

---



---

*Idealism and the Elusiveness of a Peircean Label*

---



---

Sandra Rosenthal

The Commens Encyclopedia  
The Digital Encyclopedia of Peirce Studies  
New Edition

Edited by Mats Bergman and João Queiroz

**URL** <http://www.commens.org/encyclopedia/article/rosenthal-sandra-idealism-and-elusiveness-peircean-label>  
**Retrieved** 23.01.2025  
**ISSN** 2342-4257  
**License** Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike

**Abstract:**

To understand the significance of Peirce's self-proclaimed idealism within the context of his metaphysical system, it must be viewed not only in terms of the modifications he makes, but also—perhaps more so—in terms of the alternatives against which they are pitted, for frequently it is his understanding of the shortcomings of these other positions which leads him to find idealism so enticing. Indeed, Peirce's most clear-cut assertions of idealism arise from a rejection of two other positions which he falsely thinks to exhaust the possibilities, for the alternatives from which he begins are rooted in a tradition of substance and kinds of "stuff," while his search for an answer stems from an emerging framework of process and function. While Peirce is not an idealist, his flirtation with idealism was a vital force in shaping the character of his philosophy as it moved on to novel terrain. Yet, if he is seen as wedded too closely to idealism, this novel terrain is lost from view. Thus, his self-proclaimed idealism yields both a tool for bringing to light important distinctions and an obstacle which stands in the way of understanding his ultimate commitment to a novel pragmatic synthesis which undercuts the numerous and often contradictory traditional labels by which he attempts to articulate his emerging position.

**Keywords:** Realism, Materialism, Pragmatism, Dualism, Nominalism, Categories

Peirce's self-proclaimed idealism yields both a tool for bringing to light important distinctions and an obstacle which stands in the way of understanding his ultimate commitment to a novel pragmatic synthesis which undercuts the numerous and often contradictory traditional labels by which he attempts to articulate his emerging position. Thus, an examination of his self-proclaimed idealism can point toward the systematic significance of Peirce's not being the idealist he claims to be. Such an endeavor requires as well an exploration of his flirtation with other positions, for frequently it is his understanding of the shortcomings of these other positions which leads him to find idealism so enticing. □□

Thus, to understand the significance of Peirce's self-proclaimed idealism within the context of his metaphysical system, the ensuing exploration will view it not only in terms of the modifications he makes, but also—perhaps more so—in terms of the alternatives against which they are pitted. Peirce's most clear-cut assertions of idealism arise from a rejection of two other positions which he falsely thinks to exhaust the possibilities. Indeed, the alternatives from which he begins are rooted in a tradition of substance and kinds of "stuff," while his search for an answer stems from an emerging framework of

process and function. □□

Peirce regards materialism, idealism, and neutralism as three conflicting theories, each of which gives a definite answer to the question of the nature of the universe. He attempts to solve this problem by determining what kind of law governs the universe, physical law or the law of the mind. That Peirce has expressed the alternatives in terms of laws rather than either ultimate substances or types of "stuffs" may not at first seem a significant move, for the manner of operation of "mind stuff" would surely be different from the manner of operation of "material stuff." However, as Peirce clearly indicates the nature of the problem for himself, "The distinction between psychical and physical phenomena is the distinction between final and efficient causation" (CP 7.336). In short, Peirce is not asking the type of question provided by a substance metaphysics; he is asking a question concerning the behavior of the universe, and mind and matter are names of differing types of functions or processes operative in the universe. Peirce's problematic here can be seen to follow from his pragmatic orientation which asserts that what a thing is, is determined by its activities or behavior, not by any underlying substance which determines or causes the behavior.□□

What, then, does Peirce intend by this distinction between final and efficient causation? He holds that final causation is "that mode of bringing facts about according to which a general description of result is made to come about, quite irrespective of any compulsion for it to come about in this or that particular way." It does not determine any particular way it will be brought about, "but only that the result shall have a certain general character (CP 1.211). One should not conclude from this that Peirce means by a final cause the same things as a purpose, for as he states almost immediately before the above passage, "A purpose is merely that form of final cause which is most familiar to our experience." □□

In contrast to final causation, efficient causation "is a compulsion determined by the particular condition of things, and is a compulsion acting to make that situation begin to change in a perfectly determinate way; and what the general character of the result may be in no way concerns the efficient causation." Efficient causation is "stupid" (CP 1.212); it is not Thirdness but Secondness.□□With this initial clarification of the distinction between the law of mind and the law of matter, it is now time to turn to Peirce's analysis of the available choices. He observes that there is a question as to whether 1) psychical laws and physical laws are independent, "a doctrine often called monism but which I would name neutralism"; physical law is primordial and psychical law is derivative, the position of materialism; or 3) psychical law is primordial, and

physical law is derivative, the position of idealism (CP 6.24).

Neutralism is rejected by Peirce because it assumes the existence of more independent elements than are necessary. Monism' and neutralism' both seem odd choices of terminology, for both Peirce's definition and rejection of the position indicate that what is involved is dualism, the irreducibility to two distinct "entities," mind and matter. One of his key objections to dualism as presented elsewhere, however, gives an insight into why he refers to it as monism or neutralism and to the direction in which he is headed (CP 7.570). He there finds dualism as "monism" inadequate in that by completely separating reality into two types or chunks of being, it leaves each type operating according to a single law: the law of matter or the law of mind. Thus it would seem that the separation of final and efficient causation as modes of behavior cannot be given the degree of separation at times indicated by Peirce's writings, and the division of mental and physical simply in terms of final and efficient causation is inadequate in understanding Peirce's position. The "neutralism" of dualism can be seen to lie in the fact that primacy is given neither to the law of matter nor the law of mind. In rejecting the neutralism of a dualistic position Peirce wants to give primacy to one law, and that law, of course, will be in some yet to be determined sense, the "law of the mind."□□

Peirce's rejection of materialism gives further insight into the nature of his self-proclaimed idealism. He argues against materialism that "we know that when we try to verify any law of nature by experiment, we always find discrepancies between the observations and the theory. These we rightly refer to errors of observations, but why may there not be similar aberrations due to the imperfect obedience of the facts to the law? (CP 1.402) Peirce further holds that materialism "blocks the road to inquiry," (CP 6.64) since "Law is par excellence the thing that wants a reason" (CP 6.12). And again, materialism cannot account for the many processes which are characterized by growth and increasing complexity, for the laws of mechanics are applicable only to processes that are reversible. Finally, in an appeal to common sense experience, Peirce notes that "It is sufficient to go out into the air and open one's eyes to see that the world is not governed altogether by mechanism... When we gaze upon the multifariousness of nature we are looking straight into the face of living spontaneity" (CP 6.553-6.554).

In light of the above analysis, three points can be noted, each of which will become relevant shortly. The first concerns the interrelation of the categories. According to Peirce, materialism, by omitting final causation, ignores Thirdness and, in so doing, omits spontaneity or, as he calls it in his cosmology, objective chance, which belongs to the category of Firstness. The second point concerns the role of common sense

experience in understanding the nature of the metaphysically real. Common sense experience is not to be ruled out as mere appearance in an attempt to grasp some ultimate metaphysical explanatory principle, but rather it is the key to understanding the nature of reality. Third, Peirce's cosmological account is highly significant for understanding the interrelation of the categories as ontological, for it is his cosmology which in fact gives the "reason" for law.

After rejecting neutralism and materialism, Peirce accepts the only remaining alternative, idealism. What does this mean for Peirce at this point? It means that experience cannot be accounted for solely by mechanistic laws which leave no place for chance, and that there is something more to nature than brute stupid action and reaction. It means that laws must be accounted for in terms of the process of cosmic evolution, and that the richness of lived experience must find its place within the metaphysically real. It means that no part of the universe in its real concreteness is totally characterized either by the law of mind or the law of matter, and that mind cannot be completely separated out from the activities of nature as a distinct mode of being, nor can the activities of nature be conflated to the activities of mind.□□

A reflection on those characteristics which Peirce is concerned to attribute to the universe seems to indicate that he is headed toward a temporalistic, pluralistic "idealism" without a block universe. It is an "idealism" which holds the law of mind to be in some yet undetermined sense more fundamental than the law of matter, but which nonetheless views humans and their higher faculties as quite unessential to the processes of the universe. In short, Peirce here seems heading toward a naturalism which reintegrates humans and nature, not by reducing the human as does the materialist, nor by assimilating nature to mind, as does the idealist, but by presenting an enriched nature within which are to be found the operations of those processes with which human activity is continuous.□□

Peirce, in his search for a metaphysical label, is here caught in what might be called the "Cartesian trap." If not dualism, then either all becomes mind or all becomes matter in the mechanistic sense of the nature or external world that remains when one cuts off the mind half of the Cartesian offering. What Peirce does not recognize in his survey of the traditional alternatives is that he has gone the path of those truly great philosophers who do not just take different alternatives among old choices but rather provide frameworks which reject the logic of the original questioning in terms of which both the problem and all its possible alternatives arise.□□

Peirce's difficulty in stating his position in any terms that will not be misunderstood can

be seen from a statement which is probably aimed at dualism. He notes that "Anti-synechistic thinkers wind themselves up in a fictitious snarl by falsifying the phenomena in representing consciousness to be, as it were, a skin, a separate tissue, overlying an unconscious region of the occult nature, mind, soul, or physiological basis. It appears to me that in the present state of our knowledge a sound methodetic prescribes that, in adhesion to the appearances, the difference is only relative and the demarcation not precise" (CP 5.440). One commentator, pouncing upon this remark, emphasizes Peirce's "behaviorism" (Holmes, 1964: 364). Peirce here is caught in a dilemma, for in attempting to avoid dualism, his terminology is caught between the horns of materialism and behaviorism on the one hand and idealism on the other.

What he does not clearly see, and does not have adequate language to express, is that he has not asked the kind of question for which these alternatives can provide a satisfactory answer. He has asked a question concerning the behavior of the universe, and, believing that final causation is fundamental, he finds the only available conclusion to be that "The one intelligible theory of the universe is that of objective idealism, that matter is effete mind, inveterate habits becoming physical laws" (CP 6.25). His understanding of the temporal process which is constitutive of the behavior of the universe likewise leads him to his idealistic claims, for "one of the most marked features about the law of mind is that it makes time to have a definite direction of flow from past to future", as opposed to the law of physical force (CP 6.127). Thus, investigation "must begin by asking what the flow of time consists in" (CP 6.128).

However, no sooner does Peirce embrace idealism as the lesser of the available evils than he attempts to qualify his acceptance, for "The truth is that pragmatism is closely allied to the Hegelian absolute idealism, from which, however, it is sundered by its vigorous denial that the third category . . . suffices to make the world, or is even so much as self-sufficient (CP 5.436). Peirce thus embraces objective idealism with reservations which lead to his assertion that his position is that of "conditional idealism" (CP 5.494). Idealists, according to Peirce, have been correct in embracing the doctrine of final causation, but in understanding its nature have endowed it with force or secondness which leaves no room for chance. It is significant to note that Peirce here does something seldom found in his writings. He here explicitly uses pragmatism, or pragmatism, not as a theory of meaning, not as a theory of truth, not as a methodological principle, but as a metaphysical position, as a positive source for a distinct explanation of and orientation toward the nature of metaphysical reality. □□

It can be seen from the above that chance, or Firstness, requires not only Thirdness but

also Secondness. Again, this clue to the interrelation of the categories must be put aside till later, for it is helpful here to turn to Peirce's self-proclaimed Scholastic Realism. And, in turning to this it must be stressed that Peirce's acceptance of some variation of Scholastic Realism, which asserts the reality of universals in some sense, is not per se opposed to idealism, but rather is an attack on nominalism. However, the way in which he develops his so-called Scholastic Realism is crucial in understanding his ultimate rejection of idealism.□□

In the above discussion the issue has been stated in terms of materialism, dualism, and idealism. It is within the context of these alternatives that Peirce was driven to an idealism modified by the insertion of the category of Secondness—and, indirectly, Firstness as well. This, however, leads directly to his realism, for though efficient causation belongs to the category of Secondness, the final causation indicated by Peirce's idealism belongs to the category of Thirdness, and it is with the reality of Thirdness that Peirce's realism is concerned. Furthermore, it will be seen that though Peirce's realism is concerned with the reality of Thirdness, the nature of Thirdness requires the reality of Secondness—and indirectly, Firstness as well.□□

Peirce states the issue of realism in an apparently straightforward way: "Whether laws and general types are figments of the mind or are real" (CP 1.16). Here it should be noted that the realism under discussion is that type of realism which is contrasted with nominalism. It is not the realism that lies in opposition to idealism. As seen in the above examination of Peirce's supposed idealism, it does not deny the facticity or brute "thereness" of an on-going, open ended, universe. It denies only the dualistic or mechanistic interpretation of the universe that is "there." However, the complexity of his realism begins to emerge in his assertion that "all modern philosophy has been nominalistic" (CP 1.19). This includes not only Locke, Berkeley, and Hume, but Leibniz and Hegel as well. Since Peirce criticized Hegelian idealism because it emphasized Thirdness, or "laws and general types," to the exclusiveness of Secondness, Peirce's realism cannot be understood merely by saying that Thirdness is real. It would seem at this point that realism in Peirce's view in some way involves Secondness. Yet, when we turn to Peirce's own often asserted affinity with the scholastic realism of Duns Scotus, it seems that it is the stance concerning the interrelationship of Secondness and Thirdness to which he objects. As he observes, "Even Duns Scotus is too nominalistic when he says that universals are contracted to the mode of individuality in singulars, meaning as he does, by singulars, ordinary existing things" (CP 8.208). □

The intimate interrelation of Secondness and Thirdness for Peirce is indicated to some

extent in his claim that although final causality cannot even be imagined without efficient causality, yet their modes of action are "polar contraries". "An efficient cause, detached from a final cause in the form of a law would not even possess efficiency; it might exert itself, and something might follow post hoc, but not propter hoc; for propter implies potential regularity. Now without law there is no regularity; and without the influence of ideas there is no potentiality" (CP 1.213).

Again, Peirce writes that the category of Thirdness, "can have no concrete being without action, as a separate object on which to work its government" (CP 5.436). Thus, efficient causation, in the sense of actualization of a possibility, requires the rational or "ideal causality" (CP 1.212) of Thirdness to provide the potentialities, while Thirdness, apart from its concretion in Secondness is not real. This leads one critic to say that there is a confusion in Peirce's position because of the "ambivalent role of Secondness. On the one hand, Secondness is the antigeneral, the brute, blind, and unintelligible-characterizations that are all negative or privative. On the other hand, Secondness is the actual without which laws and types cannot be real" (Bowler, 1963: 115). And, as he, this confusion in Secondness leads indirectly to the problem of concretion, for Thirdness is not real without Secondness, yet Peirce holds that "secondness does not contain any thirdness at all. We have seen the same answer in another form: 'the would-be is never contracted to the is'" (Bowler, 1963: 141). Thus, Secondness is bare or privative, Secondness does not contain any Thirdness, yet Thirdness is not real without Secondness.□□

He concludes that Peirce has avoided the Scotistic theory that the real general is contracted in the individual by robbing existence of its richness and by replacing the mysterious notion of contraction with an equally mysterious notion of concretion through which the general becomes concrete in a world of actuality. What accounts for this problem? He suggests that where Peirce's attack on the nominalist takes place within the context of a scholastic realism, his positive account of the status of laws and their relation to individuals occurs in the context of idealism, and concludes that a thoroughgoing study of Peirce's idealism might shed some light on what he would say concerning the problems of concretion and of the barrenness of existence (Bowler, 1963: 142-3). Thus, we are taken full circle back to the puzzles of Peirce's idealism.□□

If the "concrete being" of Thirdness as dependent upon Secondness is approached in the light of the traditional problems of contraction or concretion or ingression of any sort, Peirce's position may well be untenable. However, since once again Peirce is trying to deal with his position in terms of traditional alternatives, this time realism or



nominalism, it may be that here again what underlies his difficulty in the search for an accurate label is a radical change in perspective such that the entire framework within which these traditional alternatives arise is rejected.□□

If Thirdness and Secondness are intimately interrelated, if Thirdness cannot be "imagined" without Secondness, yet Thirdness does not contract into Secondness, then another mode of interrelation is obviously called for. And, since it is Peirce's cosmological account which gives the "reason" for law, then Peirce's cosmology may well hold the key to the ontological relation between Thirdness and Secondness. As will be indicated below, Peirce's cosmological account, in which the random actions and reactions of the substratum of pure chance gradually tend to take on habits which in turn limit future interactions, indicates a relation not of contraction but rather of emergence. This relation of emergence throws light on the sense in which it can be said that actuality can carry only a limited portion of possibility at any time, that the possibility of Thirdness is real only as it is in some sense "concrete in" the actual and yet that Secondness does not "contain" any Thirdness at all.□□

Though Peirce's characterization of the "primordial state" tends to suggest a cosmic representation of the First category alone, this primordial state nonetheless contains the "germ of a generalizing tendency," for the "germ" lies in Peirce's First category in the form of the degenerate generality or degenerate continuity of Firstness as a qualitative continuum. Peirce holds that Firstness is a negative generality or negative continuity in that it does not limit the future as does law (CP 1.427). Firstness is also a pure possibility in relation to Secondness, for its being as possibility is not dependent upon its actualization (CP 1.531). From the indeterminate qualitative continuum—the "may-be" of Firstness as negative continuity or negative generality is also the "may-be" of Firstness as the qualitative aspect of reality (CP 1.536) which is logically prior to both Secondness and Thirdness, anything can occur in that any two parts can interact. These random reactions occur from the brute blind force of Secondness or efficient causation acting on the substratum of pure spontaneity. As Peirce states, "Firstness is essentially indifferent to continuity" (CP 6.205). Yet though Firstness is essentially indifferent to its continuity, when interaction of two parts of the continuum occurs, that which interacts is continuous and provides a positive possibility of future interactions by excluding certain possibilities in its very occurrence. As Peirce indicates:□□

Let the clean blackboard be a sort of diagram of the original vague potentiality ... I draw a chalk line on the board. This discontinuity is one of these brute acts by which alone the original vagueness could have made a step toward definiteness. There is a certain element of continuity in this line.

Where did this continuity come from? It is nothing but the original continuity of the blackboard which makes everything upon it continuous (CP 6.203).

Again, as Peirce notes, the discontinuity can be produced upon that blackboard only by the reaction between two continuous surfaces into which it is separated. Thus, what is a singularity or discreteness in the containing continuum is itself a positive generality in relation to the discrete cuts potentially "in" it. In brief, Secondness, or bare brute action and reaction is a distinct analytic element within the ongoing process or evolving qualitative continuum. However, there is no such thing as disembodied interaction, and actuality as it contextually occurs in the passing present is characterized by the brute hereness and nowness of the shock of interaction or efficient causation "acting upon" the substratum of pure chance or "negative continuity" in accordance with the limitations placed upon it by the positive possibilities of Thirdness.

Thus, though Peirce characterizes the individual as determinate in all respects, he notes, after delineating the category of Secondness in terms of the individual, that the absolute individual "cannot exist, properly speaking. For whatever lasts for any time, however short ... will undergo some change in its relations." (CP 3.93, note)<sup>1</sup> In short, Secondness must provide the tool for progressing from the may-be or spontaneity of Firstness to the would-be or potentiality of Thirdness. Here it may be objected that there is a sense in which the cuts do contain the continuum, for it was stated that the possibilities inherent in the continuum cut are partially dependent upon the possibilities inherent in the continuum from which it is cut. However, this latter relationship is not admissible as indicative of a relationship between Thirdness and Secondness, for it depends upon viewing the cut not in its aspect of discreteness or Secondness, but in its aspect of continuity or Thirdness. Thus Peirce can hold that final causality is operative in nature and that things tend toward a final cause. Present processes tend to realize a future that is inherent within them as present possibilities. As Peirce observes, "Final causation is that kind of causation whereby the whole calls out its parts" (CP 1.220). This whole is not some idealistic type of "ens necessarium" which "draws" the processes of nature, nor is it any "whole of nature" trying to realize itself, but rather the whole is any continuum of natural processes that "calls out" a determinate range of parts. The rationality of final causality is the rational force of continuity. To say that processes are governed by final causes is to say that potentialities are real, for final causes within nature are continuities that govern their possible cuts or actualities, but that no number of actualities can exhaust.

Thus, acts or Secondness can be characterized both as privative, brute, blind or

unintelligible, and as that which gives reality to laws and general types. Secondness, as distinct from Firstness or Thirdness, is a brute action and reaction. In this sense it is the acting compulsion of efficient causation. Secondness is a mode of behavior of the concrete qualitative continuum—the mode of behavior which is characterized by efficient causation. It is the bruteness of interaction of two parts of a qualitative process. Existence, then, is a mode of behavior of the general; it is the mode of behavior characterized by interaction. And, it is the interaction, not that which interacts, which is individual, brute, and blind. But, this brute, blind interaction of the general qualitative continuum is what turns negative possibility into positive possibility, mere “may-be” into “would be.” Thus, Secondness is that which makes possible the very reality of Thirdness.□□

It can be seen, then, why Peirce insists that Thirdness does not contract into Secondness; Thirdness is not the kind of “thing” that can be in Secondness. Indeed, if one insists on using spatial language, it is more accurate to say that Secondness is in Thirdness than that Thirdness is in Secondness, for a continuum may be said to contain its cuts, potential or actual, but the cuts do not contain the continuum. For Peirce, “A true continuum is something whose possibilities of determination no multitude of individuals can exhaust” (CP 6.170). Thus, Peirce can say that Secondness does not contain any Thirdness at all, for an “existing thing is simply a blind reacting thing”, though “existing things do not need supporting reasons; for they are reasons” (CP 4.36; 5.107 *Italics not in text*). Here can be found the radical significance of Peirce’s view that synechism and realism are intimately linked (CP 6.169ff). And here, also can be found the way in which the interaction of the categories of Secondness and Thirdness yields a position which escapes the Scotistic notion of contraction of a real common object without winding up in the idealist problem of concretion. □□

Moreover, it emphasizes the qualitative richness of nature, for the metaphysical category of Firstness represents the infinitely varied, concrete qualitative richness “felt” in experience, the substratum of pure chance within which random activities occur and give rise to emergent habit-takings. Thus Peirce stresses both the qualitative nature of Firstness and its nature as “free”, peculiar and idiosyncratic” (CP 6.236; 1.357). This dual role of Firstness can help clarify the meaning of Peirce’s claim, often viewed as supportive of his self-proclaimed idealism, that “Wherever chance-spontaneity is found, there in the same proportion feeling exists. In fact, chance is but the outward aspect of that which within itself is feeling” (CP 6.265). Indeed, Peirce speaks of Firstness in terms of qualities of feeling (CP 5.444) because, as he analogously states, “There is no

resemblance at all in feeling, since feeling is whatever it is, positively and regardless of anything else, while the resemblance of anything lies in the comparison of that thing with something else" (CP 1.310). A metaphorical or anthropomorphic extrapolation from this claim concerning the "felt" character of qualitative immediacy to the claim that the "secondary qualities" are to be found in nature leads Peirce to his cryptic statement, usually taken as indicative of his idealism, that quality is a "sleeping consciousness" (CP 6.221), and that "It is a psychic feeling of red without us which arouses a sympathetic feeling of red in our senses" (CP 1.311). Peirce is here objecting to the mechanistic or materialistic view that barren primary qualities cause "less real" secondary qualities, and emphasizing the reality of lived qualitative richness. □

The above analysis of the interrelation of the categories may seem to lead back to the problem of understanding Peirce's proclamation of idealism on the basis of a belief that the "law of mind" is more fundamental than the "law of matter," for on the above interpretation of Peirce's transformation of scholastic realism it would seem that Secondness or efficient causation or the "law of matter" is logically prior to Thirdness or final causation or the "law of mind." Here it is important to stress again that Peirce does not give his own positive characterization of matter basically in terms of efficient causation as opposed to final causation but rather in terms of the rigidity of fixed habit versus the spontaneity of habit taking. It will be remembered that Peirce's choice of idealism as the "one intelligible theory of the universe" is stated in the view that "matter is effete mind, inveterate habits becoming physical laws." To say the law of mind is prior to the law of matter is not to say final causation is prior to efficient causation but rather to say spontaneity is prior to regularity. □□

The freedom and constraint displayed by "all phenomena" are "there" in the qualitative continuum, the substratum of chance. The freedom lies in the potential for chance interactions or cuts within the containing continuum. The constraint lies in the nature of the substratum as the negative continuity or negative generality of the "may-be" which random reactions turn into positive potentialities that limit possible future interactions. And thus also, the spontaneity is a spontaneity for new habit-takings, for emerging new centers of positive potentialities within the containing general continuum. The difficulty of separating the aspects of efficient and final causation, of brute interaction and continuity or lawfulness, even for purposes of analysis, is laid bare in Peirce's observation that "In one aspect of the matter it would be perfectly true to say that final causation is alone primary." But on the other hand, the law of habit is "a law of efficient causation; so that either way of regarding the matter is equally true, although the

former is more intelligent" (CP 6.101). The "oneness" of mind and matter in manifesting the dynamics of a processive universe eludes characterization in terms of traditional alternatives. □□

The above discussion has focused on chance or spontaneity as belonging to the category of Firstness, and thus it may seem, incorrectly, that Firstness alone houses the element of emergence or creativity. It was seen above that Firstness is a substratum of pure chance. However, this does not adequately capture the role of chance, for as Peirce indicates, "I make use of chance chiefly to make room for a principle of generalization, or tendency to form habits, which I hold has produced all regularities" (CP 6.63). Again, he speaks of "chance in the form of a spontaneity which is to some degree regular" (CP 6.63). What the above discussion indicates is that although the key to understanding creativity or emergence is Peirce's category of Firstness, this type of novelty cannot be identified merely with the chance spontaneity of the category of Firstness. As James observes in describing Peirce's position, to an observer standing outside of its generating conditions, "novelty can appear only as so much 'chance', while to one who stands inside it is the expression of 'free creative activity'" (James, 1977: 153). Free creative activity, as opposed to the compulsion of blind spontaneous chance, requires the positive continuity of Thirdness as well as the Secondness which brings it into being. This is perhaps analogous to Peirce's view that Secondness "is act, not power" (MS 942: 16), for power requires the interrelation of all three categories. □□

Cosmic creativity, then, can be understood only in terms of all three of the Peircean categories. Firstness, as the substratum of chance, is the substratum for alternative realizations of potentialities. Secondness, as brute action and reaction, as the idealized limiting point of the temporal moment, is the idealized moment productive of interactive novelty. Thirdness or potentiality or lawfulness, as the would-be which, in coming to be, changes the range of real possibilities "there" for its further development, is at once the foundation of lawful endurance and the bearer of a novel future. This categorial interrelationship yields a process that progresses toward new intelligibility in that the process changes itself rather than conforming to a prestructured goal. □□

Cosmic creativity, as free creative activity, as emergence, arises within the dynamic interrelation of the three Peircean categories. Human creativity, which is evinced in abductive activity, in the play of imagination, in metaphor, and which in fact permeates all levels of epistemic activity, can be understood as a uniquely specialized, highly intensified instance of the free creative activity characteristic of the universe within which it functions, and the conditions of possibility of human freedom in general, as self

directedness rooted in rationality are to be found in the conditions which constitute the universe at large and within which rationality emerges.□□

It can be seen, then, that Peirce's flirtation with idealism, when viewed within the context of the many, at times perplexing and seemingly contradictory qualifications which he makes, gives rise to the strong textures of a pragmatic metaphysics of action which undercuts the alternatives offered by a long philosophical tradition. With its inherent spontaneity and surdity of firstness and secondness, this cosmic activity eludes the confines of rationality or mentality—either superhuman or human.□□

This statement concerning human mentality, however, leads to another, this time epistemic, perspective from which to focus on Peirce's pragmatic flirtation with, but movement beyond, idealism. And, in this area what will be of prime importance is his understanding of the dynamical object as providing a constraint on mental activity which is not itself constituted exclusively by thought but which yields a nonmental "residue" which resists the constructions of mental activity.□□

It has been seen that the reality Peirce envisions is not characterized by discrete things or repeatable universals, but by a concrete dynamic continuum inexhaustibly rich in possibilities and potentialities. This reality "swims in indeterminacy" (CP 1.171-72) precisely because of its inexhaustible richness, an indeterminacy which is independent of any consciousness but is rendered intelligible by the ordering and organizing capabilities of human noetic activity. The relation between the qualitatively rich dynamic continuum which constitutes the character of the metaphysically real independently of the human mode of grasping, and the system of facts which constitutes the real world, is brought into focus by Peirce's distinction between events or occurrences and facts. While an occurrence is a concrete slice or slab of the universe in all its infinite detailed richness, a fact is a slab of the universe as related to abstractive interpretive activity (MS 647: 8). Peirce indicates the above position from a slightly different direction in his claim that "There is no thing which is in itself in the sense of not being relative to the mind, though things which are relative to the mind doubtless are, apart from that relation" (CP 5.311). Or as he elaborates, a "this" is an object selected by a subject from the continuum of possibility (MS 942: 16).□

This distinction between facts and occurrences finds its counterpart in Peirce's distinction between the "Immediate Object, which is the Object as the Sign itself represents it, and whose Being is thus dependent upon the Representation of it in the Sign", and the "Dynamical Object, which is the Reality which by some means contrives to determine the Sign to its Representation" (CP 4.536, see also 8.314). Nature or the

dynamical object, with its qualitative richness, lawful modes of behavior, and emerging activities, constrains our interpretations, pulling them or coaxing them in some directions rather than others. Within this interactive context of interpretation and constraint, different structurings yield different isolatable dynamical objects, different things, different facts. Peirce's semiotic involves the metaphor neither of copying reality nor of constructing reality, but rather of engaging reality via the perspectival tool of semiosis. Signs engage the interpreter with a dynamic reality through habits of action as living meanings. In this way habit creates the immediate object under the constraints of the dynamical object which is its ultimate referent, and provides the vital, living link between signs and the universe. □□

Within this interactive context of creativity and constraint, it can be seen that traditional alternatives fall by the wayside. Neither reality nor the relation of thought to reality can be characterized in terms of the alternatives of traditional realism, idealism, or phenomenalism. Truth can be understood neither as coherence nor as correspondence. Knowledge, and human awareness in general, can be characterized neither as foundationalist nor as anti-foundationalist. And thus Peirce can proclaim that "In its proper meaning realism is a kind of idealism. It is the doctrine that ideas play a part in the real world" (MS 967: 1). This realism that is an idealism is in fact neither, but rather is a manifestation of that strong thread of pragmatism which runs through his position, for this "realism that is a kind of idealism" emerges from his understanding of the pragmatic interplay between the indeterminately rich reality which offers its independent influence and the meanings by we render it intelligible and suitable for our needs. While Peirce is not an idealist, then, his flirtation with idealism was a vital force in shaping the character of his philosophy as it moved on to novel terrain. Yet, if he is seen as wedded too closely to idealism, this novel terrain is lost from view. □□□

## References

- Bohler, J. (1963). *Charles Peirce and Scholastic Realism*. Seattle: University of Washington Press. □
- Holmes, L. (1964). Peirce's Philosophy of Mind. In E. Moore & R. Robin (Eds.), *Studies in the Philosophy of C. S. Peirce*. Amherst: University of Massachusetts press. □
- James, W. (1977). *A Pluralistic Universe, The Works of William James* (F. Burkhardt, Ed.). Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

## Endnotes

---

1. Neither can the absolute individual, for Peirce, "be realized in sense or thought". (CP 3.93,note). This is not only because of the presently indicated nature of Secondness, but also because of both the universalizing aspect of sense and the indeterminateness of meaning ↵