

## The Role of Reason for Borden Parker Bowne

In his contribution to a 1986 book on Boston Personalism, John Lavelly points to several key issues that personalists today most need to address. One centers on the long-standing question of what the proper relationship is between faith and reason. That question, he notes, is especially pressing for adherents to a personalist tradition that reworks the more traditional notions of God. Unless theistic personalism can account for some connection between faith and reason, it stands irrelevant to the religious lives that it itself deems so vital to rich personhood. Yet rarely have theistic personalists explicitly addressed the questions: Do philosophy and religion have some rightful bearing on each other? If so, what is it?<sup>1</sup>

Such questions fit into larger ones regarding the role of reason in human lives — namely, what functions reason should serve and how it should stand in relation to other human faculties, such as feeling and intuition. For beside faith, of course, there are other forces in the human mind which inform belief apart from reason. And no doubt, they are key parts of who persons are. Among Boston personalists, at least, it is a famous and oft-repeated maxim that life is deeper than logic. But if that is the case, what role should logic, or reason, have in life?

Without trying to give final answers, in this paper I explore the role of reason for the devout Methodist and founder of Boston Personalism, Borden Parker Bowne, hoping to lend a useful basis for further discussion. Bowne himself offers little finality, but the approach he takes can be instructive. One of his earliest critics, Edward Ramsdell, sheds some crucial light on certain tensions in Bowne's approach.<sup>2</sup> Those tensions reveal a great deal about Bowne's ideal for the role of reason. Though Ramsdell rarely gets mentioned in current literature on American Personalism, I will spend the greater part of this discussion exploring the tensions that he points to in Bowne's work. One of Ramsdell's main charges — the one I will address here — is that Bowne fails to square his "rationalism" and his pragmatism with each other.<sup>3</sup> Since there has been debate about whether Bowne qualifies as a pragmatist, in some official sense of the term, I should make it clear that I do not mean to join that debate here.<sup>4</sup> Neither am I trying to show the compatibility of personalism or rationalism with pragmatism. My aim is simply to

account for how Bowne unifies two seemingly disparate elements in his philosophical approach. Though, admittedly, those elements stand in some tension, I will argue that if we recognize the various functions which Bowne thinks reason has, the apparent conflict disappears. I hope to show that for Bowne, the ideal function of reason is threefold: (1) to inform conscience, (2) to fulfill an appetite for speculative thinking, and (3) to clear away the false beliefs that end up clouding moral intuition.<sup>5</sup> This view of reason holds an answer to the question of how faith and reason relate to each other, since Bowne thinks that ministering to conscience serves religion.

Let me begin with the apparent conflict as identified by Edward T. Ramsdell. He defines rationalism as

any method or methods that make reason, as the logical understanding, the final standard and arbiter of all philosophical questions. Rationalism may proceed deductively, after the manner of Descartes and Herbart, or it may proceed empirically, gathering the facts of experience and attempting their ultimate theoretical explanation under the standards of consistency and coherence. The distinguishing mark of rationalism is its ultimate appeal to reason for its criteria of truth.

Ramsdell sees pragmatism as “those methods which make various extra-rational factors the final standards of philosophy, such as fruitfulness or favorable results, or the satisfaction of our human interests and feelings.”<sup>6</sup> The distinction may be fuzzy enough to warrant questioning, but I think Ramsdell is pointing to a recognizable contrast between philosophical approaches. Let me flesh out that contrast.

Bowne himself is aware of it. He identifies two kinds of beliefs, associating each with its own ideal mode of thinking and its own different “test” of truth or rationality.<sup>7</sup> The contrast first appears between the two classes of belief.

To explain what I mean, I will start with the first class and its related truth-test and mode of thinking. Far more than the second type of belief, the first sort is grounded on “phenomena” or “facts”, as Bowne typically calls them. Those facts consist of certain features of the world which are given or self-evident to everyone through sensory perception. From those basic facts, all persons make inferences out of which they form beliefs.<sup>8</sup> Such beliefs are the first kind which Bowne identifies. He notes that they “belong to the realm of probability; that is, our belief arises and falls with the amount of objective evidence. We take all the facts into account, and our belief is the resultant average” — in other words, the average of what the facts indicate is probably the case.<sup>9</sup> Beliefs of this sort can spring up in many areas of thought. They constitute the bulk of common sense; at a more sophisticated level, they take the form of scientific theories.

Beliefs of the first class may also take the form of metaphysical views. When they do, they require more scrutiny. Bowne explains that for practical purposes, the beliefs that make up common sense and scientific theories work well enough. But when they become the basis of metaphysical views, they mislead.<sup>10</sup> Thus — and this is a key point — Bowne urges caution toward metaphysical views that issue from common sense, and he puts far more stock in reason than in common sense. In fact, in his more speculative or “rationalistic” mode, he appoints reason as the sole rightful judge of philosophical theories.<sup>11</sup>

What does Bowne mean at this point by the term ‘reason’? He means that the metaphysician must bring experientially-based beliefs into strict accordance with the laws of thought.<sup>12</sup> The laws of thought, for Bowne, are relations inherent in the mind that determine “the order of reason” — the principles of logic. He affirms the assumption that as a measure of how tenable a belief is, the rules of logic are “valid for all and binding for all.” They must be, he points out, in order for there to be any “mental community.”<sup>13</sup> The idea here is that in order for you and me to have a conversation, we each need to do more than say what we believe: each of us must be able to give *reasons* for holding certain beliefs. My reasons will be of value to you, and yours to me, only if we have a shared standard by which to judge the merit of various reasons.

Chief among thought-laws is the law of non-contradiction, which is “that a contradiction in a notion proves its untenability.” In the original version of *Metaphysics*, Bowne states the law of non-contradiction in those words and proclaims it *the* “guiding principle throughout [this] entire discussion.”<sup>14</sup> And often in that work, Bowne rejects commonsensical beliefs accordingly.<sup>15</sup>

It is also worth noting that in crowning reason the sole arbiter of thought, he specifically says the senses should be fully subordinate to reason.<sup>16</sup> That move bears mention here because of how heavily common sense relies upon the senses, according to Bowne. In drawing inferences from the basic facts given to everyone, persons use reason — that is, we employ the laws of thought.<sup>17</sup> But we do so with varying degrees of rigor. We spontaneously form common sense mainly to meet the demands of everyday life, and so commonsensical beliefs tend to be precise and reasonable only to the extent that daily life requires.<sup>18</sup> Among other things, it requires that we trust primarily what the senses tell us; after all, the senses connect each of us to the rest of the world — the only context in which everyday life can unfold. Thus, we favor belief-systems which seem most closely to reflect sensory experience — regardless of how exact they are and how fully they abide by the laws of thought — and we shrink from a set of beliefs which are precise and perfectly rational but seem remote from sensory experience. As a result, commonsensical beliefs typically are vague and self-contradictory. When made into metaphysical views, Bowne writes, “their slight parallax with reality is magnified until the result is some grotesque absurdity or some pernicious untruth.”<sup>19</sup> In explaining his method, therefore, Bowne promises to subordinate the senses to reason.

Of course, in doing so, he does affirm that he will “make the data of the senses [my] starting-point, and on them ... build up a rational system.” Nonetheless, he immediately adds that metaphysical speculation “is never a matter of the senses, but an inference from their data,” and that it “[carries] us into a world of realities whose existence can be assured only by thought.”<sup>20</sup> And this considered view is revealed in such lines as the following, which appears just two pages later: “In one sense, philosophy is a war against the senses; and in this sense no one can be a philosopher until he gets out of his senses.”

No doubt, in its context, that line primarily conveys the message that the senses have no final say about the tenability of beliefs; and the second meaning in that line — that philosophers are daft — lends a touch of humor. But it is more than *just* a joke. That is, there is a sense in which, in Bowne’s own estimation, it really *is* daft to give reason alone the last word and to dismiss “objections based only on the senses themselves,” as he sometimes advocates doing.<sup>21</sup>

I now reach a turning point in this discussion, at which the contrast that Ramsdell is gesturing toward can slowly start to emerge. Thus far, I have tried to underscore the extent to which Bowne favors reason over common sense. Let me now address the degree to which his thought moves in the opposite direction.

Take, for example, an argument that Bowne makes in three other works, where he sounds quite a different note regarding the relative authority of reason and the senses.<sup>22</sup> For my purposes, he is worth quoting at length here:

We may ask if our senses ever deceive us; and the answer must be, Yes. And then we may continue, with true closet logic: Well, if our senses may deceive us, how do we know that they do not always deceive us? And the answer must be that we can not tell. And then, of course, the conclusion is drawn that we have no standard for distinguishing truth from error, and that skepticism overwhelmingly is upon us.

Now academically this is all right. This problem admits of no abstract theoretical solution. If we stay in the closet we can argue forever, and draw the most fearful logical consequences. But the problem solves itself in practice. We know both that the senses deceive us and that they help us to most valuable knowledge. We find out that they can thus help us, not by theorizing about them, but by using them. ... We meet all such difficulties by coming out of the closet and looking at the concrete facts. And then many a thing which may be difficult in theory is found perfectly simple in practice. Plato expounded the abstract impossibility of motion; and Diogenes refuted him by

walking up and down before him. Concrete matters must be concretely tested; and abstract objections may often be removed by walking.<sup>23</sup>

Clearly enough, what Bowne advocates can seem a direct violation of the method he sets forth elsewhere. After all, in *Metaphysics*, for example, he insists that only reason and never the senses must have the last word. Yet in the present passage, he urges abandoning reason for the senses. In *Metaphysics*, he declares that philosophy has “disdain” for “objections based only on the senses themselves.”<sup>24</sup> But in the argument at hand, he expects an objection of that very sort to carry the day. And particularly revealing, the tone in which he does so suggests that he finds the posture of abstract theorizing unacceptable and untrustworthy in its tendencies.

Perhaps most in keeping with that didactically chaffing tone is Bowne’s image of the closet. It appears fairly often in his writings. And it carries much the same connotations as did Bacon’s image of the cave or den — to which Bowne explicitly refers — and much the same connotations as such images still do today in familiar depictions of philosophers.<sup>25</sup>

To get a sharper sense of those connotations, consider the following joke from a popular site on the Internet:

A philosopher went into a closet for ten years to contemplate the question, What is life? When he came out, he went into the street and met an old colleague, who asked him where in heaven’s name he had been all those years.  
 ‘In a closet,’ he rep[l]ied. ‘I wanted to know what life really *is*.’  
 ‘And have you found an answer?’  
 ‘Yes,’ he replied. ‘I think it can best be expressed by saying that life is like a bridge.’  
 ‘That’s all well and good,’ replied the colleag[u]e, ‘but can you be a little more explicit? Can you tell me *how* life is like a bridge?’  
 ‘Oh,’ replied the philosopher after some thought, ‘maybe you’re right; perhaps life is not like a bridge.’<sup>26</sup>

Obviously, the philosopher in that joke is a preposterous character — in the sense in which the word *preposterous* means “contrary to common sense.” But his actions hardly seem contrary to *reason*, as the word can also denote. In fact, that is the very idea here, namely that philosophers take reasoning to its extreme. They are submerged in it — and are in over their heads. They also seem more like disembodied minds than whole persons. The description leaves the

impression that this philosopher stayed in the closet for the full ten years — never eating or sleeping, not to mention interacting with other human beings. The closet — in general, as well as in his case — is a hideaway, a place of seclusion and retreat from everyday living and the common experience our living affords us.

At least for Bowne, the closet is, of course, also a metaphor for speculation. Speculation proceeds according to a certain ideal of thinking. The common theme in Bowne's caution against speculation is that "[T]he speculative ideal is inapplicable to practical life. ..."27 For one, it calls for a kind of thinking that threatens one's ability to function well in everyday life. Recall that the speculative ideal subordinates the senses to reason. And picture the philosopher in that joke as he, after ten years of speculation, opened the closet door again for the first time. One imagines that he must have squinted in the light after the darkness had deprived his vision for so long. By analogy, the activity of speculation is so remote from everyday human activities that it can deplete common sense, "on which daily life so largely depends."<sup>28</sup> Common sense equips persons to meet vital needs and interests which they must fulfill in order to thrive, or at least to survive. It is because of that danger of speculation that in the Preface to the first edition of his *Metaphysics*, Bowne frets over "[w]hether in the views herewith presented I have grasped any truth; or whether, by long brooding in solitude, I have fallen a prey to some idol of the speculative den. ..."29 Speculation can even lead to beliefs which are *contrary* to common sense. In fact, the conclusions that the speculator can reach may be paralyzing and incapacitating. Think again, for example, of the ominous conclusions Bowne points to regarding whether sense perception is trustworthy.

Accordingly, for Bowne, there is a class of far more pragmatic beliefs. Ideally, in forming the first sort of beliefs, a person surveys the basic facts and infers from them certain probabilities. By contrast, "Beliefs of the second class are not founded on objective facts, but on subjective tendencies, and express only [subjective] interests or postulates."<sup>30</sup> For example, "There are practical, speculative, esthetic, and moral interests. These are the motive-powers of the mind, and outline its development."<sup>31</sup> In due course, Bowne appoints another test of truth — one which fits the nature of that second class of beliefs: a belief is true to the extent that it fulfills or helps fulfill those subjective interests.<sup>32</sup> A contrast thus emerges between what Bowne calls "formal truth" and "concrete truth": "The test of formal truth is the law of contradiction. ... The test of concrete truth is practical absurdity. Solipsism involves no contradiction, and is easily conceivable, so far as logic goes. ... The absurdity which emerges is practical rather than speculative. Life is crippled."<sup>33</sup>

We might object here that Bowne never pursues formal truth or the speculative ideal when doing metaphysics. Thus, I should stress that Bowne characterizes speculation in such a way as to cast his own ideal for metaphysics — namely, that which I have already related — as speculative to a significant degree. For example, consider the following. The speculative mind wants to proceed

according to what Bowne, borrowing Matthew Arnold's term, calls "the method of rigor and vigor."<sup>34</sup> In his *less* metaphysical works, Bowne cites at least three features of that method, all of which are common to the method he adopts in his *more* metaphysical works. First, in a less metaphysical work, he notes that the method of rigor and vigor makes reason "the final test of truth."<sup>35</sup> Second, the law of contradiction is foremost within the order of reason which provides the truth-test.<sup>36</sup> Third, Bowne writes: "If we were looking about for an ideal conception of [the method of rigor and vigor] it would run something like this: Let us first find some invincible fact or principle, something which cannot be doubted or denied without absurdity, and from this let us deduce by cogent logic whatever it may imply."<sup>37</sup> Bowne's statement of that ideal conception continues for a few more lines, but at least so far as my quotation goes, it names the very spirit behind the following decree in his *Metaphysics*: "If philosophy be possible at all, it can be on the basis only of self-evident and reasoned propositions. ... [I]f philosophy be possible, there must be self-evident propositions at its foundation."<sup>38</sup> In the *Metaphysics*, he shapes his truth-test accordingly, explaining that, in key part, "Ultimately this test will consist ... in the self-evidence or *necessity of the conception*. ..."<sup>39</sup> Yet in his less metaphysical works, while asserting that truth can come through fulfilling subjective interests, he readily admits that the "practical demands" of those interests "are not *necessities of thought*, but rather true *axiomata*, that is, things worthy to be believed."<sup>40</sup> To juxtapose such passages is to find evidence that Bowne himself was fully aware of a tension within his work as a whole.

Further, there are places in Bowne's work where he explicitly tries to meet speculative standards. An instance occurs in his essay "The Speculative Significance of Freedom." In its opening pages, he affirms that — in "life" — every person has the *experience* of being free. But Bowne presents that essay as an attempt to establish the existence of human freedom on other grounds. As he explains, certain determinists insist that even if persons have the experience of freedom, that experience appears illusory when one examines the question of freedom on a purely "speculative and transcendental" level. In other words, as he puts it, "[T]he difficulty in accepting freedom lies, it is said, in the very nature of reason itself." Thus, as Bowne explains, he seeks "to show that freedom is as much an implication of the rational life as it is of the moral life. Hence the title of this paper — 'The Speculative Significance of Freedom'."<sup>41</sup> That essay is not the only one in which Bowne vows to reach "formal" truth, rather than the "concrete" kind, but it is one of the more obvious ones.

By now, it should be apparent that the second class of beliefs and its related truth-test are indeed significantly different from the first. In light of such a contrast in Bowne's work, Ramsdell asks how Bowne's rationalism and pragmatism can be consistent with each other:

How are consistency and 'adequacy to the facts' to be

equated or harmonized with results, interest satisfactions and survival as criteria of truth? Will an idea tested by one set of criteria meet the truth-requirements of the other set? If they will, the use of the two sets is superfluous; if they will not, we are confronted with contradiction. When the pragmatic and the rationalistic conflict, by what criterion shall we decide between them?<sup>42</sup>

In effect, Ramsdell says that Bowne's approach to philosophy is half rationalistic, half pragmatic, and therefore completely incoherent. Ramsdell does seem to have a point. Is Bowne, indeed, mired in incoherence on the topic of the role of reason?

I think he is not. In the rest of this discussion, I will try to show why.

For Bowne, what ultimately unifies the more speculative with the more practical modes of thinking is the voice of conscience. At multiple points throughout his work, he argues at length that, as he puts it at one point, "There is no department of belief into which subjective interests do not enter as controlling," and hence, "[*All*] belief is molded by practical aims and necessities rather than by the processes of logic."<sup>43</sup> In other words, not only beliefs of the second class Bowne cites, but also all beliefs of the *first* class rest at bottom on subjective interests. Recall that, for Bowne, everyone embraces certain "postulates" in order to fulfill those interests or tendencies, and that those "practical demands" of human "nature" are "true *axiomata* — that is, things worthy to be believed."<sup>44</sup> Thus, the final truth-test in Bowne's philosophy is this: "Whatever the mind demands for the satisfaction of its subjective interests and tendencies may be assumed as real, in default of positive disproof."<sup>45</sup> Here alone there is evidence enough of Bowne's insistence on "the primacy of life over speculation."<sup>46</sup> That theme overtly surfaces in many of his works: in one, he affirms "the primacy of the practical reason, and the subordinate character of the speculative," in another he stresses that "Life is richer and deeper than speculation," and in still another he urges that "living" — as opposed to speculation — "is the main thing, after all."<sup>47</sup>

Bowne adds something that reveals the supremacy of conscience in his philosophy:

In the last analysis these *axiomata* have an ethical root. They rest upon an idea, not of what must be, but of what ought to be. ... This basal faith rests upon nothing deeper than itself, and hence it cannot be argued. Both acceptance and rejection are finally acts of choice rather than reasoning. The dispute finally reduces to this: The believer assumes our nature to be true until it is proved



to be false; the unbeliever regards it as possibly false until it is proved to be true. So far as logic is concerned there is little to choose between them. ...<sup>48</sup>

But unless I can rely entirely on logic in discerning "what ought to be," as he puts it, how will I know how to live my life?

Part of the answer lies in Bowne's belief that moral intuition is instinctive. As he writes, "Our claim is that when two motives appear in the soul, we instinctively know which is higher. When gratitude and selfishness appear together, we know one to be worthy and the other base."<sup>49</sup> Further, he proclaims his belief "in the absolute authority of conscience."<sup>50</sup> In sum, Bowne points out that the axiomata he refers to have an ethical root, and he adds that we best make ethical decisions by means of "instinctive" moral intuition.

Nonetheless, he hardly writes off reason as irrelevant to leading a life that is good to live. He is quick to stress that "Conscience apart from intellect is mere whim and pathology — religious whim it may be, but whim just the same. ..."<sup>51</sup> Later he adds: "One great need of the present time, in all practical fields, is the serious use of reason in the criticism of life."<sup>52</sup> What, then, is the proper role of reason or logic?

Here I come to my thesis. For Bowne, reason ideally works in three ways. First, through dialectical interplay with conscience, reason must sort out both the metaphysical and the more practical or logistical meanings, implications, and consequences of what the conscience demands.<sup>53</sup> Bowne warns that "The ethical consciousness ... is rarely in full possession of itself, and consequently many ethical theories acquire currency which, developed into their consequences, would prove fatal to all ethics."<sup>54</sup> The case is similar with the religious consciousness. Accordingly, conscience should not "determine action, but the principles and direction of action."<sup>55</sup> Upon unfolding the meanings, implications, and consequences of ethical demands that the conscience issues, reason reports back to conscience, enabling a person's intuitions to be informed ones.<sup>56</sup>

The second ideal function of reason in Bowne's view relates to the human interest in, or tendency toward, seeking speculative truth. Like the other subjective interests, it warrants fulfillment: "A mind which could not interest itself in truth or beauty, which found the pursuit of knowledge tiresome and had no high aspirations, such a mind could never be considered as other than atrophied or a case of arrested development."<sup>57</sup> Further, Bowne writes elsewhere: "Thought, then, which has any relation to truth and knowledge, or which concerns itself at all with its own presuppositions and implications, can never escape making a general metaphysical assumption about its objects and their systematic connection."<sup>58</sup> In other words, for the mind that cares about truth, doing metaphysics is not optional. Reason performs its second ideal function simply by fulfilling the speculative interest.

But recall Bowne's concern that the speculative mind can easily go astray.

“Correct thinking does not come by nature,” Bowne characteristically warns.<sup>59</sup> It takes careful, schooled, and savvy reflection to deliver the speculative mind from the messes it often gets itself into. And so the third function of reason is to rescue the whole person from the speculative mess. The emptiness of closeted thought is not the only danger. In fulfilling the speculative interest — which, to repeat, is worthy of fulfillment — the mind also runs the risk of reaching conclusions which are at odds with those *axiomata* Bowne identifies. The point is to sound out a metaphysics that is in harmony both with itself and with those *axiomata* and thus poses no threat to practical life. As Bowne writes, “[W]hile a good philosophy may not have much positive value, a bad one may do measureless harm.”<sup>60</sup> He therefore concludes that metaphysics has a crucial “negative function”: “We need, then, a sound philosophy at least as a kind of intellectual health officer whose business it is to keep down disease-breeding miasms and pestiferous growths, or as a moral police whose duty it is to arrest those dangerous and disturbing intellectual vagrants which have no visible means of support, and which corrupt the people.”<sup>61</sup> Keeping in mind the connotations of his image of the closet, consider also another passage in which Bowne makes largely the same point: “Our knowledge of anatomy is mainly the product of disease. Nerves reveal themselves and their functions by disordered action. In like manner, philosophy is mainly a product of mental disease. The attempt to harmonize the mind with itself is the great source of philosophical knowledge and advance.”<sup>62</sup> Using reason in its third function, the meta-physician is a philosophical therapist who cures speculative minds of the ills of the closet. No doubt, Bowne offers his metaphysics as such a cure. He is purging the Western mind of the impersonal metaphysics that has long infected it.<sup>63</sup>

Further, he is wading into metaphysical speculation only by what he views as necessity — to fulfill his own speculative interest and to clear the way for truth — and not to find truth.<sup>64</sup> And he is doing so in the service of morality — which long precedes his metaphysical conclusions.<sup>65</sup> Again and again, throughout his work, he denies the validity of following reason wherever it may lead.<sup>66</sup> As he explains in the Introduction to *Metaphysics*, it matters relatively little whether there is a correspondence — in the stricter senses of the term — between the conclusions that speculation yields and what absolutely exists:

It is not the lack of harmony between our conceptions and reality which disturbs us, but their discord among themselves. ... Our conceptions may be purely phenomenal; but none the less will the mind demand that they be harmonized with one another. The importance and the justification of metaphysics are not dependent, therefore, on the falsehood of the philosophy of relativity.<sup>67</sup>

In the same passage, he spells out the chief impetus behind his speculation: "Mental discord and contradiction we cannot endure. ... [U]ntil our thought-life ceases, there will always be an attempt on the part of the mind to bring its conceptions into a consistent system. ... Metaphysics finds its warrant in the mental demand for harmony in thought." Its value lies in its function as therapy.

Granted, it might seem unlikely that Bowne thinks metaphysics can be curative. After all, in addressing the value of metaphysics, he concedes that certain beliefs stand impervious to argument since those beliefs are not "founded on argument" in the first place.<sup>68</sup> Similarly, referring to faith in the "true *axiomata*," he writes: "Nor can faith be recovered by arguing; this will often rather deepen the unbelief."<sup>69</sup> And elsewhere he notes that "[T]he Churches whose creeds are speculatively the most elaborate have never been the most efficient in turning from darkness to light."<sup>70</sup>

But there are also passages in which Bowne contends that intellectual health rides on speculative philosophy. For example, in his capstone work, he declares:

Intellectual campaigns ... are commonly decided at points quite remote from the apparent battlefield. ... These are the strategic points that command the field and decide the day. They lie in our epistemology and metaphysics — subjects which seem to have little or no practical bearing, yet out of them are the issues of intellectual life or death. Our notions of knowledge and its nature, our conception of reality and causality, our thoughts respecting space and time ... these are the things that decide our general way of thinking and give direction to our thought even in morals and religion.<sup>71</sup>

And more succinctly, in the same work, he proclaims: "Only a good philosophy can displace a bad one," suggesting that metaphysical arguments are not only effective but essential in curing weakness of faith in those *axiomata*.<sup>72</sup>

There is no conflict between the former three and the latter three passages quoted immediately above. The belief which shines through the former three is that a good philosophy can displace a bad one only for persons who already are inclined toward faith but simply find their speculative tendencies getting in the way.<sup>73</sup> Metaphysics can serve such persons merely by freeing them of the false beliefs that undermine their trust in conscience.

This view of philosophy's relation to personal belief underlay Bowne's interactions with other people. Toward the end of Bowne's life, William James noted in a letter to him: "Your youthful tendency to a certain snappishness of statement has toned itself down into patience. ..."<sup>74</sup> That snappishness might be attributable to youth alone, but it might also reflect something deeper in Bowne's thought which stands in line with the claim that only a good philosophy

can displace a bad one. While Bowne's snappishness subsides in his later published works, it still surges in private letters that he penned even during his later years. In an 8 February 1908 letter to William Torrey Harris, for example, he writes in a withering tone: "Really it would be hard to find, I think, a more pretentious and swelling system with less of real substance and intellectual insight than [Herbert] Spencer's."<sup>75</sup> Similarly, in a 29 March 1910 letter, Bowne muses to his friend Rudolf Eucken:

I have wondered how you and Professor Haeckel get on together. Two persons more antipodal in their views it would be hard to find. With us [including Eucken] the atheistic and materialistic gust of the last generation has blown over. Materialism and atheism may remain as dispositions but they are dead as philosophies. But Haeckel seems not to have heard of this and goes on with the most naive assurance. ...<sup>76</sup>

Referring to that line in Bowne's letter, Warren Steinkraus writes that it reflects on Bowne's part an "inability to take seriously persons who saw no flaws in materialism." But it is not that Bowne finds such persons simply unintelligent. He thinks that "[B]elief can be a ground for praise, and unbelief for condemnation" *in that*

[O]ur beliefs represent not our conclusions, but Us. They reveal the drift of our sympathies and the tendencies of our nature. They also reveal the quality of our soul and the grade of our development. To confess satisfaction with a mechanical, or immoral, or godless universe is only an act of self-revelation. The greatness of our demands measures the greatness of our nature. Only smallest souls can live without high faith and lofty hopes.<sup>78</sup>

Bowne's remark to Rudolf Eucken about Professor Haeckel is much like a comment which Jürgen Habermas is supposed to have made about Heidegger — that it might be understandable that Heidegger was a Nazi prior to the Second World War, but that it is unforgivable that he remained loyal to the National Socialist party even in later years when the horrors of Nazism were well-known. As Bowne makes clear enough in the letter to Eucken, he finds fault with Haeckel because — in Bowne's view — materialism and atheism have grown philosophically bankrupt, and so Haeckel must remain atheist and materialist only out of his own "disposition," and not for lack of a good philosophy to displace his bad one.

Bowne fought long and hard, especially in his early years, to craft a good philosophy that could displace the bad ones that had ensnared so many members of his society. Typically, even early in his career, it was far less from mere defensiveness than for trying to free those held captive by bad philosophies that Bowne used arguments and cutting sarcasm “like bludgeons, beating all those who disagreed into submission with blows of relentless logic” and satire.<sup>80</sup> It is because Bowne believed that “Philosophy has done important negative work in clearing the field of a swarm of crude dogmatisms that hinder faith ...” that he could also write: “The argument is no longer syllogistic but biologic and pragmatic.”<sup>81</sup> And quite possibly, it is because he believed that he and other philosophers had proven successful in doing that negative work that he could relax into a gentler and more pious literary style in his later writings and address concerns which are more overtly religious.

In just as large a part, though, his earlier work is in the service of religion, if less overtly so. And here emerges his answer to the question of how faith and reason relate to each other. In making faith both intellectually possible and accountable, reason can advance morality, since authentic faith fosters moral action, and since only right belief poses no threat of muffling the voice of conscience.<sup>82</sup> And in nurturing the growth of morality, reason serves religion, since righteousness — Bowne holds — is the “essence of religion.” On one occasion, in spelling out his claim about religion’s essence, he contends: “Whatever our theological faith, whatever our religious practices, and whatever our religious pedagogics, their sole use and value consist in helping us to lives of love and righteousness before God and man. This is that for which they exist and that which gives them meaning and justification.”<sup>83</sup> Of course, since that statement comes from a popular sermon published posthumously in a collection which his wife finished putting together, it might carry less weight.<sup>84</sup> Consider, then, that Rudolf Eucken — a friend of Bowne and a distinguished philosopher in his own right — notes that one of “three leading points which mark the chief directions of [Bowne’s] thought” is that “[T]he kernel of religion is ethical, and religion is the lodestar of ethics, with which it is inseparably connected.”<sup>85</sup> Further, there are essays that Bowne saw published which stand in testament to Eucken’s claim. Even while still a student, Bowne writes: “The end of the law is love. The purpose for which the whole machinery of religion exists is to elevate those natural sanctities which God has planted in the human heart into controlling and abiding principles. Not to make us partakers of an alien holiness, but to create within us a pure heart and a clean one is the aim of the Gospel.”<sup>86</sup> He even reflects in that same essay: “If faith and morals are really in conflict, humanity can better dispense with the former than with the latter.”<sup>87</sup> In religion, as in all of life, achieving moral ends remains the primary concern.

That concern, I maintain, grounds Bowne’s whole philosophy, accounting for the coexistence of the rationalist and pragmatic elements in his approach. No doubt, there is some tension between these elements. When doing metaphysics,

Bowne tends to seek what he calls formal truth, testing propositions mainly by such standards as the law of non-contradiction. Elsewhere, he focuses more explicitly on what he terms concrete truth, embracing or rejecting beliefs chiefly on the basis of whether they fulfill a range of practical and subjective needs and interests. As Ramsdell aptly points out, if Bowne used these two modes of thinking independently of each other, his philosophy as a whole would be fundamentally incoherent. Yet the two modes fit into Bowne's overarching philosophical approach — thereby cohering with each other — and though Ramsdell overlooks Bowne's meta-approach, he performs a vital service in prompting others to see it. Bowne's stress on the supremacy of conscience unifies his more speculative and more practical modes of thinking. Within his vision, conscience provides vague, general principles by which to live. Reason enters into dialogue with conscience, clarifying its aims and principles, crafting plans for acting on them in specific ways, discerning the potential consequences of the actions planned, and checking back with conscience to test the results. Reason also functions as a tool with which to answer the genuine human need to seek formal truth in speculation. But the activity of speculation and the conclusions that come from it can easily weaken one's capacity to hear what conscience urges. Reason therefore prescribes a metaphysics that serves as a kind of philosophical therapy, restoring that capacity by bringing order to the bedlam that emanates from speculation. A metaphysical system is therapeutic insofar as it both passes the test of formal truth — thus satisfying the requirements of the speculative interest — and accords with practical needs and interests and with what conscience requires, thereby fulfilling the whole person and meeting the standards of concrete truth.

In the end, Bowne leaves his reader mainly to heed the voice of conscience, spend time in serious thought — drawing out tacit aims and logical consequences — and then make the most informed decision that conscience calls for. He offers no guaranteed method for discerning what is right or wrong, good or bad, correct or incorrect. The voice of conscience can be faint, the path of logic can be dim, and even the role of reason itself can remain something of a mystery. Regarding the degree of mystery that remains in his account of the role of reason, Bowne offers what I will make his final word here: "It is often easier to maintain an extreme than a moderate doctrine. The extreme is clear, while the moderate doctrine has an air of vagueness and compromise about it. This makes the latter obnoxious to all those who crave finality and sharp definition, forgetting that reality declines to be too sharply defined. In the present case ... it is not easy to draw any sharp line of distinction."<sup>88</sup> For now, at least, that conclusion seems to me the only one conscionable.<sup>89</sup>

## NOTES

1. John H. Lavelly, "Reflections on a Philosophical Heritage," in Paul Deats and Carol Robb (eds.), *The Boston Personalist Tradition in Philosophy, Social Ethics, and Theology* (Macon: Mercer University Press, 1986), pp. 257-60.
2. Edward T. Ramsdell's critiques are published in a series of three articles: "The Religious Pragmatism of Borden Parker Bowne (1847-1910)," *The Personalist*, 15, 4, (1934), pp. 305-14; "Pragmatism and Rationalism in the Philosophy of Borden Parker Bowne," *The Personalist*, 16, 1, (1935), pp. 23-35; and "The Sources of Bowne's Pragmatism," *The Personalist*, 16, 2, (1935), pp. 132-41. Ramsdell adapted all three articles from his doctoral dissertation, which is unpublished.
3. In this paper, I ignore the part of that charge in which Ramsdell claims that "Bowne did not establish the rational character of the interests and feelings of the mind as he described them." Ramsdell, "Pragmatism and Rationalism in Bowne," p. 31. In an article in which he mentions Ramsdell, Douglas R. Anderson responds to that criticism. See his "Bowne and Peirce on the Logic of Religious Belief," *The Personalist Forum*, 6, 2, (1990), pp. 107-22. Ramsdell's other critiques get no mention here since they are far less relevant.
4. Early major contributors to the debate include Ralph Tyler Flewelling and Francis John McConnell. See Flewelling's *Personalism and the Problems of Philosophy: An Appreciation of the Work of Borden Parker Bowne*, with an introductory chapter by Rudolf Eucken (New York, Cincinnati: The Methodist Book Concern, 1915), pp. 130-41, *passim*; and McConnell's *Borden Parker Bowne: His Life and His Philosophy* (New York, Cincinnati, Chicago: Abingdon, 1929), pp. 55, 149-62. William James added to the debate by declaring Bowne a pragmatist. For more recent contributions, see F. Thomas Trotter, "Borden Parker Bowne 1847-1910: An Estimate of His Contribution and Continuing Influence," *The Philosophical Forum*, 18, (1961), pp. 63-71; Anderson, "Bowne and Peirce"; Donald W. Dotterer, "James and Bowne on the Philosophy of Religious Experience," *The Personalist Forum*, 6, 2, (1990), pp. 137-40; Douglas R. Anderson, "The Legacy of Bowne's Empiricism," *The Personalist Forum*, 8, Supplement (1992), pp. 1-8; Anderson's "Bowne's Redefinition of 'Telos,'" *Idealistic Studies*, 18, 1, (1998), pp. 239-46; and Randall E. Auxier, "Time and Personality: Bowne on Time, Evolution, and History," *Journal of Speculative Philosophy*, 12, 3, (1998), pp. 194, 201 n.23.
5. Though he avoids the term 'pragmatic,' Herbert Schneider argues that there is a shift in Bowne around 1884 toward a philosophical approach more in line with William James'. Herbert W. Schneider, "Bowne's Radical Empiricism," introductory essay in Warren E. Steinkraus (ed.), *Representative Essays of Borden Parker Bowne* (New York: Meridian, 1981), p. xii. I believe and mean to indicate — particularly through the works of Bowne I quote in the following — that the "empirical" and "apriori" approaches "run concurrently" in Bowne, as Warren Steinkraus suggests in "A Century of Bowne's Theism," *Idealistic Studies*, 12, (1982), p. 63. Throughout this discussion, I often quote extensively from Bowne, sharing his own conviction that in certain cases, candor requires "the check, both of exact quotation and exact reference." B.P. Bowne, *Herbert Spencer: Being an Examination of the First Principles of his System* (New York: Nelson and Phillips, 1874), p. 5.
6. Ramsdell, "Religious Pragmatism of Bowne," p. 306. In responding to certain criticisms made of one of Bowne's chief successors, Edgar Sheffield Brightman, Robert N. Beck offers some further clarification of the term 'rationalism' in regard to

personalism. See his "Rationalism and Personalism," *The Philosophical Forum*, 15, (1957), pp. 56-60.

7. Bowne does so at various points in his writings. The first instance I have found is in Borden Parker Bowne, *Studies in Theism* (New York: Phillips and Hunt, 1879), pp. 62-63. He develops the point at some length in his "The Logic of Religious Belief," first published in *Methodist Review*, 66, 1, (1884), pp. 642-65, and reprinted in the *Representative Essays*, pp. 149-65. See also his *Theory of Thought and Knowledge* (New York, Cincinnati, Chicago: American Book Company, 1897), pp. 369ff.

8. See especially Bowne's *Studies in Theism*, pp. 76-77; *Metaphysics: A Study in First Principles* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1882), pp. 21, 22; *Theory of Thought*, p. 377; and *Personalism* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1905), pp. 23-24. Hereafter, all references to Bowne's *Metaphysics* are to that original 1882 version, rather than to the Revised Edition that first reached publication in 1898.

9. Bowne, "Logic of Religious Belief," p. 154.

10. Bowne, *Metaphysics*, p. 3.

11. See Bowne, *Metaphysics*, pp. 18-23. Granted, in laying out his method in the final pages of the introduction to *Metaphysics*, Bowne does vow not only to trust reason, but also to start with the tenets of common sense and to make them "the text for a critical exegesis." And he insists that his method "does no violence to the natural sense of probability" that pervades common sense. Bowne, *Metaphysics*, p. 19. Nonetheless, he pledges to reject any commonsensical beliefs which reason indicts.

12. See Bowne's *Metaphysics*, pp. 1, 8, 19, 21. See also "What is Truth?" *The Independent*, 36, 1, (18 September 1884), p. 1185; "Logic of Religious Belief," pp. 153-54, *passim*; "What is Rationalism?" *The Independent*, 40, 1, (26 January 1888), p. 99; "Theology and Reason," *Zion's Herald*, 66, 1, (19 December 1888), p. 401; and *Theory of Thought*, 17, pp. 293-95.

13. Bowne, *Personalism*, 20.

14. Bowne, *Metaphysics*, p. 77.

15. *Ibid.*, p. 40-41.

16. *Ibid.*, p. 18-23.

17. *Ibid.*, p. 1.

18. *Ibid.*, p. 3.

19. *Ibid.*, p. 3.

20. *Ibid.*, p. 19.

21. *Ibid.*, p. 21. The full sentence reads: "Philosophy is always ready to consider objections against the justness of its inferences from phenomena, but objections based only on the senses themselves it treats with the same disdain with which an astronomer would listen to an attack on the Copernican theory based on its opposition to appearances."

22. One of those works is *Theory of Thought*. See p. 293. The other two are an article and a book in which the article appeared in modified form. The article is "The Inerrancy of the Scriptures," *Zion's Herald*, 76, 1, (5 January 1898): p. 7, reprinted in the *Representative Essays*, pp. 180-83. The book is *The Christian Revelation* (Cincinnati: Curtis and Jennings, 1898), which was reprinted as part of *Studies in Christianity* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1909). In the following, I quote from the modified version of the latter work, with the assumption that Bowne might have considered it a more developed statement.

23. Bowne, *The Christian Revelation*, pp. 55-58. See *Studies in Theism*,



p. 78. Bowne echoes the theme of the last sentence in many other works. Beside *Theory of Thought*, p. 293, see, for example, "Logic of Religious Belief," p. 153.

24. Bowne, *Metaphysics*, 21.

25. *Ibid.*, p. vii, for his explicit reference to Bacon's "idols" of the den and the cave.

26. David Shay, "Philosophers Jokes [*sic*]," <<http://www.geocities.com/CapeCanaveral/4661/projoke70.htm>>, 2001.

27. Bowne, "Logic of Religious Belief," p. 152.

28. Bowne, *Theory of Thought*, p. 369.

29. Bowne, *Metaphysics*, p. vii.

30. Bowne, "Logic of Religious Belief," p. 154. See also Bowne, *Studies in Theism*, p. 315, where he writes that "Our fundamental practical beliefs are not speculative deductions from formal premises, but *formulations of life itself*, and they depend for evidence mainly upon the energy of life they formulate. ... In this realm, belief, or assent, involves an element of volition"; *Theory of Thought*, p. 371: "Man is not only or mainly intellect. He is also and chiefly a practical being; and his thought is determined less by speculative reflection than by the pressure of practical necessities. Belief is a means rather than an end. It is valuable for what it helps us to, and its grounds lie quite as much in its practical necessity as in its speculative foundation"; and *Personalism*, p. 310: "[T]he great body of our fundamental beliefs are not deductions but rather formulations of life. Our practical life has been the great source of belief and the constant test of its practical validity, that is, of its truth. Such beliefs are less a set of reasoned principles than a body of practical postulates and customs which were born in life, which express life, and in which the fundamental interests and tendencies of the mind find expression and recognition."

31. Borden Parker Bowne, *Studies in Theism* (New York: Phillips and Hunt, 1879), p. 69.

32. Beside Bowne's "The Logic of Religious Belief" and *Theory of Thought*, see, for example, his *Studies in Theism*, pp. 64-65, where he writes: "We conclude ... that it is no objection to a belief that its grounds do not admit of satisfactory formal statement, provided that it always works well," and p. 75, where he adds that "Those views ... of man and his relations which must develop and dignify human nature, and which work best in practice, are at least presumptively true. ... In addition, then, to beliefs deduced from formal data, there are other beliefs which are based on results"; *Theism*, (New York: American Book Company, 1902), p. 291, where he concludes: "Hence the existence of God is affirmed not on speculative or theoretical grounds, but because of the needs of the practical life. This has often been called the moral argument for the divine existence; a better name would be the practical argument"; "Present Status of the Argument for Life after Death," *North American Review*, 191, (1910), p. 103; "Gains for Religious Thought in the Last Generation," first published in *Hibbert Journal*, 8, (1909-1910), pp. 884-93, reprinted in *Living Age*, 266, (20 August 1910), pp. 451-56, and reprinted in the *Representative Essays*, p. 171, where he writes: "They are the principles by which men live, and without which they cannot live their best life. And the proof of such belief rests entirely on the energy of the life they express, and on their power to further that life in practice. They meet out mental needs and they work well in life. This is the pragmatic test of truth, and for concrete truth there is no deeper or surer test than this"; and *Kant and Spencer* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1912), p. 209, where he proclaims: "Thought has become pragmatic, especially in ethical and religious fields, and we are very little concerned at speculative inadequacy, provided a doctrine works well in practice and

enriches and furthers life.”

33. Bowne, *Theory of Thought*, pp. 374-75.

34. Bowne attributes the term to Matthew Arnold in *Theory of Thought*, p. 371. See Bowne, “Logic of Religious Belief,” especially p. 152, where he refers to “the speculative ideal” and gives much the same analysis of it as he does in *Theory of Thought and Knowledge* and other works.

35. Bowne, *Theory of Thought*, 373.

36. *Ibid.*, p. 374.

37. *Ibid.*, p. 371.

38. Bowne, *Metaphysics*, p. 17.

39. *Ibid.*, p. 8, (emphasis mine).

40. Bowne, “Logic of Religious Belief,” p. 162, (emphasis mine).

41. Borden Parker Bowne, “The Speculative Significance of Freedom,” first published in *Methodist Review*, 77 (September 1885), pp. 681-97, and reprinted in the *Representative Essays*, p. 25. The speculative significance of freedom is a key theme in his *Metaphysics*, as he himself points out. Bowne, *Metaphysics*, p. vii. No doubt, there are certain ways in which the approach Bowne takes in his more metaphysical works does not fit his description of the method of rigor and vigor. For example, in *Theory of Thought*, p. 375, he notes that one dictum of the method of rigor and vigor is “[D]oubt everything that can be doubted”; and in his *Metaphysics*, for example, he takes pains to distance himself from such skepticism. See especially *Metaphysics*, pp. 8-9, 15, 19-20.

42. Ramsdell, “Pragmatism and Rationalism in Bowne,” pp. 23-24.

43. Bowne, “Logic of Religious Belief,” pp. 152-58. See all of that essay. See also his *Studies in Theism*, pp. 61-107, especially pp. 65-66, where he writes that “The whole mental life ... springs out of feeling. It is extremely doubtful if a purely perceptive being, without any subjective interests, could attain to rationality, even if its physical existence were secured. Indeed, it is demonstrable that our sentiments outline and control all mental developments”; *Metaphysics*, p. 16, where he admits that “Probably all our beliefs are, to some extent, products”; “Concerning the ‘Christian Consciousness,’” *The Independent*, 37, (January 1885), p. 35, where Bowne writes that “The fundamental outlines of human belief are determined by various circumstances, chief of which are the essential interests of the mind. Mental activity runs in lines determined by our fundamental interests, and all our theories are adjusted to them”; and *Philosophy of Theism*, (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1887), p. 19, where he reminds the reader that “The mind is not a disinterested logic-machine, but a living organism, with manifold interests and tendencies. These outline its development, and furnish the driving power.” Often, in the portions of his works in which he addresses the issue, Bowne makes that point repeatedly. For example, see *Theory of Thought*, pp. 35, 368-69, 370-71, 373, 374, 376, 386-89; and “Gains for Religious Thought.”

44. *Ibid.*, p. 162. Regarding such postulates, Bowne asks: “Do they prove anything? The answer must be, that primarily they are not reasons for believing, but tendencies to believe. As such they prove nothing. They become reasons only as we assume some theory of their origin.” In the sentences that immediately follow therein, Bowne unveils the ultimate ground of the theistic and personalistic claims that are fundamental to his philosophy: “If we may assume a harmony between our nature and the nature of things, or if we assume a process of evolution such that our nature must develop into harmony with reality, or if we assume that God will take care of our faculties and their essential veracity, then these subjective interests become reasons for believing. It is plain,

however, that these assumptions themselves depend on the fact to be established, the trustworthiness of our nature, and cannot, therefore, be both premise and conclusion. Our nature must finally be taken on trust." See also, for example, Bowne's "Concerning the 'Christian Consciousness,'" p. 35, where he asserts that "Primarily, all of these assumptions are but the projection upon the universe of the demands and interests of our total nature"; *Philosophy of Theism*, pp. 13-14, and iii, where he admits that "There is an element of faith and volition latent in all our theorizing. Where we cannot prove, we believe. Where we cannot demonstrate, we choose sides"; "Faith in Our Immortality," *The Independent*, 48, (1896), p. 439, where he acknowledges, regarding such postulates, that "[N]o doubt can be cast upon them without discrediting the whole system of knowledge"; *Theory of Thought*, p. 377; and the quotation from Bowne's *Theism* which appears in note (32) above. A 1955 issue of *The Personalist* contains a debate between Paul Helsel and Warren Steinkraus over whether Bowne's metaphysics derives from a theological postulate. See Paul R. Helsel, "Borden Parker Bowne and F.R. Tennant," pp. 47-58; Warren E. Steinkraus, "Professor Helsel and Bowne," pp. 281-85, and Paul R. Helsel, "A Reply to Professor Steinkraus' 'Professor Helsel and Bowne,'" pp. 286-88, all in *The Personalist*, 36, (1955).

45. Bowne, "Logic of Religious Belief," p. 156. See *Theism*, p. 18.

46. Borden Parker Bowne, "Spencer's Nescience," *The Independent*, 56 (1904), p. 67. See Bowne, *Theory of Thought*, p. 293; and a stronger restatement in Bowne, *The Christian Revelation*, p. 69-72. See also p. 62 of the latter work.

47. Bowne, *Studies in Theism*, p. 74; *Philosophy of Theism*, p. 14; *Theory of Thought*, p. 382.

48. Bowne, "Logic of Religious Belief," pp. 162-63. Throughout other works, such as *The Christian Revelation*, Bowne echoes that point.

49. Borden Parker Bowne, "Moral Intuition vs. Utilitarianism," first published in *New Englander*, 32 (April 1873), pp. 217-42, and reprinted in the *Representative Essays*, p. 69. See p. 78. As Douglas Anderson points out, though Bowne authored this line early in his career, the claim regarding moral intuition fits with his work as a whole. Anderson, "Legacy of Bowne's Empiricism," p. 3.

50. Borden Parker Bowne, "Moral Intuition vs. Utilitarianism," p. 74. Bowne does insist that "Not moral correctness, but vital fullness, is the deepest aim in life," meaning by 'vital fullness' such things as "the development of the great social forms, the educational facilities, the gathered knowledge, the industrial activities, the wise cooperation and organization, and the stored wealth without which humanity cannot progress." Bowne, "Morals and Life," *Methodist Review*, 91 (1909), pp. 708-22, reprinted in the *Representative Essays*, pp. 82-83. But his way of reaching that conclusion indicates the supremacy of conscience in his view; for in giving no argument in support of his conclusion, he apparently discerns the deepest aim in life mainly through his own moral intuition.

51. Bowne, "Morals and Life," p. 82.

52. *Ibid.*, p. 85. See *Metaphysics*, p. 18, where Bowne points out: "Ethics deals with duty, and the question of whether there be any duty can be answered only by an appeal to the reason that is within us."

53. See Bowne, *Studies in Theism*, p. 69; "Logic of Religious Belief," p. 163; and *Personalism*, p. 9.

54. Bowne, "Logic of Religious Belief," p. 163. For an almost exact parallel, see Bowne's *Theory of Thought*, pp. 383ff.

55. Bowne, "Moral Intuition vs. Utilitarianism," p. 76. On p. 78, he concludes: "The sum of our arguments is this: Conscience judges actors; reason judges actions. Conscience selects the motive, reason selects the act that will best express that motive. Conscience gives the principles of action; reason applies it." Once while fielding questions after one of his public lectures, Bowne was asked to define conscience. In his reply, he said: "If you want to know what is the ultimate fact of conscience, I should say it was this: A perception of higher and lower in the principles of action, and in no way a perception of how those rules shall be applied. I believe that codes of life are purely manufactured. Conscience would give us this law of love, say, but how that shall be applied is purely a matter of experience, a thing which we have to grow into; and the world has not grown into very much of it yet. Suppose a person is sick. Conscience says to you, 'You must aid him.' You feel that you must. There is obligation upon you to aid him. But conscience does not tell you how to aid him. You might go to a drug store and get the first medicine you come to, and go back and give it to him, and kill him. To know how to realize your good purpose you must have experience and common sense." Quoted in Warren E. Steinkraus, "Philosophical Conversations at a Summer Colony in the 1870's," *Journal of the History of Philosophy*, 12, (1974), p. 343.

56. See especially Bowne's "Morals and Life."

57. *Ibid.*, p. 83.

58. Bowne, *Theory of Thought*, 35.

59. Bowne, *Metaphysics*, 9.

60. Bowne, *Personalism*, 6.

61. *Ibid.*, p. 8.

62. Bowne, *Metaphysics*, p. 3. Note also the title of Bowne's article "The Mind Cure," *The Independent*, 38, (15 July 1886), pp. 875-76.

63. Here I am particularly indebted to Dr. Thomas O. Buford, as I am throughout this paper.

64. See Bowne, *Metaphysics*, p. 23, where he writes that "Being ... is something to be recognized and admitted, rather than deduced or comprehended."

65. For arguments that differ significantly from mine on this point, see especially Anderson, "Legacy of Bowne's Empiricism"; and Richard A. Beauchamp, "Ethics and Metaethics in Bowne's Philosophy," pp. 77-78, and James McLachlan, "The Idealist Critique of Idealism: Bowne's Theistic Personalism and Howison's City of God," pp. 89-106, both in *The Personalist Forum*, 13, 1, (1997). Beauchamp believes that Bowne's metaphysics heavily influences his ethical philosophy, and McLachlan thinks that Bowne critiques the idea of ethics as first philosophy. What I argue here is far more in line with Ronnie L. Littlejohn's suggestion that perhaps "Bowne's theory of persons is underwritten by moral not metaphysical considerations. ..." Littlejohn makes that comment in "A Response to Daniel Holbrook's 'Descartes on Persons' and Doug Anderson's 'The Legacy of Bowne's Empiricism,'" *The Personalist Forum*, 8, 1, (1992), p. 20, pointing out: "This means that Anderson may have Bowne's philosophy upside down. In this paper, Anderson seems to suggest that Bowne starts with a metaphysical theory of interaction, and some desire to find a role for the body in the definition of person, and then moves to his understanding of persons as makers of life." Here is a point on which Ramsdell is incisively correct, writing: "It is inconceivable [for Bowne] that anything harmful to personality can be ultimately true. Personalism ... was not simply the outcome of Bowne's philosophical activity; it was the starting-point. He allowed it to determine method." Ramsdell, "Pragmatism and Rationalism in Bowne," p. 28. To see Ramsdell's

insight here, one need only note such spots in Bowne's work as the following: "Logic of Religious Belief," p. 153, where he writes approvingly that "[M]an did not begin by inquiring into the implications of ethical existence and by settling all the metaphysical difficulties involved therein, but he begin [*sic*] by being ethical, and by implicitly assuming all which that implies. He did not prove that he had a right to be ethical, but he found himself such"; *The Christian Revelation*, pp. 71-72, where he warns that "A standard [of truth and authority] which left no room for choice, for love and loyalty, would defeat the moral ends of life"; and *Personalism*, p. 25, where he himself points out, referring to his own system: "This personal beginning of all speculation should be emphasized. . . ."

66. For example, see Bowne, *Theory of Thought*, p. 381, where he declares: "The fearful logical inferences which might be drawn in such a case would have significance only on the assumption that logic still has jurisdiction, and this assumption is the very thing denied"; and *Theism*, p. 23, where he insists: "We do not ignore the facts which make against the [religious] view; but we set them aside as things to be explained, yet which must not in any way be allowed to weaken our faith."

67. Bowne, *Metaphysics*, p. 12.

68. *Ibid.*, p. v.

69. Bowne, "Logic of Religious Belief," p. 164.

70. Bowne, "Religion and Theology," *The Independent*, 38 (14 October 1886), p. 1296, and reprinted in the *Representative Essays*, pp. 177-78. It seems especially appropriate to quote from that essay given Thomas Trotter's claim that in it, Bowne describes his own "shift from the technical language of philosophy to the more direct language of piety. . . ." F. Thomas Trotter, "Boston Personalism's Contributions to Faith and Learning," in Deats and Robb (eds.), p. 17.

71. Bowne, *Personalism*, p. viii.

72. *Ibid.*, p. 9. It is clear enough that in using the word 'philosophy' here, Bowne refers to metaphysics, along with other modes of philosophy. On p. 4, Bowne points out that a philosophy "is a man's way of looking at things. The common-sense man finds a lot of bodies about him in space and a series of changes going on in time, and in these he rests final. That is his philosophy. The materialist conceives that the world of experience can be explained by molecules and atoms, endowed with forces of attraction and repulsion which work forever through space and time. That is his philosophy. The agnostic holds that we can know nothing beyond phenomena. The causal power behind is forever hidden. That is his philosophy. The theist holds that the order of things can be explained only by an intelligent cause back of all appearance and manifestation. That is his philosophy." Obviously, all of the examples of particular philosophies involve metaphysics.

73. The context of the former three lines supports my claim here about the primacy of the will for Bowne. For example, in "Logic of Religious Belief," p. 164, where Bowne warns: "Nor can faith be recovered by arguing; this will often rather deepen the unbelief," he introduces the claim in the paragraph above with the following: "In a pessimistic state of mind, where the springs of life are low, the scientist despairs and becomes agnostic. In a similar state of mind, the moralist cries out, 'Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die.' The Christian, after a period of full assurance, falls into doubt even of the existence of God. . . . The trouble is with the inner spring of faith."

74. The letter, dated 17 August 1908, is reprinted in full in McConnell, pp. 276-78; and the *Representative Essays*, pp. 189-90.

75. The letter is reprinted in Borden Parker Bowne, "Borden Parker Bowne's Letters to William Torrey Harris," edited with comments by Daniel S. Robinson,

*The Philosophical Forum*, 13, (1955), pp. 94-95.

76. That letter is reprinted in Warren E. Steinkraus, "The Eucken-Bowne Friendship," *The Personalist*, 51, (1970), p. 403.

77. Steinkraus, "Eucken-Bowne," p. 402. I share Steinkraus' view that "The informal letters of great philosophers often provide valuable clues not only to the development of their thought processes but also to their inner personalities" and can be invaluable "in detecting ... the backlying factors in a philosopher's thought and personal history." Warren E. Steinkraus, "Bowne's Correspondence," *Idealistic Studies*, 2, (1972), pp. 182-183.

78. Bowne, "Logic of Religious Belief," p. 164. Contrast the latter part of that statement with Bertrand Russell's claim: "There is something feeble and a little contemptible about a man who cannot face the perils of life without the help of comfortable myths." Quoted in James A. Haught, *2000 Years of Disbelief: Famous People with the Courage to Doubt* (Amherst: Prometheus Books, 1996), p. 235, who cites Russell's *Human Society in Ethics and Politics* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1955).

79. As Thomas Trotter notes, Bowne's calling "was making religion intellectually possible at a time when all the classical supports for religion seemed to be cracking." Trotter, "Boston Personalism's Contributions," p. 17. Similarly, Warren Steinkraus comments that "Bowne saw himself as a protagonist for the truth, as a 'fighter' for spiritual ends, as did William James." Steinkraus, "Eucken-Bowne," p. 402.

80. Quoted in Lavelly, p. 258, and attributed to Erazim V. Kohák, "The Futility of Argument: A Commentary on Warren Steinkraus's 'A Century of Bowne's Theism'" (presented at a meeting of the Personalistic Discussion Group, 28 December 1979), p. 1, paraphrasing Steinkraus. In another writing, Steinkraus aptly points out that Bowne's "literary style did not reveal [his] true personality. His most attractive qualities, we are told, were a quiet modesty and self-effacement." (Steinkraus makes that observation in his preface to the *Representative Essays*, p. vi. Bowne's congeniality and generosity in person is also portrayed in Kate M. Bowne, "An Intimate Portrait of Bowne," *The Personalist*, 2, (1921), pp. 5-15; McConnell; James T. Carlyon, "Bowne in the Classroom," *The Personalist*, 28, (1947), pp. 266-72; Mary Hinckley Dearing, "Reminiscences of Borden Parker Bowne," *The Philosophical Forum*, 15, (1957), pp. 51-55; and Bogumił Gacka, *American Personalism* (Lublin: Oficyna Wydawnicza "Czas," 1995), pp. 29-45. Gacka comments that none of Bowne's students "could ever feel that his criticism of the Darwinian movement, the vigor of his attack on the metaphysics of evolution came out of an inferiority complex. B.P. Bowne never went through a period of fear of the atheistic philosophy that marked the opening days of the evolutionary statement" (pp. 34-35.) Consider, in complement, that in a 26 December 1903 letter to James Mudge, for example, Bowne writes with cool-headed restraint about Reverend George Cooke, at a time when Cooke had just published a pamphlet denouncing Bowne and was about to bring formal charges of heresy against him, for which Bowne ultimately stood trial in the Methodist church. (See "Five Letters of Bowne to James Mudge," edited with comments by Warren E. Steinkraus, *The Personalist*, 46, (1965), pp. 344-45.) By contrast, as Edwin T. Mead noted, Bowne's satire was "never quite so sharp and hot as when he was dealing with the opponents of woman suffrage." (Quoted in Steinkraus' preface to the *Representative Essays*, v. Steinkraus refers to Mead's comment in the *Boston Evening Transcript* of 6 April 1910.)

81. Bowne, "Gains for Religious Thought," p. 171.

82. Bowne sees such faith as a direct product of either sentiment or moral

willing — not of logical inference. See Anderson, “Bowne and Peirce,” pp. 109-12, 114-16. Nonetheless, he maintains that the “religious ideal must always include the cognitive ... ideal” — which involves fulfilling the speculative interest — as a “barrier against superstition.” Bowne, “Logic of Religious Belief,” p. 164.

83. Borden Parker Bowne, “Righteousness the Essence of Religion,” in *The Essence of Religion* (Boston, New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1910), pp. 75-76. See also Bowne’s “Relation of Ethics to Theism: or Is There Morality Without God?” *Chautauqua Assembly Herald*, 3, (20 August 1878), pp. 3, 7.

84. Randall Auxier, for example, warns against attaching “too much philosophical significance” to Bowne’s popular sermons. Auxier, p. 197.

85. Rudolf Eucken, “The Work of Borden Parker Bowne,” M. Perrin (trans.), in Flewelling, p. 25.

86. Bowne, “Faith and Morals,” *The Independent*, 26, (14 May 1874), p. 3, reprinted in the *Representative Essays*, p. 175. Steinkraus mentions on p. 186n.1 that Bowne wrote the piece in 1874 while a student at the University of Halle in Germany.

87. Borden Parker Bowne, “Faith and Morals,” p. 174. Bowne often echoes those points in later essays, too — such as in “Logic of Religious Belief,” p. 175, where he exclaims that faith is meant “to supplement [the moralities], to aid their growth”; and in *The Christian Revelation*, p. 105, where he remarks again that “[T]he end of the law is love; that is, the purpose of the law is to beget love in the heart and life. ... [T]he fundamental aim is to reproduce Christ in the disciple.” Also in that latter work, as in others, he stresses the supremacy of conscience. For example, see pp. 88-89: “Mechanical interpretations of the atonement have often lent themselves to immoral conclusions, and nothing but a wholesome moral instinct has prevented it in every case”; and p. 92: “[I]n general, the progress in theology has consisted in adjusting *readings* to those fundamental principles of good sense and good morals to which revelation must conform, if it is to be of any value for us” (emphasis his).

88. Bowne, *Theory of Thought*, p. 371.

89. I wish to thank Dr. John Lachs for his invaluable help in the writing of this paper.