

TEMPORALIZING THE ABSOLUTE: ROYCE, WHITEHEAD AND THE SPECIOUS PRESENT

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Abstract. Whitehead has said that his philosophy could be considered as a “transformation of some main doctrines of Absolute Idealism onto a realist basis” (*PR*: preface, viii). In what follows I attempt to offer an interpretation of this statement guided by the idea that Whitehead is not correcting or refuting idealism (in the manner of G.E. Moore), but drawing out inherent lines of interconnection and continuity. Absolute idealism is usually taken, in Whitehead’s case at least, to refer directly to F.H. Bradley and Whitehead has explicitly indicated his debts to the British philosopher. However, the American philosopher Josiah Royce could also be considered an absolute idealist and yet little work has been done on the connections between him and Whitehead. Although Royce died in 1916, he was a central figure in shaping the Harvard philosophy department that Whitehead praised and, through his friend and colleague at Harvard William Hocking, Whitehead would have known about Royce’s work. What is interesting about Royce for our purposes is that, unlike Bradley and other idealists, he is said to take time seriously. Although Royce’s metaphysics doesn’t include finite centers of experience like Whitehead or Bradley, he does develop the idea of a varying temporal span to overcome mind-body dualism. In other words, Royce generalizes the idea of a “specious present” that expands and contracts in ways that resemble Whitehead’s own accounts of perception. Indeed, Royce claims that his temporalism stretches all the way to the Absolute, setting him apart from other idealists. In this paper I will explore these shared ideas on time and the specious present. I will begin by laying out the problem of the specious present and how both Whitehead and Royce respond to it. I will first outline the similarities in their response before moving on to focus on their disagreements relating to the reality of the temporal. These disagreements revolve fundamentally around immediate experience and whether temporal relations, especially the emergence of the new, are part of feeling. Finally, I will try to draw out the implications these accounts have for their respective understandings of the absolute or the eternal. My central claim will be that for Whitehead the “transformation of absolute idealism onto a realist basis” involves fully *temporalizing* the Absolute, which we do not find in Royce.

Keywords: Whitehead, Royce, Absolute Idealism, Specious Present.

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THE SPECIOUS PRESENT

One way into the problem of the experience of time is to think the reconciliation of the now or presence and succession. As succession there must be a distinction between before and after and in the Western metaphysical tradition it is the present, or the self-identical now, that mediates before and after. In one momentary and indivisible act the present coalesces with the past and the future. This is sometimes called the problem, or the paradox, of the “simultaneity of succession”, or more simply the “specious present.” Our experience of time includes on the one hand the experience of diversity, whose temporal form is succession, an earlier than and a later than, a predecessor and a successor. On the other hand, our experience is of unity, where the plurality or difference is held in a simultaneous and indivisible perception.

The specious present, a term coined by E.R Clay, and developed by numerous thinkers including William James, attempts to address this problem. James described it as a block of time or a duration that has a bow and a stern, a rearward and forward-looking end, what James famously called the “stream of consciousness.” The stream is an intuited or sensed duration within a simultaneous or momentary act. For Clay, the present is specious because it has no thickness, it is an instantaneous moment or present. On this view the present is nothing in itself, it is a durationless “knife edge” present that perishes in the same event in which it is born. This view of succession as a series of instantaneous “nows” was, and is, held by numerous philosophers and scientists including Descartes, Hume and Kant. In Descartes’ view the instant comes into being and perishes, eternally recreated by God. Hume’s version of it, as a succession of perceptions that glide onto the stage of consciousness and then exit the stage, is famous. This view of succession as a diversity of external units was also accepted by Kant and the neo-Kantians. The British philosopher C.A. Strong used an argument based on this view of succession in his response to James. Strong argues that earlier and later cannot be bound in a unity because they don’t exist together. Direct consciousness of the immediate past is an illusion since only the present is real. For Strong, James’ view of a simultaneous unity is a contradiction, what Strong called a “monstrosity.”¹

WHITEHEAD AND THE SPECIOUS PRESENT

In contrast, for Whitehead and Royce it is precisely *this* present, a mathematical durationless instant, that is specious and the enduring psychological/ontological present that is real. For James the simultaneous presence of earlier and later moments just *is* how consciousness combines its diverse contents into a unity,

¹ See C.A. Strong, “Consciousness and Time,” *The Psychological Review*, 1896. In current analytic metaphysics of time Strong’s view is now called “presentism”. For a discussion of presentism and other notions of time in analytic philosophy, see Emery *et al*, 2020 <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/time/>

and that unity requires a durationless and indivisible act of consciousness. However, both Whitehead and Royce claim to reject any solution that would privilege an appeal to an instantaneous, and therefore durationless or timeless act. Whitehead in particular emphasizes this throughout his work, but whether Royce consistently maintains this we shall see. In one example from Whitehead, one of many from which we could have chosen, he says “we deny this immediately given instantaneous present. There is no such thing to be found in nature. As an ultimate fact it is a non-entity. What is immediate for sense awareness is a duration” (*CN* 65). Whitehead’s solution then to the problem of the specious present is, I suggest, two-fold: on the one hand Whitehead’s accounts of perception give us something like the specious present as the sensed content of perception. On the other hand, Whitehead provides an explanation of that content, of how experience is synthesized or held together without appealing to an instantaneous moment.

Firstly, Whitehead recognizes the specious present with his descriptions of perception. His accounts of perception are amongst his most important philosophical legacies because they challenge the primacy of the present and the bifurcation of nature. Along with James’ “stream of consciousness”, and Bergson’s “duration”, Whitehead’s notions of “causal efficacy”, “presentational immediacy” and “symbolic reference” challenge the schools of thought derived from Descartes, Hume and Kant in which succession is reduced to the impressions of immediate atomic sense-data presented to consciousness. By focusing only on sense data we end up in what Whitehead, following Santayana, called the “solipsism of the present moment” (*SYM* 29). In causal efficacy, by contrast, “the presentations of sense fade away and we are left with vague feelings of influences from vague things around us” (*PR* 176). In the most immediate sense this is the datum provided by what Whitehead calls the “withness of the body”, the portion of our past that’s gone, but still there. For Whitehead what holds this symbolic reference together as a unity in consciousness is not a timeless act, but a structure that explains the becoming of continuity, as Whitehead puts it.

For Whitehead these accounts of perception are not intended to resolve the problem of the simultaneity of succession, or the specious present (as we find for example in James). Rather, Whitehead attempts to give an explanation of how the specious present is possible. Whitehead’s explanation for this is of course the theory of actual occasions, most fully developed in *Process and Reality*. Actual occasions provide the ground and conditions for experiencing the specious present. The key assumption to be challenged is that the past and the present are held together in a durationless act of consciousness. This means that not only the contents of perception are temporally dynamic, but also the acts or actual occasions are dynamic and stretched out in time. This stretching out of the act of creativity, not the perceptual content, is what Whitehead calls “becoming” or concrescence. Whitehead describes the structure of these acts, including the receptive or prehensive phases of concrescence, conceptual prehensions and eternal objects, and

their integration into the decisions of satisfaction, in elaborate detail. As soon as the occasion comes to be it perishes. As Whitehead likes to say, following Plato, it never really is or, we could say it negates itself. However, the occasion doesn't disappear without a trace. For Whitehead it becomes objectively immortal, held as data for new occasions. Every moment ceases one type of fluency, (becoming, concrescence) but then starts another (transition) in that it is prehended in the concrescence of new occasions.

ROYCE AND THE SPECIOUS PRESENT

Although there is nothing like the actual occasion in Royce, like Whitehead, he distinguishes our direct perceptual experience of time from a more indirect conceptual experience. He stresses what he calls the "highly artificial" aspects of our conceptual experience of time and how symbolic representation begins to outstrip perceptual experience when elements in our direct experience of the wholeness of time are found to be irreconcilable with the conceptual construction. Our direct experience includes change, and in the form of succession, one event follows another in a temporal series such that each one of them is over and past when the next one comes. If *b* succeeds *a* then *a* is in the past of *b* and succession passes from *a* to *b*. This order and direction of temporal relation is contrasted with space where if *a* is next to *b* we can say that *a* coexists with *b* or *b* with *a*.

In addition to the order and direction of experienced time Royce includes another aspect that he says is persistently pointed out by psychologists, but often ignored by metaphysicians, which is the experience of succession in a momentary awareness. As Royce says, "it is, I must insist, true that for my consciousness *b* is experienced as following *a*, and also that both *a* and *b* are *together* experienced as in this relation of sequence." (WI II 116). On this experience of togetherness or simultaneity Royce says, and I quote in full:

When we more directly experience succession, as for instance when we listen to a musical phrase or a succession of drumbeats, we not only observe that any antecedent member of the series is over and past before the next one comes, but also, and without the least contradiction between these two aspects of our total experience, we observe that this whole succession, with both its former and later members, so far as with relative directness we apprehend the series of drumbeats or of other simple events, is present at once to our consciousness, in precisely the sense in which the unity of our knowing mental life always finds present at once many facts (WI II 115).

Although Royce is aware of the artificial aspects of conceptual experience this doesn't seem to extend to anything like Whitehead's "fallacy of simple

location”, or Bergson’s spatialization, at least in *The World and the Individual*². Indeed, Royce illustrates the claim above where my consciousness *b* is experienced as following *a*, and as experiencing the togetherness of *a* and *b*, by using geometric examples. Royce says that experiencing the togetherness of *a* and *b* is no more contradictory than experiencing a surface with two parts that, because of their spatial position, are mutually exclusive and yet also having the experience that the two parts go together to form one whole surface. Perhaps a better example that Royce uses, and one that Whitehead and Bergson use, is language. Royce gives the example of a famous line of verse: “the curfew tolls the knell of parting day”. Unquestionably, Royce says, I experience the word “day” after the word “parting” is over and done with and as succeeding all the other words, but I am also aware that the whole line is present to me at once as one succession (*WI II* 117).

This “two-fold” aspect, as Royce calls it, of the conscious temporal datum is regarded by both Whitehead and Royce as of primary significance for understanding real time. As we’ll see, both philosophers think of the specious present as a model that can be generalized to all of reality. For Royce we just need to listen to a melody or a rhythm and in grasping it as whole we have before us the image of the divine knowledge of time. In Royce’s examples, all drawn from human experience, there is no precise distinction between the present and the past. The immediate past and present merge or fuse together. However, there are distinctions between what we can call the “thickness” and “length” of the span of the duration. For Royce there are speeds and slownesses that begin with human consciousness and work their way up to include all of nature or the eternal where, as Royce puts it, “all the life of the world, and all temporal sequences are present at once to the Absolute” (*WI II* 140). Human spans for Royce are at the bottom of the scale. Above us in the continuum Royce imagines a material region of the inorganic world as the presence “of at least one fellow creature who took perhaps one billion years to complete a moment of his consciousness so that where we saw, in the signs given us of his presence, only monotonous permanence of fact, he, in his inner life, faced momentarily significant change” (*WI II*: 228).

THE REALITY OF THE TEMPORAL

In his 1910 paper “The Reality of the Temporal”, Royce argues for a position on the reality of the temporal that is remarkably close to Whitehead on many points, but ultimately diverges from him, and his contemporaries Bergson and Lovejoy (whom he associates with the “New Realism”, *TRT* 257), on the experienced reality of novelty. Although he’s disappointed with the way that novelty is dealt with, the facts, as stated by these thinkers, are for Royce incontrovertible. One such

² As we’ll see, Royce gets closer to something like a critique of simple location in his later article “The Reality of the Temporal” but occasionally reverts to spatial examples and remains committed to the idea that temporal experience cannot disclose anything about the new.

bedrock fact is that reality undergoes perpetual change which we experience through the events of our personal lives. Change is ever-present and verifiable for each one of us. As Royce writes, “whatever now is, is either itself undergoing change, or is taking part in processes, such as movements and activities, which involve change” (*TRT* 259). All of us can attest to this in our personal experience and we have learned to extend these facts beyond our experience in accordance with a certain structuring of change itself.

Change for Royce is not simply chaotic or unordered. Rather, we impose an order on change such that events are governed by what Royce calls “general laws” (*TRT* 259). What are these laws? Events are subject to a temporal structure that imposes a relational order upon them. Either events are structured by the relation of being a predecessor to or a successor of, that is, the “earlier-later” relation; or, events are “contemporaneous with” and exhibit the relation of simultaneity. Given any two such events, one occurs either earlier than, later than or simultaneously with the other. If events appear to overlap we are sure, Royce claims, that through a careful analysis and subdivision of the time order we can discern their respective places on the timeline and resolve any ambiguities. We do this by tying events to indivisible instants or instantaneous events that fix their chronological order. Royce writes, “In this way, conceiving of the real events of the world as consisting of ideally simple events, sometimes called ‘instantaneous events’, we conceive that the real processes of the world form an order than one could describe as a series of chronological levels – any level being a set of the simultaneous events of the world at any supposed and not further divided instant, while the series of these levels constitutes the history of the world” (*TRT* 260).

For Royce this general structuring and extension of our experience of change is a frame within which we put events in order. This positioning of events in space is not part of our immediate datum but what he calls a “construct”, the motives for which “lie deep in our nature as reasonable beings” (*TRT* 261). This is the influence of Kant, and rational idealism more generally, on Royce. The synthesizing activity of reason, external to experience, provides the basis for the unifying of experience. As we’ll see, this has direct implications for Royce’s views on novelty and is another point of distinction between him and Whitehead. For Whitehead, the categories of classical rationalism and Kantianism are too limited and must be broadened. Whitehead’s well-known “recurrence to pre-Kantian modes of thought” (*PR* xi) is a necessary step in moving past Kant towards an essentially post-Kantian mode of speculative realism.

As Royce says, we are all in agreement that trying to understand change by appeal to indivisible instants is not part of experience, but nor is it simply a “fiction” or false either. As Royce puts it, “I do not doubt myself that in this respect we are conceiving genuine characters of the real world” (*TRT* 261). In addition to the general characteristics relating to how the series of events mentioned above are ordered, in the physical sciences there is a more specialized conception of a series as a mathematical continuum. The parts of the continuum are viewed as infinitely

divisible with indivisible conceptual instants as points that form a one-to-one correspondence with real numbers. For Whitehead, as for Royce, this conception of the mathematical continuum is an artificial product but with real practical value. As Royce says, and Whitehead would agree, this construct of the physical sciences “is no genuine representation of any final reality”, but an extremely useful construction. Royce goes to say that he believes “in this construction as an immensely useful guide but not as a picture of absolute reality” (*TRT* 261). The metrical time sciences have constructed a conceptual time order fashioned more or less after human practical needs.

This is close to Whitehead. For example, in chapter 3 of *Science and the Modern World* Whitehead is engaged in a critical discussion of the core presuppositions of modern science. One such presupposition or fallacy as Whitehead calls it, is “simple location”: matter is definitively here in space-time without reference to other regions of space-time. Simple location is, for Whitehead, an answer to the question “what is nature made of?”:

The answer is couched in terms of stuff or matter or material – the particular name chosen is indifferent – which has the property of simple location in space and time... The characteristic common both to space and time is that material can be said to be *here* in space and *here* in time, or here in space-time, in a perfectly definite sense which does not require for its explanation any reference to other regions of space-time. (*SMW* 48–49, italics in text).

Simple location is, then, the idea that something called matter is located in a self-identical present in which times are conceived as instants and spaces are conceived as points fully present to themselves in accordance with the logic of identity. One immediate problem, amongst others, that Whitehead has with this is that nothing like this exists in nature or our experience of nature. In Whitehead’s words, “we deny this immediately given instantaneous present. There is no such thing to be found in nature. As an ultimate fact it is a non-entity. What is immediate for sense awareness is a duration” (*CN* 65).

In addition, Whitehead explains that if matter has existed in any period then it has existed in any portion of the period. This means that dividing the time does not divide the material whereas dividing the space does divide the material such that dividing the volume will result in less of the material. This difference leads to the idea that matter is fully itself in any sub-period and so the transition of time is regarded as superficial and inessential. Whitehead writes “this fact that the material is indifferent to the division of time leads to the conclusion that the lapse of time is an accident, rather than of the essence, of the material... Thus the transition of time has nothing to do with the character of the material. The material is equally itself at an instant of time. Here an instant of time is conceived as in itself without transition, since the temporal transition is the succession of instants” (*SMW* 50). Similar to Royce, Whitehead argues that spatialization is the expression of more

concrete facts under the guise of very abstract or conceptual logical constructions. It is the error of mistaking the abstract for the concrete. Simple location is an example of what Whitehead calls the “Fallacy of Misplaced Concreteness”: “this fallacy is the occasion of great confusion in philosophy. It is not necessary for the intellect to fall into the trap, though....there is a very general tendency to do so” (*SMW* 50–51).

Following the general temporal ordering of events and the specific rendering of that character in the form of the mathematical continuum as a useful construction, there is a third characteristic feature of the reality of the temporal: the idea of novelty. Royce writes, “these thinkers [Bergson, Lovejoy, etc.] agree... in insisting upon novelty, and upon irrevocable individual reality as belonging to each event of the time world” (*TRT* 262). The author of *Process and Reality* could hardly be more in agreement. Creativity is the ultimate category for Whitehead, the “universal of universals” as he puts it, and novelty is an “ultimate notion”. For Whitehead, creativity “is the principle of novelty. An actual occasion is a novel entity diverse from any entity in the many which it unifies” (*PR* 21). Royce agrees with the idea that novelty is a central fact, but he makes two objections. Firstly, that novelty cannot be described and nor can it be immediately felt. On the first objection Royce takes himself to be in agreement with Bergson; Royce says, “no description, no reduction of time sequences to types, to classes of events, to serial order, no explanation in terms of a world formula can ever exhaustively conceptualize the time world, or deprive its novelties of their individual significance” (*TRT* 263). Although Bergson and Whitehead would balk at the idea that one can “exhaustively conceptualize the time world”, both attempt to create new concepts and categories to describe and think novelty. This is the whole point of Whitehead’s method of descriptive generalization and “imaginative construction” (*PR* 5). Indeed, Whitehead explicitly challenges the idea that we should attempt to explain concrete facts in terms of abstract types, classes and orders. Rather, “the explanatory purpose of philosophy...is to explain the emergence of the more abstract things from the more concrete things. It is a complete mistake to ask how concrete particular fact can be built up out of universals. The answer is, ‘in no way’” (*PR* 20). Creativity and novelty are not substrates that function as separate substances or more “eminent” realities beyond their accidents, as one might find in absolute idealism (*PR* 7). Rather, creativity is actual in virtue of its accidents, differentially realized in each of them. Thus, we can say that novelty is a concrete universal, immanent in its actualizations.

This leads us into the second objection: that novelty cannot be immediately felt. Royce writes: “Uniqueness, novelty, individuality – these, I have said, cannot be described and must be appreciated. But I have now added the reflection, just as true as the other. Uniqueness, novelty individuality – *these cannot be immediately felt*. They are no data of immediate experience.” (*RT*: 266, italics in text). Royce claims that novelty is part of reality but it cannot be immediately felt or perceived,

only presupposed. His argument is that a particular datum of perception cannot disclose anything about the universal: “for how shall I immediately feel or see or otherwise sense the truth, if it be indeed a truth, that this fact of sense was never a fact for me, or for anybody else before?” (*TRT* 265). The sense datum in itself, for Royce, doesn’t show that it is “unique of its kind.” The novelty, then, can only be what Royce calls “a truth that is here simply supersensual” (*TRT* 264) and not given in experience. We’ve already mentioned Royce’s reliance upon a narrowly Kantian conception of a datum of experience as a manifold of externally related units in which the experience of the concrete universality of novelty would be impossible.

As we suggested earlier, Whitehead’s accounts of perception operate with an enlarged conception of experience, similar to James’ “pure experience”, in which a particular experience or feeling draws on the whole relational context. Feeling in this sense is primitive, vague and yet insistent, a feeling of passage in which the past is compelled into the present and opens onto the new. This means that each novel moment in its “presentational immediacy” is inseparable from the whole antecedent past and the feeling of novelty *requires the whole antecedent past for novelty to be felt*. The feeling of novelty needs to be understood within the context of this broadened experience of the specious present in which the immediate past constitutes the immediate present and the anticipation of the future. In *Adventures of Ideas* Whitehead insists that “the present moment is constituted by the influx of the other into that self-identity which is the life of the immediate past within the immediacy of the present” (*AI* 233). For Whitehead, Royce would be guilty of neglecting the full influx of the other, of restricting it to a past-present and simply locating novelty as the “bare incoming of novel abstract form” (*AI* 242), a bare form supplied by the mind. Royce’s criticism here is, of course, directed at Bergson but it’s no more applicable to him either because Bergson, like Whitehead, also thinks of novelty as one irreducible aspect of the “prolongation of the past” into the present. These differences have implications for how each philosopher thinks about generalizing and expanding the specious present to the absolute.

THE MOVING IMAGE OF ETERNITY

As we’ve seen both Whitehead and Royce work with the idea of a two-fold aspect of the specious present but they generalize it in very different ways. Whitehead uses the term “conformation” for this two-fold aspect, where the present conforms to or merges with the past but how the scale is drawn, and the examples referred to, are very different. Whitehead often gives examples referring to what he calls “low grade organisms”: a stone conforms to its conditions, a flower turns to the light, a dog anticipates the future. For Whitehead, when memory and anticipation are negligible “there is complete conformity to the average influence of the

immediate past...When there is memory, however feeble and short lived, the average influence of the immediate past or future ceases to dominate exclusively" (*ESP* 91). In Whitehead's speculative image of nature, developed in numerous texts, there is no need to posit essentially different types of actualities or activities (e.g., human and nonhuman, mind and matter, etc.). Royce is in agreement with this but, unlike Royce, Whitehead's one type of creative experiencing or vibratory existence is scaled differently such that we find, at one end, a tendency toward conformity with the present and repetition of the immediate past with the merest thread of memory approaching zero, and, at the other end, the inverse tendency, which is the confrontation between the widening and deepening of memory and the breadth of possibility as the past fills the present in anticipation of the future.

In Royce's account, inorganic matter is a vast, expansive time span that far exceeds the human. In Whitehead it is close to zero, although importantly it is not zero. Moving along Whitehead's scale the expansion of memory and anticipation beyond human consciousness would place us closer to what we can call the "eternal", although Whitehead uses different terms which we'll return to below. At the other end of Royce's scale we have an eternal insight that would extend beyond human temporal consciousness and the vastness of inorganic matter to a present indefinitely extended in a kind of "perpetual present" that would include the whole of the past and the whole of future in one cosmic immediate memory – the Absolute. Just as we may know a series of notes at once, or the meaning of a succession of words at once, Royce writes, "so God knows the whole time sequence of the world at once. The difference is merely one of span. You now exemplify the eternal type of knowledge, even as you listen to any briefest sequence of my words. For you to know time by sharing the image of the Eternal" (*WI* II 146). Royce generalizes from a human specious present – when you listen to the briefest sequence of my words, or notes in a melody – and by removing the limits at either end places God in an eternal present which attains the Absolute. To the objection that this eternal insight is impossible because the infinite past is no longer or the future not yet Royce claims that just as we know a series of words or notes as both no longer or not yet, and we know them at once, so God knows the whole temporal series (*WI* II 145). Royce says that the whole temporal series are "viewed at once by the Absolute" and are "all equally present". "Their presence", Royce writes, "is the presence of all time, as *totum simul*, to the Absolute" (*WI* II 141). It includes as he says "the observation of every passing away, of every sequence, of every event, and of whatever in time succeeds and follows that event (*WI* II 141).

One concern from a Whiteheadian point of view regarding Royce's temporal Absolute is that the future has already happened and time has ceased to flow since the not yet is given in the all at once of the absolute. There can be no genuine novelty or creativity as such, no potentiality for the new. As we saw earlier in his *The Reality of the Temporal* Royce compares his own views with Bergson. He

accepts all of Bergson's claims about what can be intuited in duration except the idea of the creativity of the new: "Uniqueness, novelty, individuality, *these cannot be immediately* felt. They are no data of Immediate experience" (*TRT* 266). Putting aside whether this is a correct interpretation of Bergson³, Royce accepts that these are characteristics of our reality but rather than part of our immediate felt experience they are products of the will. Whether we talk about the temporal experience of the self, or the world's time as a whole, for Royce time has the form of the will in which the past leads toward and aims at the future. In some ways this teleological structure of will could be close to Whitehead's subjective aim and subjective form, but in Royce's Absolute there is no incompleteness. The new is already included and equally present as a *totum simul*. Royce's Absolute is in effect a completed eternal substance, a static timeless whole without a successor in which the sense of an expanding or contracting present is reduced to a metaphysically simple present or an eternal now. When Royce says "In the last analysis the absolute must be viewed in a well-ordered and discrete series of facts which from our point of view may indeed appear,... capable of discrimination *ad infinitum*" (*WI II*: 138) then we fall back onto an image of time as externally related points on a line and end up with vision of a temporalized Absolute as a pure space of co-existence⁴.

In contrast, if we can talk of Whitehead's "absolute" it cannot be a timeless essence or substance because it is always moving, it lives, is essentially incomplete and open to the virtual future. Whitehead's absolute is not a completed, timeless infinite substance but an incomplete and radically unfinished creativity. Here I'm leaning on Whitehead's concept of the "everlasting", described in the final sections of *Process and Reality*. In everlastingness immediacy is reconciled with objective immortality (*PR* 351) in a constant unifying that doesn't achieve final unification. Whitehead's version of the eternal is of creative advance that combines vivid immediacy and perishing in a permanent dance of unity and multiplicity that goes on until, as Whitehead puts it, the "crack of doom." But Whitehead's everlastingness is more than a radically unfinished duration or ongoingness. That "more" would concern a discussion in Whitehead, as it does in Royce, of what is essentially the problem of the specious present that we began with, but a specious present writ large and taken to its widest cosmic degree, a metaphysical generalization where everlastingness includes a vast number of successive events

³ It's doubtful that "immediacy" in Bergson has the sense that Royce gives to it. Bergson talks about the immediacy of intuition as a reflective activity of bringing the vague into clearer focus. Bergson sometimes stresses the labor and difficulty of this activity. Jankélévitch (2015) argues that "immediacy" in Bergson should be understood in terms of epistemological purity. In other words, the immediately felt data are most often distorted and misleading. Experience only becomes immediate in Bergson's sense when the distortions are eliminated.

⁴ Milič Čapek develops an argument along these lines in his "Time and Eternity in Royce and Bergson", in *Revue Internationale de Philosophie*, 21, pp. 22–245, pp. 79–80.

extended over each other in one moving, growing, durational pulse. This is what Whitehead calls the “consequent nature” in its role as a kind of open and evolving cosmic memory. Although I don’t have time and space to discuss this in detail here, suffice it to say that in this cosmic epoch objectifications are preserved in the consequent nature “according to the same principle as in the temporal world the future inherits from the past” (*PR* 350). Thus, both Whitehead and Royce attempt to re-articulate the “moving image of eternity” through a new conception of a generalized specious present.

CONCLUSION

By way of conclusion, I’d like to distill the above in terms in a number of tentative points and then say something about Whitehead and idealism.

1. Both Whitehead and Royce agree that our experience includes a specious present where two aspects are held together: succession and unity. In this synthesis the present and the immediate past merge. For Royce the future is part of reality but not as an intuited content, but a rationally willed phenomenon.

2. For Royce the specious present is just the way conscious experience is put together. In the background for Royce is Kant and rational idealism generally. For Whitehead the problem requires a deeper explanation in terms of the genesis of the present and his answer is the theory of actual occasions

3. Both give an account of the reality of the temporal that includes creativity, novelty and uniqueness, but for Royce novelty cannot be described or felt. For Whitehead, creativity is an immanent category of a widened conception of experience that includes the prehensions or feelings of the past taken up into the new present.

4. Both generalize the specious present but the scaling is different. In Whitehead the shortest span is when memory and anticipation approach zero and eternal objects are repeated. For Royce the smallest span is the human with the time spans of inorganic nature vastly exceeding our own.

5. Both give an account of what we can call the “moving image of eternity.” Royce’s Absolute is a completed static whole, an image of the eternal as a space of co-existence where novelty is already given. Whitehead attempts to fully temporalize the eternal which means it moves everlastingly beyond itself toward an open future.

With these points we can see that although Royce attempted to take time seriously his position ends up closer to other idealists, like Bradley and McTaggart, who deny the reality of time altogether. Although Whitehead’s remark regarding the transformation of idealism onto a realist basis directly relates to Bradley, I have argued that it also applies to Royce and perhaps could be expanded to the idealist traditions more generally. There are numerous schools of idealism holding differing

positions and views but is there a tendency across those traditions to either deny time altogether or give it a restricted role? On what basis might we extend this tendency to idealism in this generalized way? Whitehead agreed with Bergson that, as he puts it, “on the whole, the history of philosophy supports Bergson’s charge that the human intellect ‘spatializes the universe’; that is to say that it tends to ignore the fluency, and to analyze the world in terms of static categories” (*PR* 209). Idealisms are no less prone to spatialization than other schools within the rest of the history of philosophy. Neither Whitehead, nor Bergson for that matter, thought that this tendency is an “inherent necessity of the intellect”⁵ and so there is no logical or necessary incompatibility between idealism and temporalism. We can see this in Royce’s brand of idealism where there is an awareness – up to a point – of spatializing tendencies and a rejection of atomistic conceptions of the instant but in the final analysis temporal relations for Royce are real, but are not fully experienceable. The final reality of temporal relations for Royce are given and unified in the absolute mind. For Whitehead, as we have seen, this is to deny the experienced reality of the temporal in its most important feature: the reality of the creative. In the end Whitehead’s view does not diverge significantly from James’ in his long exchange, dubbed “the battle of the Absolute”, with Royce.

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⁵ *PR* 209. I think Whitehead was wrong about Bergson here. This is part of a broader misreading of Bergson as anti-intellectual including as we’ve seen, Royce, who thinks he’s in agreement with Bergson when he claims that novelty cannot be described.

