Royce taught there for thirty-four years. Mead interacted with James frequently and Royce was his teacher (Aboulaflia, 2012: 2). Pierce, on the other hand, was excluded "... from the circle of academic philosophy" (Boskoff, 1969: 325). He exerted much of his early influence on the scientifically inclined members of the Hyperion Club (Mills, 1966).

Outside of the Chicago school of pragmatism, only James's influence on the general interactionist framework has been highly significant and of long standing. Pierce's impact has been recognized only belatedly, and apart from direct positive influence on Mead, his greatest influence is not on interactionism in general but on that variety of symbolic interactionism known as the Iowa School (Reynolds 2003: 47-48).

Josiah Royce seems to have been pretty much left out of the picture. As a sociologist of knowledge, I wonder why! Why would one of the four key founders of pragmatism as a philosophical movement (Manis and Meltzer, 1978: 7; Reynolds, 2003: 46) be ignored? Why would so many, though by no means all, contemporary interactionists either fail to cite his work (Denzin, 1992; Maines, 2001; Meltzer, Petras, and Reynolds, 1975; Musolf, 1998; Prus, 1996), mention him only in passing (Manis and Meltzer, 1978; Stryker, 1980), or offer only strictly limited commentary (Deegan, 2001; Reynolds, 2003) on "the single most important idealist in the United States" (Martindale, 1981: 266)?

These, however, are not Darrick Brake's questions. They are not his concern. Rather, he simply wants to demonstrate: (1) that Royce's writings have something to offer today's interactionists; (2) that Royce's views on many topics are compatible with those of such intellectual powerhouses as his student George Herbert Mead and those of interactionism's once titular head, the late Herbert Blumer; and (3) that Royce should be fully accepted as one of symbolic interactionism's legitimate forerunners, even if, in the long run, his influence remains less than that of Mead, Dewey, James, or even Pierce. Brake attempts to accomplish all this by first placing Royce's work in its philosophical-historical context and then showing the compatibility

between such Roycean intellectual formations as the “Doctrine of Signs” and the “Theory of Signs, Symbols, and Interpretations” and then-developing patterns of symbolic interactionist thought.

In my opinion, Brake has gone a long way toward making his case that Royce’s ideas should engage our attention. This short book, Brake’s first, merits a read.

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INTRODUCTION

The research presented in this monograph began several years ago when I was working on my master's thesis at Central Michigan University. Through several conversations with Dr. Bernie Meltzer, I became aware of the academic works of Josiah Royce who I had, at the time, very little knowledge about. After I began reading his works and investigating his basic ideas and concepts I wanted to know more about Royce and decided to focus my entire master's thesis on the subject of Josiah Royce and his academic works.

Once I began investigating Royce's social philosophy, I noticed that his ideas had interlinkages and connections to the basic tenets and concepts of early symbolic interactionism. These connections lead me to ask the research question: Did Josiah Royce and his ideas on social philosophy make a contribution to early symbolic interactionist theory? In order for me to answer this question, I would have to become more familiar with his work, his ideas, and basic concepts. This is what I set out to do with my master's thesis.

This monograph represents a culmination of the research I performed for my master's thesis and additional research in the topic of Josiah Royce's contribution to symbolic interactionism. The major focus of this book will be centered on critically evaluating the works of Josiah Royce and discuss how his ideas and social philosophy made contributions to symbolic interactionist thought and sociological theory. The data for my research came from a range of different library resources ranging from books and articles, to the use of numerous archives. The primary work for the majority of this book will be that of reading, interpreting, and analyzing Josiah Royce's major academic works that illustrate his connections to early symbolic interactionist thought.

There are two major tasks that require an explanation in order to assess the contributions made by Josiah Royce to the development of symbolic interactionism. The first major task, as discussed in chapter one, is to place Royce and his ideas into the proper historical-philosophical time period. By doing this, I hope to establish that (1) the academic works of

Royce did *not* predate the early formative years of the philosophy of pragmatism (one of the major vein of thoughts that developed symbolic interactionism), (2) that Royce created and published academic works at the *same time* as the other early American pragmatists, meaning that he did *not* miss the crucial developmental years, and (3) that considering the time in which Royce wrote and lived, in comparison with William James, John Dewey, and Charles Sanders Peirce, he did *not* postdate the development of pragmatic thought and symbolic interactionist theory.

The second major task is to substantively assess Royce's "Theory of signs, symbols, and interpretations" and the "Doctrine of signs" and to explore as many connections as possible to the development of symbolic interactionist thought. Royce's book *The Problem of Christianity* (1913) and the article "Mind" (1917) are his most critical works in discussing the connections between symbolic interactionism and his own ideas. There is a summary of Royce's basic ideas from *The Problem of Christianity* in chapters two through four. Chapter two looks at his theory of perception, conception, and interpretation. Chapter three focuses on his discussion of the will to interpret which layouts his ideas on the interpretive process and chapter four summarizes in detail Royce's concept of the doctrine of signs. There is a detailed discussion and summary of the ideas presented in Royce's article titled *Mind* in chapter five. This article represents his late and final work on the topic of perception, conception, and interpretation.

To explore and define symbolic interactionism and its meaning for this research, the basic tenets and ideas of George Herbert Mead (chapter six) as presented in his book *Mind, Self, and Society* (1934) and those of Herbert Blumer (chapter eight) in his book *Symbolic Interactionism: Perspective and Method* (1969), are utilized by focusing on Mead's and Blumer's works a wide net can be cast in terms of comparing and contrasting their ideas on symbolic interactionism with those of Royce. This comparison allows an investigation of the connections between Royce's basic ideas and both Mead's classical symbolic interactionism and Blumer's more recent developments of symbolic interactionism. These connections and interlinkages are discussed in chapter seven (Royce and Mead) and in chapter eight (Royce and Blumer).

The final chapter (chapter 10) summarizes and discusses all the interlinkages between Josiah Royce and George Herbert Mead, and Royce and Herbert Blumer. The final section of this chapter will discuss how the connections between these individuals' works suggest that Josiah Royce has definitely made a contribution to symbolic interactionist thought and theory. This contribution suggests that Royce is just as important as other Pragmatists when his ideas are laid out and discussed in relation to symbolic

interactionism. As well as suggesting that Royce should be viewed as a contributor to early symbolic interactionism in the same manner as James, Dewey, and Peirce. By focusing this research on placing Royce's work into the proper socio-historical time period and through exploring his philosophical works, my overall goal for this research is to provide insight into the works and life of an American philosopher whose work (and contribution to symbolic interactionism) "has been misunderstood and misjudged" (Stuhr 1987, 179).

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