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Part I

An Autobiographical Sketch

The following piece by Royce is, indeed, a sketch. He was not given to public autobiographical statements, and resisted others’ efforts to write his personal history. Until the publication of promised volumes on the biography of Royce and the letters of Royce, we are left with a very scanty knowledge of his life. Further, the Royce Papers in the Harvard University Archives, Widener Library, although rich in professional memorabilia cast little light on Royce as a person.

Yet, even in this slight autobiographical piece, a close look will reveal the major tension of Royce’s life and thought. In failing health and less than a year from his death, Royce was deeply disturbed by the outbreak and character of the first World War. By personal experience, Royce is not surprised by the existence of either evil or error, but he also affirms the way to salvation.

Meanwhile I have always been, as in my childhood, a good deal of a nonconformist, and disposed to a certain rebellion. . . . So much of the spirit that opposes the community I have and have always had in me, simply, elementally, deeply. Over against this natural ineffectiveness in serving the community, and over against this rebellion, there has always stood the interest which has taught me what I nowadays try to express by teaching that we are saved through the community. (HGC, 130–31; below, 1:34–35)