


Proofs of realism and experiential flow



Sandra Rosenthal

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Abstract:

Peirce stresses that the pragmatist qua pragmatist must embrace realism as opposed to nominalism. He offers as well "proofs" of realism which are open to various criticisms. Within the framework of his pragmatic vision, the experiential sense of realism is inseparable from the functioning of habit in the flow of time. What is being verified by experimental testing is, ultimately, not a particular scientific law, nor scientific laws in general, but rather the common sense expectation of predictive reliability rooted in the primitive epistemic "feel" of real potentiality, a belief which is dubitable in principle, and which is, in fact, often doubted at the abstract, reflective levels of science, logic, and philosophy, but which, at the level of rudimentary perceptual experience is fundamental to our very sense of our world, and is well verified by the continual availability of our perceptual world. The concrete functioning of habit provides, epistemically, the conceptual counterpart of the real lawfulness held to exist in the world, and provides, ontologically, an example of this real lawfulness. Peirce's dispositional theory of meaning leads to a metaphysics of realism as opposed to a nominalism, a realism not of eternal essences but a "process realism" in which there are real modes of behavior which govern what occurs.

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It is a not uncommon objection to Peirce's pragmatism that his pragmatic theory of meaning makes it impossible to meaningfully assert the existence of the real potentiality upon which he insists. Yet, Peirce not only insists upon the reality of causal laws or genuine potentialities but stresses that the pragmatist qua pragmatist must embrace realism as opposed to nominalism. The crucial significance of this objection to Peirce's acceptance of realism as opposed to nominalism is aptly captured in the observation that his pragmatic theory of meaning is incompatible with his metaphysics, since the summary view of lawfulness [nominalistic] and the counterfactual view [realistic], give rise to exactly the same set of experiential consequences; thus according to Peirce's pragmatic criterion of meaning there is no difference between the two theories and hence no real dispute (Burks, 1968, p.462. He levels this charge explicitly at both Lewis and Peirce. See also Madden, 1955). In short, there is a contradiction running throughout his philosophic thought. As another critic has forcefully stated the same kind of objection, Peirce's realism like his nominalism, "is unverifiable speculation, and is meaningless within the framework of his pragmatism." (Turley, 1977, p.56). More prominent in the literature than concern with the meaningfulness of Peirce's realism are

the attempts to justify Peirce's "proofs" of realism. These two issues can best be dealt with not in turn but together, as they are inseparably interrelated and mutually clarifying.

A strong defense has been made of Peirce's pragmatic realism as an explanation of "why the scientific manipulation of language affects our interaction with the world in the way in which it does" on the basis that for Peirce, such a claim is susceptible to the cumulative effect of inductive confirmation or disconfirmation. Though the non-fulfillment of an inductive prediction does not overthrow realism, the nonfulfillment of all inductive predictions would overthrow it; hence, each nonfulfillment of an inductive prediction counts as evidence against it, while each fulfillment counts as evidence in its favor. Pragmatic realism is thus an empirical hypothesis about science. That there is such a thing as science, is empirical support for the claims of realism as opposed to nominalism (Skagestad, 1980, pp. 527-540, 1981, pp.134ff). In a somewhat different but related vein, it is claimed that Peirce's realism is best conceived as a "kind of high-level abductive hypothesis" needed to account for the possibility of there being genuine science, and thus receiving indirect verification" (Haack, 1992, p.24-28).

The development of these argument contains important insights into the compatibility of Peirce's pragmatic verificationism and his realism. By focusing on the level of science and/or scientific language, however, the full strength of such insights is not utilized, for realism as an inductively supportable and supported hypothesis begins, for Peirce, neither at the level of language nor at the level of science, but rather at the level of rudimentary perceptual experience. Realism is incorporated in language because the structure of language incorporates the meaningful structure of rudimentary perceptual experience; for Peirce, "Meaning enters into language by determining it." (MS 1105, p. 4 of the Harvard Microfilm Edition of the Peirce Papers). Science incorporates realism because the structure of scientific prediction reflects the structure of such experience, and rudimentary perceptual experience incorporates realism because it is rooted in temporality. As will be seen below, it is in the experience of temporality that the basis for both the meaningfulness and the cumulative verification of realism will be found. Further, rooting the issues in this fundamental level will be seen to resolve certain supposed contradictory claims which are held to be "undeniably there" within Peirce's defense of realism.

Peirce, in discussing the real lawfulness of nature, notes the manner in which the scientist grasps the potential through the actual when he observes that "what would be, can, it is true, only be learned through observation of what happens to be..." (CP 6.327).

What this seems to indicate is that the particular content of any particular law can be ascertained only by reference to actual occurrences. After a certain number of experiments in which a series of actual events takes place, the scientist has discovered the content of a law and exemplifies his extra knowledge by prediction. In brief, we establish what would be by what is, and in turn verify what would be by what is. The issue at hand, however, is not merely the question of how one establishes the particular content of a particular law, but the very meaningfulness of the assertion that the potentialities of lawfulness are something real over and above the actual instances which we interpret as their exemplifications. And, if any law has content only by reference to the actual, what can we even mean by the assertion of the reality of potentiality as something distinguishable from the actual? Although scientific experimentation tends to provide a cumulative confirmation of a predictable uniformity in nature, the nature of this uniformity still remains at issue. The "uniformity of nature" is of course asserted by nominalists as well as realists.

The attempt has also been made to defend Peirce's pragmatic realism from the direction of logic, but this again begs the very issue in question. Such a defense (Boler, 1963, p.111 serves as an example of this approach) focuses on Peirce's claim that his pragmatism is concerned with the consequence as a relation between an antecedent and a consequent rather than with the consequent itself. However, a close examination of Peirce's definition of a consequence as a relation between an antecedent and a consequent shows that it does not provide an answer to the problem but rather requires a previous solution before it can itself be interpreted. Peirce defines the consequence in the following passage:

Scotus and the later scholastics usually dealt not with the syllogism but with an inferential form called a consequence. The consequence has only one expressed premise, called an antecedent; and its conclusion is called the consequent; and the proposition which asserts that in case the antecedent be true, the consequent is true, is called the consequence. (CP 4.45)

Thus, by a consequence Peirce means a conditional proposition or an implication relation. However, precisely what is at issue is the nature of this implication relation. Does it mean that when A happens, B will happen, or does it mean that if A had happened, B would have happened, although A has not and will not, in fact, happen? This is the crux of the logical issue between realism and nominalism¹ and an appeal to the consequence in support of realism merely begs the issue of the nature of the consequence.

The answer to the above problem begins to emerge neither at the level of the

sophisticated elaboration of logical relationships nor at the level of sophisticated scientific experimentation and prediction, but rather at the more fundamental level of the epistemic foundations for such endeavors. And, such a foundation must provide an answer for the question: How can any experience of what is actual provide a meaningful content for the concept of unactualized possibilities, of a reality which by its very nature is more than the sum of all actualities? That relations of qualitative events are given in perception rather than discrete atomic qualitative appearances will not by itself handle the problem at its most fundamental level, for whatever is given is actual. Even if actual relationships are given, how do we get from this to a claim concerning the unrealized potentialities of real relations? The direction to be followed here is indicated in a general way by Murphey when he notes that Peirce required a "property characterizing unactualized possibilities which would be itself actual so that it could be observed... . Peirce found such a property in continuity" (Murphey, 1961, p. 395). Thus Peirce emphasizes, concerning continuity, that "points are nothing but possibilities, until they are actually marked. Therefore, those intermediate points, being possible, are already there in the only sense there is in speaking of unmarked points" (MS. 137, p.7).

Here again, however, the answer cannot be found in terms of an abstract concept of continuity. Rather, the abstract elaboration of continuity for Peirce gains its fullness of meaning from the concreteness of experience. As Peirce cautions, "it may be held that we can be justified in inferring true generality, true continuity. But I do not see in what way we ever can be justified in doing so unless we admit the cotary propositions, and in particular, that such continuity is given in perception; that is ... we seem to perceive a genuine flow of time" (CP 5.205). Thus, the claim for true continuity or true generality² is rooted ultimately in the experience of a durational present. And, it will be seen that the concrete meaning of unactualized possibilities, of genuine alternatives and genuine potentialities, is gained by reference to the experiential awareness within the duration present of habit as a rule of organization of unlimited possibilities and as a readiness to respond to more than can ever be specified or actualized. The meaningfulness of the content of Peirce's assertion that predictive regularity is to be understood in terms of the potentialities of real causal relationships is gained by a sophisticated elaboration of or abstraction from the reference to the primitive experience of unactualized possibilities or real potentialities as this occurs through the functioning of habit in the flow of time. It has been noted that "It is the lawlike character of our experience which accounts for the meaning of our concepts and propositions; for it is the lawlike character of our experience which accounts for the properties, a description of which constitutes meaning." (Almeder, 1979, p.4). However, though it is the lawlike or uniform

character of our experience which accounts for the possibility of our meanings, it is the structure of our meanings which accounts for the understanding of such a lawlike character as the exemplification of real potentialities of real generals.

This understanding of the role of habit as yielding an experience of unactualized possibilities is implicit in Peirce's understanding of meaning as habit, for a habit is a "would-be", and "no agglomeration of actual happenings can ever completely fill up the meaning of a 'would-be' " (CP 5.467). Just as a continuum may generate an unlimited number of cuts within itself, so a disposition as a rule of organization contains within itself an unlimited number of possibilities of specific acts to be generated. And, just as with the continuum, one may elicit any particular cut, but cannot exhaust via enumeration all possible cuts, so one can elicit any particular set of acts desired, but cannot exhaust via enumeration all possibilities.

Further, in none of these cases is the inability to exhaust via enumeration all possibilities a contingent fact, but rather is intrinsic to the nature of the generating rule. As Peirce states, "A true continuum is something whose possibilities of determination no multitude of individuals can exhaust," while "a habit or general idea is a living feeling, infinitesimal in duration and immediately present, but still embracing innumerable parts." And, continues Peirce, in such an "absence of boundedness a vague possibility of more than is present is directly felt" (CP 6.170, 6.138). Such a sense of vague possibility includes the sense of efficacy, for "feeling which has not yet emerged into immediate consciousness is already affectible and already affected. In fact, this is habit, by virtue of which an idea is brought up into present consciousness by a bond that had already been established between it and another idea while... it was still in futuro" (CP 6.141). As Peirce summarizes the import of the above, "In the presence of this continuity of feeling, nominalistic maxims appear futile" (CP 6.139).

The recognition that the beginning of Peirce's pragmatic arguments for realism is found in directing us "towards something different from practical facts, namely to general ideas, as the true interpreters of our thought," (CP 5.3; quoted in Skagestad, 1980, p.532) is indeed significant. However, its significance is found in the fact that at the very basis of general ideas is not just predictability according to "a general description, namely the experimenter's plan or purpose" (Skagestad, 1980, p.533) but rather a rudimentary, concrete, lived through experience of the generative potentialities constitutive of real lawfulness. Though a plan may be abductively formed in the light of past instances, it is always more than a collection of instances, for it is structured by habit as a readiness to act to an indeterminate number of possibilities via the

organizational structure of the plan. Thus at the core of the plan is the felt potentiality inherent in habit. It has been convincingly argued that "Scholastic realism is 'too nominalistic' for Peirce because it remains compatible with construing a true generalization as a conjunction of true singular statements." Rather for Peirce, individuals are understood as instances of the generalization (Thompson, 1978, pp. 87-93). For Peirce, realism must be understood in this way, for the potentialities of real lawfulness are immediately felt in the functioning of habit as the generative, structuring rule for the awareness of objects. The meaningfulness of lawfulness or would-be's is to be found in the general purposiveness inherent in the felt actuality of habit as that which can never be exhausted in its results. The felt functioning of meaning as dispositional, then, is the source not only of our sense of the concrete unity of objectivity as more than a collection of appearances, but also of our sense of a reality whose possibilities of being experienced transcend all actual experiences. Indeed, "a pragmatist must subscribe to the doctrine of real possibility because nothing other than this can be so much as meant by saying an object possesses a character" (CP 5.457).

Thus, the conceiving mind cannot, by the very nature of meaning, be tied down to a consciousness which apprehends actualities only, for the implicit content of our concepts includes meaningful assertions about potentialities which reach out beyond that which will ever be actualized. Embodied in the actuality of our conceptual structures as dispositional, then, is a sense of reality which transcends actual occasions of experience. Such a sense is rooted directly in a recognition of time as process, for in the process of lived time is to be found the basis for the primitive epistemological "feel" of continuity, of the functioning of meaning as dispositional, and within it, the primitive epistemological "feel" of real potentialities or real dynamic tendencies. As Peirce stresses, "There is no span of present time so short as not to contain ... something for the confirmation of which we are waiting." But this "peculiar element of the present, that it confronts us with ideas which it forces upon us ... is something which accumulates in wholes of time and dissipates the more minutely the course of time is scrutinized" (CP 7.675).

The very structure of meaning is grounded in a primordial experience of time as process. What occurs within the present awareness is not the apprehension of a discrete datum in a moment of time, but rather the time-extended experiential "feel" within the passing present of a readiness to respond to more than can ever be specified. Thus Peirce points out that "if we wish to know what the percipuum of the course of time is, all we have to do is abstain from sophisticating it, and it will be plain enough ..." (CP

7.649). It has been argued that Peirce did not mean to approach the issue of realism experimentally, but rather to show, against Hume, that the claims of realism make more sense, are more reasonable than the alternatives (Roth, 1985, pp. 877-879). It would seem that his position is more reasonable because it is the view that is more sensible, but indeed, literally so.

One may, if one wishes, ignore this percipuum of the course of time and insist on interpreting time as a series of knife-edged moments, and along with this, one may insist that predictability is nothing but the regularity of such moments, bemoaning the meaninglessness of the assertion of any supposed causal relatedness or genuine potentiality or real generality. Indeed, in taking away the durational present, in reducing the process of lived time to a series of knife-edged moments, one has taken away the basis for the primitive epistemological "feel" of continuity. And, in so doing, one has ruled out of court the very possibility of the functioning of meaning as a generative rule and hence has ruled out of court the basis for a primitive epistemic "feel" of real potentialities structuring the very character of emerging actualities. But, in removing this temporal basis of felt continuity, in removing the primitive experiential sense of the reality of unactualized potentialities, one has taken away the very possibilities of perceiving a world of physical objectivities. Peirce well warns about this, pointing out that "So long as we trust to common sense, the properties of a true continuum are a matter of course", while through our abstract elaborations "we founder from quagmire into quicksand" (MS 137, p.10).

The significance of this relation between the "sense" of realism, temporality, and the perceived world in resolving supposed contradictions in Peirce's "proofs" of realism will be the focus of the ensuing discussion. There are two major areas to be explored. First, the possible inconsistency, or, at best, ambiguity of purpose, in Peirce's "experimental proof of realism," as it is generally called. And, secondly, the possible inconsistency of this proof with his supposed "a priori proof" for realism.

Peirce, after dropping a stone to the floor, as experimental evidence for his position concludes:

A thousand other such inductive predictions are getting verified every day and one would have to suppose every one of them to be merely fortuitous in order reasonably to escape the conclusion that general principles are really operative in nature. This is the doctrine of scholastic realism (CP 5.96).

One critic, focusing on Peirce's experimental proof, poses the dichotomy of rhetorical illustration of common sense belief vs. experimental testing of a dubitable hypothesis,

arguing that Peirce is not content to do just the former but is unsuccessful in accomplishing the latter (Thompson, 1964, pp. 414 ff). Others claim that Peirce is in fact offering experimental testing. The experimental evidence for realism is not just the fall of the stone but the fact that everybody predicts that the stone will fall, and that it actually does fall. If it had failed to fall, this would have counted as evidence against realism. This claim does not quite go far enough in its defense of Peirce, however, because it takes the language of science as its starting point. But, to further develop this point, it will be necessary to first explore Peirce's supposed "a priori" proof of realism, his argument for the inconceivability of a chance world. Many critics of Peirce find an inconsistency between it and the experimental "proof." However, Peirce's supposed a priori proof for realism, far from being incompatible with his experimental proof, provides an illuminating pathway to it.

Peirce's discussion of the inconceivability of a chance world emerges within the context of his discussion of clerical arguments for the existence of God (CP 6.399). The purpose of his general discussion is not to show that the orderliness we find in our experience proves the reality of Thirdness but rather that such orderliness cannot prove the existence of God. Peirce argues that both a chance universe and an orderly universe would allow for our world as we experience it, because the uniformities necessary for predictability, which constitute our orderly world, emerge as uniformities in relation to an organizing, delineating mind. A universe of chance or a universe of order, not related to human intents is, according to Peirce, equally abundant in possibilities of order for mind to discriminate (CP 6.404-406). From this concretely rich universe, through the perspective of a meaning system rooted in active interest and intent, meaningful uniformities emerge within our world. This interpretation of Peirce gains support from his criticism of Mill concerning the uniformity of nature (CP 6.67). Facts or objects emerge neither from mind alone nor from the universe alone, but rather from the interaction of the two which constitutes experience. And predictable order is always among facts.

Thus, experience of a chance world is inconceivable not because it is a priori impossible, but because of the way intelligence operates. Indeed, an intelligent organism, set down in any chaos, would proceed to elicit order necessary for its ongoing activities. Though a chance world is logically possible in itself, when combined with information concerning the nature of mind as interpretive activity and the nature of uniformity as related to this activity, a logically impossible set results. This is not an a priori inconceivability but rather is an inconceivability based on what can and cannot fit consistently with the

"facts" of experience as they have been thus far interpreted. Thus, Peirce concludes, the only way the uniformities of our experienced world could prove the existence of God were if the existence of finite minds proved the existence Infinite Mind (CP 6.407). For Peirce, the interesting issue is not whether the universe, apart from an interested mind, is one of order or chance, but rather, what experience would be like if there were no possible uniformities interesting for human activities. And, his conclusion here is most instructive. If this latter were to be the case, there would be no perception of objectivities at all. Experience of a chance world would be the experience of a mind which refused to organize, or, in other terms "A world of chance is simply our actual world viewed from the standpoint of an animal at the vanishing point of intelligence." There would be neither memory nor expectation (CP 6.406). Memory, for Peirce, like expectation, "depends on a law of organization" rooted in dispositionally generated activity, founded ultimately in the nature of temporality. Thus, Peirce claims that "The world of memory is the world of time" (MS 350, Lect. 1), but "were the instants independently actual, as they are in the Time of the analysts, memory would be a perpetual miracle" (MS 137, p.13). The existence of memory is itself, for Peirce, a proof for continuity, for "if it were not so, nobody could have any memory" (CP 4.641).

A world without order, then, would be a world without recognizable things. That the universe contains possibilities or order relevant to human activities is shown by the very existence, within experience, of a perceptual world of objectivities. That this uniformity which allows for our perceived world is grasped in terms of thirdness or real dynamic potentialities, is shown not by the inconceivability of a world without order or uniformity but by an examination of the nature of the perceptual experience within which our orderly world emerges. Such an examination reveals that these uniformities are not experienced, in rudimentary perceptual awareness, as regularities among discrete characters occurring in discrete moments, but rather as the product of creative, dynamic tendencies which are immediately felt in the temporal flow of the durational present. In short, that we have a perceptual world is evidence of the availability within the universe of abstractable uniformities interesting to us, whatever be their nature apart from us. An examination of the perceptual experience in which the experience of these uniformities is rooted uncovers the basis for the meaningfulness of realism as the explanation of the nature of the uniformities. The claim that there are ontologically real causal forces operative in the universe which creatively structure emerging facts gains its explanatory meaningfulness in the concreteness of experience, for such dynamic creativity is immediately felt in the functioning of habit through the passage of time. This meaningful claim, implicit in the very heart of the conceiving mind if not willfully

ignored, is then inductively verified by the continual availability of our perceptual world and by the prediction of science.

But, this statement brings the discussion back to the experimental proof for realism. And, by now the full significance of the defense of Peirce in terms not just of the fall of the stone but the fulfilled expectation of the fall of the stone (Skagestad, 1980, p.536) can begin to emerge, for it can be seen that there is no dichotomy between "rhetorical illustration of common sense belief and experimental testing of a dubitable hypothesis." What is being verified by experimental testing is, ultimately, not a particular scientific law, nor scientific laws in general, but rather the common sense expectation of predictive reliability rooted in the primitive epistemic "feel" of real potentiality. What is being verified is a belief which is dubitable in principle, and which is, in fact, often doubted at the abstract, reflective levels of science, logic, and philosophy, but which, at the level of rudimentary perceptual experience is so fundamental to our very sense of our world, and is so well verified by the continual availability of our perceptual world, that its illustration in verifying instances does, indeed, seem rhetorical. As Peirce points out, a baby makes "acquaintance with the flow of causation. Acquaintance with the flow of causation so early as to make it familiar before speech" (MS 644, pp. 11-12).

If all predictive reliability were lost we should no longer have science, but then neither should we have a perceptual world. However, that we should have pragmatic evidence for the falsity of realism is for Peirce not the case. For, to no longer have our perceptual world is to have given up the organizing activity of mind and, with it, the sense of dispositionally organized felt possibilities, memory, and expectation. And, that same temporally rooted, dispositionally organized sense of expectation which is at the heart of the sense of realism and the sense of a perceive world, is at the heart, also, of the very possibility of pragmatic evidence. As Peirce states, concerning the same temporally rooted percipuum which makes nominalistic maxims futile, "But it is remarkable that in case we do not accept the percipuum's own account of itself ... then it would seem that there is nothing that empirical truth can mean except accordance with what is given in those instants, which in this case, in no way testify concerning one another or in any way refer to one another" (CP 7.671). What is given at an instant is not, for Peirce, a perspective of an object, for that requires the durational time within which habit functions. Ultimately, then, for Peirce, to deny the sense of realism embedded in perceptual awareness is to deny the possibility of truth in terms of verification, both at the level of science and at the level of common sense. Thus, the primordial experience of temporal flow at the heart of perceptual awareness is foundational both for the sense of

realism and for the very possibility of its experimental proof. Because of Peirce's pragmatic understanding of meaning as habit and its experiential dimensions, the claim of realism is meaningful and necessarily embedded in our common sense perception of the world, and it is this meaningful claim which is being empirically verified through fulfilled prediction. Several important implications for Peirce's general position lie implicit in the above development.

First, the very way in which Peirce's proofs for realism involve the ordering discriminations of intelligence points toward the possibility of an inherent pluralism implicit in his arguments, for what laws one finds are partially dependent on the creative discriminations one brings, and alternative ways of discriminating may lead to alternative law governed uniformities within experience.

Secondly, it should not be surprising, in retrospect, that Peirce's experimental proof of realism leads to the very roots of lived experience, since experience for Peirce is inherently experimental, embodying the dynamics of scientific method as the lived experimental activity of the scientist. Scientific method involves a noetic creativity which organizes experience, which directs our activity, and the adequacy of which is tested in the ongoing course of experience. For Peirce, scientific method is the only correct method of fixing belief, for it is the only method by which beliefs must be tested and corrected by what experience presents. Further, the creative abductions of science which provide an organizational focus for directed activity shade into everyday "perceptual judgments without any sharp line of demarcation between them" (CP 5.181, 2.96). Here it should be stressed that this shading of scientific abductions into everyday perceptual claims is not a continuity of content organized but of method of organization. Peirce's concern with scientific method is with the dynamics of experimental activity, not with the reification of its contents, and this experimental activity is embedded, according to him, in the most rudimentary experiential dynamics which give rise to the perceived world

Finally, there are key metaphysical implications involved in Peirce's understanding of the sense of realism which pervades experience. The sense of realism has been seen to be inseparable from the functioning of habit in the flow of time, for a disposition or habit as a rule of generation is something whose possibilities of determination no multitude of actually generated instances can exhaust. Peirce's dispositional theory of meaning leads to a metaphysics of realism as opposed to a nominalism, a realism not of eternal essences but a "process realism" in which there are real modes of behavior which govern what occurs. Laws, which outrun any number of actualities are, as modes of

behavior, the source of the structures emerging in what occurs. Human habits of response are precisely lawful modes of behavior structuring emerging activities. Thus Peirce states of the pragmatist, "That he will have no difficulty with Thirdness is clear enough because he will hold that conformity of action to general intentions is as much given in perception as is the element of action itself, which cannot really be mentally torn away from such general purposiveness" (CP 5.212). The concrete functioning of habit provides, epistemically, the conceptual counterpart of the real lawfulness held to exist in the world, and provides, ontologically, an example of this real lawfulness.

The awareness of habit as a disposition or readiness to respond to more than can be specified gives a concrete meaning to the concept of a "process realism," of a real lawfulness which outruns and governs unactualized possibilities. Further, the sense of process realism at once would seem to provide, for Peirce, an experiential basis for the rejection of deterministic hypotheses, one not presented in "The Doctrine of Necessity Examined".³ For, the sense of unactualized possibilities embedded in meaning as dispositional brings a sense of real alternatives into the very heart of perceptual awareness, providing an experientially meaningful basis for the rejection of deterministic hypotheses, a directly felt sense of possibilities and of the spontaneity of choice among them. To hold that this "sense of realism" which is inherent both in our every perception of the world around us and in the assertions of science is indeed metaphysically veridical involves showing, ultimately, that for Peirce, the features of experience revealed through his pragmatic examination of experience are at once the features of the ontologically real.⁴

That Peirce does intend an intimate interrelation between his pragmatic analyses of experience and his metaphysics is to be found in his claim that:

Suffice it to say once more that pragmatism is, in itself, no doctrine of metaphysics, no attempt to determine any truth of things. It is merely a method of ascertaining the meanings of hard words and of abstract concepts. All pragmatists of whatever stripe will cordially assent to that statement. As to the ulterior and indirect effects of practicing the pragmatic method, that is quite another affair" (CP 5.464)

Such effects are detailed elsewhere:

There are certain questions commonly reckoned as metaphysical, and which certainly are so, if by metaphysics we mean ontology, which as soon as pragmatism is once sincerely accepted, cannot logically resist settlement. These are for example, What is reality? Are necessity and contingency real modes of being? Are the laws of nature real? Can they be assumed to be immutable or are they

presumably results of evolution? Is there any real chance or departure from real law? (CP 5.496)

Or, as he succinctly summarizes, "Pragmatism ... is the forerunner of a new metaphysical light" (MS 319, p.5). And, from the backdrop of his proofs of realism, it can be anticipated that Peirce's synechism, rooted ultimately in temporality, will be central to its focus. This anticipation stands in radical opposition to the view which is well represented in the recent claim that Peirce's synechism "incorporated his strong pragmatic position on the relative demerit of metaphysics", and is, in fact, not a metaphysical doctrine but solely a regulative principle of logic (Alborn, 1989). Peirce's pragmatism is far from being an anti-metaphysical tool for clarifying the meaning of terms. Rather, the very tool leads to a particular ontological content. Such a content belongs both to ontology and "to 'epistemology,' an atrocious translation of Erkenntnislehre." (CP 5.496).

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Notes

1. Peirce himself changed in his understanding of this issue in his earlier and later discussion of the diamond's hardness. (CP 5.403, 5.457, 8.208). For an account of Peirce's own early nominalism see Fisch, 1986, pp.368ff, 1961, pp.xxv-xxviii. ↵
2. Peirce Identifies continuity with generality. And of course, as these relate to the causal potentialities of Thirdness, not to the efficient causality of Secondness. (CP 1.211). ↵
3. Peirce's claim of the inconceivability of a chance world of course is not meant to deny the element of chance in the universe which negates necessitarianism. ↵
4. The terms 'ontological' and 'metaphysical' are used interchangeably in this work. Although Peirce at times makes a distinction, seeming to label as 'metaphysical' issues which are pragmatically "meaningless gibberish" or a best unsolvable, he is far from consistent in this use. ↵