Part IV

Religious Questions

In one sense, a separate section devoted to “religious questions” could be misleading to readers of Royce, for the “religious” was a dominant and lasting concern throughout his life. We wish to emphasize, however, that Royce saw an inextricable relationship between the problem of error and the meaning of God. His response to this problem was the cornerstone of his later thought and it is well to understand its early formulation. The line from these early essays to the doctrine of “Interpretation,” in The Problem of Christianity, is indeed continuous but characterized by profound and perhaps radical development. It is true that the notion of the Absolute and the ponderous language surrounding such discussion in the early Royce generates little sympathy in contemporary thought. On the other hand, we should not forget that the young Royce begins his consideration of these matters with a number of commentaries on the experience of doubt, error and evil. Santayana once said: “It is characteristic of Royce that in his proof of something sublime, like the existence of God, his premiss should be something sad and troublesome, the existence of error.”

