

A COMMUNITY AS/IN INTERPRETATION: A PRAGMATIC-SEMIOTIC APPROACH TO THE PROBLEM OF COMMUNITY

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Abstract. Living in communities is a basic necessity for human existence. It is through largescale cooperation in and between communities that our species exceeds its natural limits to create – uniquely – society and civilization. Paradoxically, our (post-)modern world has adopted an ideology of unchecked individualism that conceives humanity as composed of selfish creatures ultimately severed from one another. This, however, is an illusory idea since it is communities that form the building blocks of society and not individuals. In this paper we are approaching the problem of community from a pragmatic-semiotic point of view, aiming at a conceptualization of community as an interpretative process. The proposed approach relies on a reading of the works of Charles S. Peirce and Josiah Royce that aims to reveal the hermeneutic essence of community. Here we are to examine, then, Peirce and Royce as philosophers of community as well as to follow the metaphysical consequences of conceiving of community as interpretation. Thus, we are imagining the whole universe as semiotic in nature and as calling for the ethical forces of love and loyalty. Of course, we are not to dismiss some of the drawbacks that are observable in the idea of the community as-in interpretation such as the relation between time and space as well as the danger of too much unity for the preservation of diversity and plurality of perspective.

Keywords: community; interpretation; pragmatism; semiotics; Peirce; Royce.

Living in communities is a basic necessity for human existence. Our species seems to be so well adapted to overcoming its limitations because of a capacity for cooperation with a scope and complexity that exceed even the masters of eusociality in the animal kingdom such as ants and bees for example. This “accident” of human existence has been explored from various perspectives in the natural and the social sciences alike. Biologists, neuroscientists, anthropologists, and historians have puzzled over the phenomenon of human community in order to find what grounds our

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sociality.¹ Paradoxically, the world we inhabit has adopted quite uncritically an ideology of unchecked individualism that naturalizes the idea that each and every one of us is a selfish creature, forming a closed and self-sufficient system. In accordance with this solipsistic account of human nature, it is merely the instinct of self-preservation that forces a person to enter into a group for a very practical reason: survival. This idea in turn colors hypotheses in meta-ethical theories such as utilitarianism's golden rule of "private vice for public good" that has captured the collective imagination of most nations. However, it is communities and not individuals that form the building blocks of society and civilization. To what do we owe, then, our ability to commune so successfully? Large scale cooperation undeniably has much to do with the structure and functioning of our brains, but in this paper we are going to examine the problem of community from a pragmatic-semiotic point of view. Thus, we aim to conceptualize *the community as an interpretative process*. The proposed approach relies on the works of the classical American philosophers Charles S. Peirce and Josiah Royce in order to reveal the hermeneutic essence of community. Firstly, we are going to examine Peirce and Royce as philosophers of community. Our next step is to follow the metaphysical consequences of conceiving of community as interpretation, in order to see the whole universe as semiotic in nature. Further on we are to remark on the ethical forces of *love* and *loyalty* called for by the pragmatic-semiotic conception of community. Finally, we are to examine some of the perceived drawbacks in conceptualizing community as-in interpretation.

PHILOSOPHIES OF COMMUNITY

Our investigation into the problem of community could, admittedly, begin at the origins of Occidental thought with a dive into Plato's *Republic* or Aristotle's *Politics* and the latter's idea of ζῶον πολιτικόν. After all, the ancient lovers of wisdom put the fate of the community at the forefront of their ethical speculations, whereas today's most cherished ideas of the *self* or the *individual* was only secondary (if it was there at all). Our approach, however, will be different. We are choosing to build this text around the works of classical American pragmatists such as Peirce and Royce not only because they deserve the label *philosophers of community*, but also because they make a radical theoretical move by examining the concept as foundational both for reality

¹ For anyone who wants to know more about the concept of *eusociality*, or "the condition of multiple generations organized into groups by means of an altruistic division of labor" (Edward O. Wilson, *The Social Conquest of Earth*. New York, Liveright Pub. Corp., 2012, loc. 2181) and the different scope of cooperation possessed by *Homo sapiens* in comparison to social insects like bees and ants Edward Wilson's *The Social Conquest of Earth* would be more than an interesting read. In *Why We Cooperate* the celebrated developmental psychologist Michael Tomasello provides a compelling case for the argument that "two singular characteristics of human culture – cumulative artifacts and social institutions – are a set of species-unique skills and motivations for cooperation" (Tomasello, Michael, *Why We Cooperate*. Cambridge, Mass., MIT Press, 2009 p. XIII) that radically differentiate us from our closest ape relatives.

and for logic. Although Peirce's work is seldom approached from this perspective, the idea of community has been central to his philosophic architectonics no less than it was for *the* philosopher of loyalty Royce.

The question whether the *genus homo* has any existence except as individuals, is the question whether there is anything of any more dignity, worth, and importance than individual happiness, individual aspirations, and individual life. Whether men really have anything in common, so that the *community* is to be considered as an end in itself, and if so, what the relative value of the two factors is, is the most fundamental practical question in regard to every public institution the constitution of which we have it in our power to influence. (W2 487)

I strongly feel that my deepest motives and problems have centered about the Idea of Community, although this idea has only come gradually into my clear consciousness. This was what I was intensely feeling, in the days when my sisters and I looked across the Sacramento Valley, and wondered about the great world beyond our mountains.²

It is true that Peirce never developed a strict definition of community, while Royce's lifelong interest in the idea resulted into an original re-interpretation of key Christian ideas with a Peircean semiotic twist. Peirce, nonetheless, reached a clearness of the notion through his vision for a community of inquirers. The latter is an ideal community of minds that seeks the truth through inquiry, subject to the scientific method. This essentially interpretative process is dialogical and, hence, social in nature. Thus, the truth sought for in it should be confirmed by a communal act of agreement deferred into the possible future of experience. It is because of that that for Peirce the very idea of reality hinges on the notion of community:

The real, then, is that which, sooner or later, information and reasoning would finally result in, and which is therefore independent of the vagaries of me and you. Thus, the very origin of the conception of reality shows that this conception essentially involves the notion of a COMMUNITY, without definite limits, and capable of an indefinite increase of knowledge. (W2 239)

Peirce invokes the concepts of *truth* (as the ultimate agreement of inquirers) and *reality* (as what is represented in the agreement) in relation to the three stages of scientific inquiry (e.g., abduction, deduction, and induction), only to be lead to the conclusions that the community is "the ultimate ground of both logic and reality".³ Conceived in this way, truth becomes a public endeavor that is achieved through an "infinite process of sign references developed by the community, *constituting* (and not *substituting*) the real".⁴ Our first quotation above clearly suggests that Peirce's under-

² Josiah Royce, *The Hope of the Great Community*, New York, NY, Macmillan, 1916, p. 129.

³ C. F. Delaney, "The Journal of Speculative Philosophy Papers", in E. C. Moore, et al (eds.), *Writings of Charles S. Peirce: A Chronological Edition*, vol. 2, Bloomington, IN, Indiana University Press, 1984, p. XLI.

⁴ Rossella Fabbrichesi, "The Body of the Community. Peirce, Royce, and Nietzsche", *European Journal of Pragmatism and American Philosophy*, II-1, 2010, par. 3. When referring to article I am pointing to the paragraph rather than the page in order to make it easier for the reader to consult the references.

standing of the importance of community stems from the age old philosophical dispute between nominalists and realists. Being a self-proclaimed scholastic realist, following in the footsteps of Duns Scot, Peirce considers the idea that a person is *merely* an individual to be one of the greatest illusions of human reason:

There are those who believe in their own existence, because its opposite is inconceivable; yet the most balsamic of all the sweets of sweet philosophy is the lesson that personal existence is an illusion and a practical joke. Those that have loved themselves and not their neighbors will find themselves April fools when the great April opens the truth that neither selves nor neighborselves were anything more than vicinities; while the love they would not entertain was the essence of every scent. (CP 4.68)

Although Peirce was critical of individualism and perceived it as a doctrine of thought akin to nominalism, we should not jump to the conclusion that his philosophy derides selfhood or that it hides a collectivist agenda doing away with personal moral growth. His “negative” treatment of the individual was rather a way to highlight that the slipping *self* is a consistency of action and thought achieved always and already in a social context. This consistency, furthermore, is expressible through “signs, and translated into habits and praxes, that are never completely individual”.⁵ Therefore, personal identity is anchored outside the individual into “the alterity of *external* signs in which personhood is exposed and *extended*” (Ibid.). As individuals we are not really severed from one another and the rest of the world. Our *selves* could rather be described as vicinities that lack sharp lines of demarcations from other individuals. Thus, the founder of pragmatism could argue that to “deny the reality of personality is not anti-spiritualistic; it is only anti-nominalistic” (CP 8.82). A similar anti-nominalist stance is adopted by Royce in his treatment of the problem of community.

For Royce to be saved (in the Christian sense) individuals must surrender their individuality to a higher cause: that is, they must become members of a community of interpretation and, thus, something more than *mere* individuals. The second volume of his masterpiece *The Problem of Christianity* begins with a commentary on the illusions we entertain as regards our separateness from our fellows. The immediate experience of feeling, the fact that thought is inaccessible by direct intuition, or the conviction that only our deeds individuate us give us the false impression of being tragically severed from one another. Royce, however, argues that all of these experiences are all realized through and in social institutions like custom and language, which are not the result of merely to individual efforts. On the contrary, such mental habits have evolved over time as products of communities. Thus, the consistency of the self, similarly to Peirce’s idea, “comes down to us from its own past” and thus is a history, which means that “my idea of myself is an interpretation of my past, — linked also with an interpretation of my hopes and intentions as to my future”.⁶ The relation between past and future is

⁵ *Ibidem*, par. 6.

⁶ Josiah Royce, *The Problem of Christianity*, vol. 2: *The Real World and the Christian Ideas*, New York, Macmillan, 1913, pp. 40–42.

also observable in “collective” minds such as communities, which derive their identities and consistency from common memories of the past and common aspirations as to the future.

The concept of the community is thus, for our purposes, a practical conception. It involves the idea of deeds done, and ends sought or attained. Hence, I shall define it in terms of members who themselves not only live in time, but conceive their own ideally extended personalities in terms of a time-process. In so far as these personalities possess a life that is for each of them his own, while it is, in some of its events, common to them all, they form a community.⁷

How does life become common we might ask? Both Peirce and Royce would argue that commonality is achieved through a triadic and dialogical process of interpretation that grounds not only our cultural institutions and natural predispositions alike, but the very fabric of the universe itself.

THE UNIVERSE AS INTERPRETATION

It is typical for modern philosophy to consider cognition as an interplay between *perception* of pure data and *conception* of abstract terms. But for Royce experience teaches that fullness of life requires that we consider a third process, radically different from these two: namely, *interpretation*. Interpretation – unlike perception and conception – is dialogical and hence not a lonely endeavor. Moreover, the objects of interpretation themselves are of mental nature and, therefore, are signs. Finally, he concludes, interpretation so far as it is a mental phenomenon is also of the essence and nature of a sign.⁸ These points are the result of Royce’s sustained engagement with some of Peirce’s early work on logic conceived as semeiotic. Thus, Royce could define interpretation as a process that brings in order three elements, which is the reason why we cannot reduce it to the other two cognitive processes. This idea has serious metaphysical consequences: namely, we could imagine the universe itself as a process of interpretation. For Royce the relations of someone who interprets her past to her future are analogous to those that exist when the historical process links past states of the world to future ones in the present.⁹ This parallelism of an individual’s the mental life and the evolution of the universe leads Royce to consider the universe itself as an interpretative community:

We all of us believe that there is any real world at all, simply because we find ourselves in a situation in which, because of our fragmentary and dissatisfying conflicts, antitheses, and problems of our present ideas, an interpretation of this situation is needed, but is not now know to us. *By the “real world” we mean simply “the true interpretation” of this our problematic situation.* No other reason can be given than this for believing that there is any real world at all.¹⁰

⁷ *Ibidem*, pp. 64–65.

⁸ See *Ibidem*, pp. 148–149.

⁹ See *Ibidem*, p. 144.

¹⁰ *Ibidem*, pp. 264–265.

Because interpretation calls for further interpretation indefinitely, the classical pragmatists of a semiotic stripe conceive reality as indefinitely future, for the “true interpretation” is an open event deferred in time. Royce’s metaphysical doctrine can be summarized as follows: the ideas of present experience and the goal of experience are antithetical; reality solves the antithesis through a process of; reality, thus, is itself a process that involves an infinite sequence of interpretations and that admits of an unlimited variety among the selves that interpret; the latter constitute the life of a single community of interpretation no matter how diverse.

In the concrete, then, the universe is a community of interpretation whose life comprises and unifies all the social communities which, for any reason, we know to be real in the empirical world which our social and our historical sciences study. This history of the universe, the whole order of time, is the history and the order and the expression of this Universal Community.¹¹

While Royce thinks of the universe as an interpretative process that is essentially a community, Peirce argues that it is “perfused with signs, if it is not composed exclusively of signs” (CP 4.448). If this is true, then the universe is at least partly mental, which makes it intelligible: i.e., it could be accounted for and explained in general terms. If we consider what Peirce tells us about symbols – a symbol is “a law, or regularity of the indefinite future” (EP2 274) – could we then say that the universe itself is a sort of a symbol? This particular metaphysical speculation surely sounds like no more than poetry, but when it comes to Peirce we should never forget that bad “poetry is false [...] but nothing is truer than true poetry” (CP 1.315). It is precisely the idea the universe is a symbol that forms the most enigmatic part of Peirce’s “Καὶνα στοιχεία (New Elements)”.

If we are to explain the universe, we must assume that there was in the beginning a state of things in which there was nothing, no reaction and no quality, no matter, no consciousness, no space and time, but just nothing at all. Not determinately nothing. For that which is determinately not *A* supposes the being of *A* in some mode. Utter indetermination. But a symbol alone is indeterminate. Therefore, Nothing, the indeterminate of the absolute beginning, is a symbol [...] As a symbol it produced its infinite series of interpretants, which in the beginning were absolutely vague like itself. (EP2 322–323)

The universe is symbolical in nature because it is always growing and a “symbol is something, which has the power to reproduce itself, and that essentially, since it is constituted a symbol only by the interpretation” (EP2 322). This means that Peirce was equating the unlimited process of inquiry and the growth of the universe under his idea of semiosis: i.e., the “action, or influence, which is, or involves, a cooperation of three subjects, such as a sign, its object, and its interpretant, this tri-relative influence not being in any way resolvable into actions between pairs” (EP2 411). It is in such a triadic process that the community of inquirers (per Peirce) or interpretation (per Royce) is born

¹¹ *Ibidem*, pp. 272–273.

to subsume individuals and make them more than just individuals. Leaving aside questions as to whether this proposition could be labeled panpsychistic or pansemiotic as well as an unnecessarily long discussion on the intricacies of Peirce's semiotic doctrine and Royce's use of it, we instead could direct our inquiry to the ethical consequences of conceiving community as interpretation. Thus, we are led to the "forces" that create communities of interpretation according to Peirce and Royce: viz., love and loyalty.

THE PRAGMATIC ETHOS OF COMMUNITY

Peirce comes up with the term *agapasm* in his "Evolutionary Love" (1893) to explain the key role that love plays in evolution. His take on the ancient Greek ἀγάπη could be described as a pragmatic rendition of the Christian ideas of creative love and charity, rather than as an interpretation of the meaning of ἔρωσ as passionate love. Criticizing what he calls "the gospel of greed" – the utilitarian Benthamite ideology according to which private vice is essential in the creation of public good – Peirce develops his Lamarckian idea of evolution "by the power of sympathy" (CP 6.307). It should be noted that *agapasm* is closely connected to Peirce's doctrine of *synechism* that regards everything as continuous. Thus, a third force of evolution that mediates between fortuitous variation (*tychasm*) and mechanical necessity (*anancasm*) is called for that shifts the focus from the individual to the community with the help of:

[...] an evolutionary philosophy, which teaches that growth comes only from love, from I will not say self-*sacrifice*, but from the ardent impulse to fulfill another's highest impulse [...] The philosophy we draw [...] is that this is the way mind develops; and as for the cosmos, only so far as it yet is mind, and so has life, is it capable of further evolution. Love, recognizing germs of loveliness in the hateful, gradually warms it into life, and makes it lovely. That is the sort of evolution which every careful student of my essay "The Law of Mind" must see that *synechism* calls for. (W8 186)

It is love and loveliness that we find in what Peirce calls on another occasion the "three logical sentiments": viz. an interest in an indefinite community, the recognition that this interest can be made into an ethical ideal, and the hope for the unlimited development of intellectual activity.

It may seem strange that I should put forward three sentiments, namely, interest in an indefinite community, recognition of the possibility of this interest being made supreme, and hope in the unlimited continuance of intellectual activity, as indispensable requirements of logic. Yet, when we consider that logic depends on a mere struggle to escape doubt, which, as it terminates in action, must begin in emotion, and that, furthermore, the only cause of our planting ourselves on reason is that other methods of escaping doubt fail on account of the social impulse, why should we wonder to find social sentiment presupposed in reasoning? As for the other two sentiments which I find necessary, they are so only as supports and accessories of that. It interests me to notice that these three sentiments seem to be pretty much the same as that

famous trio of Charity, Faith, and Hope, which, in the estimation of St. Paul, are the finest and greatest of spiritual gifts. (CP 2.655)

In this passage Peirce brings into relation three pivotal ideas of his philosophy: inquiry, community, and love. This is a way of expressing faith (and hope) that intellectual activity is unlimited. If we are to proceed to Royce's idea of loyalty, we could say that it has common origins with the pragmatic ἀγάπη.

The first systematic consideration of loyalty as *the* ethical ideal for Royce comes from his "Philosophy of Loyalty" (1908). In this work he describes loyalty "as the central spirit of the moral and reasonable life of man"¹² and defines it as the "*willing and practical and thoroughgoing devotion of a person to a cause*".¹³ In *The Problem of Christianity* the notion returns to subsume Christian charity and love. When Royce observes that industrial society breeds mechanical cooperation instead of a genuine political and religious interest in the community,¹⁴ he returns to his own conception of the meaning and purpose of love and loyalty.

When love of the community, nourished by common memories, and common hope, both exists and expresses itself in devoted individual lives, it can constantly tend, despite the complexity of the present social order to keep the consciousness alive. And when this takes place, the identification of the loyal individual self with the life of the community will tend, both in ideal and in feeling, to identify each self not only with the distant past and future of the community, but with the present activities of the whole social body.¹⁵

Royce, we should state once more, does not deride the individual and explains that a person needs to love herself. What he says, however, is that this love of the self should be in a community and that it should not be superficially emotional because then there is a risk that it will vanish and the community will be lost with it.¹⁶ This is why he proposes – against Schopenhauer's attitudes of affirmation and denial of the will – something, which we might describe as the loyal attitude. This third (and middle) way includes the "positive devotion of the Self to its cause".¹⁷

Devotion is a kind of love that endures, a willing that manifests itself not merely in the episodic choosing to do this rather than that but also in the continuous reaffirmation of choice already made. This is a love that takes the form, then, of a fidelity to ideals, persons, and causes. It is a steadfastness of purpose that, much like the meaning that results from interpretation, can only manifest itself clearly and fully over time.¹⁸

¹² Josiah Royce, *The Philosophy of Loyalty*, New York, NY, Macmillian, 1908, p. VII.

¹³ *Ibidem*, pp. 15–16.

¹⁴ See J. Royce, *The Problem of Christianity*, vol. 2, p. 85.

¹⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 92.

¹⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 96–98.

¹⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 310.

¹⁸ Michael L. Raposa, "Loyalty, Community, and the Task of Attention: On Royce's 'Third Attitude of the Will'", *American Journal of Theology and Philosophy*, 37(2), 2016, p. 115.

And we could add that this devotion, realized fully over time, happens to exist only within a community. With these remarks we could turn to the next and last section of this essay, which examines some of the perceived shortcomings of the idea of the community as interpretation.

THE PROBLEMS OF THE IDEAL COMMUNITY

At the end of this essay, we are to address two seeming problems that stem out of Peirce's and Royce's ideas about community as a process of interpretation. On the one hand, it seems there is a stress on the importance of the temporal at the expense of the spatial and on the other – the unity in their notion of *community* might incline us to think that diversity and plurality are unwelcome vices instead of sought for virtues in society.

When dealing with Peirce and Royce we might indeed be tempted to think of time as more important in the formation of community than space. These most elusive of concepts and the relation of the realities they signify have been at the forefront of much discussions not only in philosophy, but in physics as well especially since relativity and quantum physics emerged on the scene. Among contemporary theoretical physicists there are some who would argue that time is an illusion, but others are prone to believe that space is fundamental, whereas space is only a secondary, emergent phenomenon.¹⁹ But how can we relate the space-time riddle to our discussion of community? Symbols, as conceived in the semiotic universe of Peirce, grow in what can be called a historical time-process to accrue meaning and ever transform themselves into new form or gradually decay into oblivion barely leaving traces of their significations. It seems, then, that the actual space, in which a community might be born is of little interest to the pragmatic-semiotic approach here adopted since it is akin to philosophical idealism, which might be perceived as putting its preferences on high ideals and abstraction far removed from empirical reality. But this would be a serious misreading of the *in futuro* pragmatism that Peirce and Royce develop, which might further lead to its confusion with a sort of Hegelianism so typical of much of modern Western thought. In fact, Peirce and Royce recognize that the ideal community of interpretation that the universe itself might be must always be anchored in the actual. We should only remember that Peirce's symbol mediates and unites an icon and an index. This means that the ideal community of interpretation itself mediates between all the possible and actual communities that empirical science could recognize as objects of investigation. The same way a symbol mediates between qualities of feeling embedded into icons and the brutal facts of the actual world anchored into indices to produce what Peirce on occasion calls *information*. Space and time, thus, play complementary roles in the formation of communities. This same idea is sensed and articulated by Royce in his address for the National Geograph-

¹⁹ Among the latter group falls the celebrated theoretical physicist Lee Smolin, who has also been influenced by Peirce in his understanding that "the laws of nature may have evolved by a process akin to natural selection" (Lee Smolin, *The Life of the Cosmos*, Oxford and New York, Oxford University Press, 1997, p. 329).

ical Society by the title “The Pacific Coast: A Psychological Study of the Relations of Climate and Civilization” (1898). This is a move that anticipates the much later work of another philosopher of community like Tetsuro Watsuji, whose book *A Climate: A Philosophical Study* (later revised and republished as *Climate and Culture*) is a form of a critique of Heidegger’s over emphasis on the temporal with its accompanying under emphasis of the spatial as expressions of subjective human experience. While studying *Sein und Zeit* Watsuji realizes that “time not linked with space is not time in the true sense” and that Heidegger “stopped short at this point because his *Dasein* was the *Dasein* of the individual only”.²⁰

[Heidegger] treated human existence as being the existence of a man. From the standpoint of the dual structure – both individual and social – of human existence, he did not advance beyond an abstraction of a single aspect. But it is only when human existence is treated in terms of its concrete duality that time and space are linked and that history also (which never appears fully in Heidegger) is first revealed in its true guise. And at the same time the connection between history and climate becomes evident.²¹

Similarly, Royce investigates the role that climate and physical space play in the formation of particular communities, only to admit that as of yet we are much too ignorant to fully appreciate the intimate relation between a community and its environment. Considering time and space not merely objectively, but as an integral part of subjective human experience, we are ready to address what we called earlier the problem of diversity.

The ideal community of interpretation “summons” a dangerous idea, contained in itself: that of unity. Since Peirce and Royce seemingly belittle the individual, we could argue that their ideal communities are antagonistic to diversity and plurality, since they are the result of the accidental differences emerging from the illusion of selves. By taking the community as superior to the personal their pragmatisms might be misinterpreted as totalitarian in spirit and in political consequences. If the individual self is a negation, as Peirce argues, then we are allowed to think of separate selves as lacking agency to adopt aesthetic, ethical, or logical ideals. However, Peirce’s critique of individualism does not aim at the belittlement of the individual person, as we have said earlier, but rather at freeing us from nominalism’s set of illusions. On the one hand, Peirce exhibits the insufficiency of individuals as regards the attainment of truth and on the other hand, he is demolishing the prison, so to speak, of interiority that is implicit in Descartes’s pure consciousness of rationality. In the end, Peirce simply shows us that the individual person is more liable to prejudice and false belief when she is left outside the communal process meaning exchange that interpretation is. And when we engage the concept of diversity, we should not forget that Peirce’s anti-deterministic metaphysics rests on the idea that evolutionary growth means first and foremost the diversification of forms: hence,

²⁰ Tetsuro Watsuji, *A Climate: A Philosophical Study*, Tokyo, Ministry of Education and Hokuseido Press, 1961, pp. V–VI.

²¹ *Ibidem*.

plurality cannot be precluded, but should simply be considered as subservient to the general purpose of the universe to increase concrete reasonableness.

Royce's thought does not differ radically on matters such as these. The metaphysics of interpretation he develops is inspired by the early Pauline churches and for that reason it is incompatible with the perceived totalitarian aspects of unity. Royce's surrendering individual does not withhold from her individuality for the sake of observing tradition or custom. As Mahowald writes, personality "is [...] acquired, as the unique expression of a self, through the progressive merging of one's socially inculcated moral ideal with his free decisions relative to that ideal".²² This is why Royce's community depends on diversity, for interpretation always and necessarily "calls for a further interpretation [...] because it addresses itself to some third being".²³ Commenting on those ideas Fabbrichesi concludes that the community is "more real and concrete than any single individual".²⁴ To stress this once more, the idea of community does not deride the individual, but, on the contrary, it aims at elevating the person beyond its narrow scope in order to realize that "the real self is the community",²⁵ because by cherishing one's own community, the individual cherishes herself in the others. Royce's idea of loyalty is loyalty not to the *selfish* self or to any concrete historical society with its own particular tradition or custom. It is, on the contrary, loyalty to the Spirit of which all true religion ought to speak.²⁶ There is no false unity or totality implicit in Peirce and Royce, but only a plea for a better understanding for the necessary self-sacrifice individuals should be ready to make in the name of something larger than themselves, which in turn enlarges them as well: viz., the community.

CONCLUSION

The problem of community is possibly one of the most difficult we can encounter in the humanities. Observing the scholarly ethos, then, we have to admit that this short essay does not aim at a solution of it so much as to direct our attention to the particular pragmatic-semiotic reading of community as interpretation, developed into the works of Peirce and Royce. The community of interpretation without definite limits that they have envisioned is perhaps another name for what the ancient Greek philosophers were alluding to when uttering the word λόγος and possibly one of the ways in which the individual's temporal evanescence is appeased. We might be over-interpreting indeed, but this reading suggests that the community is what extends the person beyond her limits in order to transcend time itself and, thus, cope with one of the very few facts of which we are certain: that of death. This coping is realized through an active and dialogi-

²² Mary Briody Mahowald, *An Idealistic Pragmatism. The Development of the Pragmatic Element in the Philosophy of Josiah Royce*, The Hague, Martinus Nijhoff, 1972, p. 108.

²³ J. Royce, *The Problem of Christianity*, vol. 2, p. 150.

²⁴ R. Fabbrichesi, "The Body of the Community. Peirce, Royce, and Nietzsche", par. 11.

²⁵ *Ibidem*.

²⁶ See J. Royce, *The Problem of Christianity*, vol. 2, p. 429–432.

cal process of interpretation that constructs meaning, which in turn constitutes reality as an event that is by its own nature deferred into the future through an exegesis of the past. Thus, we can say that *the community as-in interpretation* has hope at its core, since “interpretation seeks a city out of sight, the homeland where, perchance, we learn to understand one another”.²⁷ We could think of Royce’s “perchance” as a wager that we are free to accept or decline as individuals, but a wager that could be resolved only in the future of the community of interpretation that the universe itself might very well be.

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²⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 152.