

# The Intelligibility of Peirce's Metaphysics of Objective Idealism

A Inteligibilidade da Metafísica do Idealismo  
Objetivo de Peirce

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**Abstract:** The paper critically explores the meaning and intelligibility of Peirce's theory of objective idealism as found in his papers of the *Monist* series (1891–3) beginning with "Architecture of Theories". The grand idea of Peirce's mature philosophical system proposes an epistemological realism and an idealist metaphysics. The paper primarily focuses on the latter, which expresses a worldview that conceives mind as the primordial or fundamental reality of nature. By analyzing Peirce's metaphysics in contrast to the alternative versions of Cartesian dualism, neutralism, and materialism, and by connecting it to his cosmogony, phenomenology, and physiology, the tenability of the primordially of mind is defended as "the one intelligible theory" for explaining evolution, variety, human consciousness, and other observed facts of the world.

**Key words:** Peirce. Objective idealism. Idealist metaphysics. Epistemological realism. Emerson. New England Transcendentalism. Intelligibility. *Monist* series. Evolutionary cosmology. Tychism. Primordially of mind. Feeling.

**Resumo:** O artigo explora criticamente o sentido e inteligibilidade da teoria do idealismo objetivo de Peirce conforme encontrada em seus artigos da série *Monist* (1891-93), começando com "Arquitetura das Teorias". A grande ideia do sistema filosófico maduro de Peirce propõe um realismo epistemológico e um idealismo metafísico. O artigo primeiramente foca sobre o último, que expressa uma visão de mundo que concebe mente como a primordial ou fundamental realidade da natureza. Analisando a metafísica de Peirce em contraste com as versões alternativas do dualismo cartesiano, neutralismo e materialismo, e conectando isso à sua cosmologia, fenomenologia e fisiologia, a viabilidade da primordially da mente é defendida como "a única teoria inteligível" para explicar evolução, variedade, consciência humana e outros fatos observados no mundo.

**Palavras-chave:** Peirce. Idealismo objetivo. Metafísica idealista. Realismo epistemológico. Emerson. Transcendentalismo da Nova Inglaterra. Intelligibilidade. Série *Monist*. Cosmologia evolucionária. Tiquismo. Primordially da mente. Sentimento.

## 1. Introduction

For the first time, in 1891, Charles Sanders Peirce publicly announced an essential feature of his thought that would characterize, and even stigmatize, the reception of his philosophy throughout his career and into the twenty-first century. In the publications of the *Monist* metaphysical series, beginning with “Architecture of Theories,” he introduced his theory of objective idealism. The theory would blossom into a conceptual foundation of his philosophy, a grand idea of his mature philosophical system that the *Monist* series argues for in concert with tychism, synechism, agapism, and evolutionary cosmology. In time, it would be recognized as arguably one of the greatest efforts at speculative metaphysics in the history of American philosophy, and perhaps remains—as Peirce believed—“[t]he one intelligible theory of the universe” (EP1 293<sup>1</sup>).

In the scholarship of the past half of a century, Peirce’s cosmological writings as a whole have been met with mixed reactions. On the one hand, the critics have tended to group together and isolate his work during the so-called “cosmological period” extending from the lecture “Design and Chance” (1884) to the lecture series “Reasoning and the Logic of Things” (1898). They argue that his cosmological writings are an uncharacteristic fragment of his thought that ought to be read as an unseemly departure from his more scientific and positivist writings.<sup>2</sup> Furthermore, some claim that its doctrines, including objective idealism, are unintelligible and contain assertions that are nothing more than anthropomorphisms and metaphors, at best, or blatant contradictions and incoherent expressions, at worst. Most recently, Thomas S. Short—who finds an intellectual companion in the combative British empiricist, Walter B. Gallie, and his work from the 1950s<sup>3</sup>—has struggled to discern the meaning

- 1 All quotations of Peirce’s writings, unless cited otherwise, are from *The Essential Peirce: Selected Philosophical Writings* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press). Vol. 1, ed. Nathan HOUSER and Christian KLOESEL (1992), and vol. 2, ed. Peirce Edition Project (1998); it is cited EP1 and EP2 followed by page number.
- 2 For what has become a classic statement of such a view, see Thomas GOUDGE, *The Thought of C.S. Peirce* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1950), and his incision of Peirce into two parts, half naturalist and half transcendentalist. Most recently, Thomas L. SHORT, in “What was Peirce’s Objective Idealism?” *Cognitio: Revista de Filosofia* v. 11, no. 2 (2010):333–46, and “Did Peirce have a Cosmology?” *Transactions of the Charles S. Peirce Society* v. 46, no. 4 (2010):521–43, argues that the cosmology was a short-term speculative effort abandoned by Peirce. Moreover, he believes that the cosmological theories were intended to be merely “programmatically” for assisting future inquiry, and not an effort at formulating definite truths about the universe, despite Peirce’s remarks to the contrary. In response to Short, David A. DILWORTH in “Peirce’s Objective Idealism: A Reply to T. L. Short’s ‘What was Peirce’s Objective Idealism?’” *Cognitio: Revista de Filosofia* v. 12, no. 1 (2011):53–74, provides ample evidence that when Peirce is properly read synechistically, the signs are that his cosmology, like many of his thoughts, are not suspended in intellectual isolation, but the “seeds of a multi-layered architecture of theories [from which Peirce] reaped a vintage harvest [...] producing a *grand cru* theoretical accomplishment of the highest caliber in the history of philosophy.” (p. 54–55). The cosmological theories are organic components of Peirce’s (self-proclaimed) “completely developed system” that achieved further amplifications in his later career. I align myself with this view.
- 3 Walter B. GALLIE, *Peirce and Pragmatism* (New York: Dover, 1966 [1952]).

of and argument for objective idealism. His dilemma is evident when he states that Peirce's idealism is indistinguishable from materialism "except [in] a perverse choice of words," and that its claim that mechanistic principles fail to explain the reality of feeling is grounded on "[n]o reason, beyond [a statement of] obvious futility."<sup>4</sup> Comments such as these exhibit a lack of sincerity and an *a priori* aversion to idealism, and sometimes metaphysics in general, that preclude an objective and generous reading of Peirce. In a mood of adamant resistance, the critics appear not to have put in the leg-work necessary to understanding Peirce's metaphysics as he envisioned it.

On the other hand, there are the generous readers and advocates of Peirce's cosmological writings. Scholars such as Joseph L. Esposito, John K. Sheriff, Kelly A. Parker, and David A. Dilworth have composed thorough interpretations of the cosmology that display exegetical excellence, and which have repeatedly established the continuity of the cosmological period across Peirce's career as an essential element of his systematic philosophy.<sup>5</sup> Yet, that said, their accounts of objective idealism occur in the context of their own projects, which excusably have interests other than a focused analysis of the theory.

Thus, to my knowledge, a thorough analysis of Peirce's meaning of objective idealism and a critical examination of its intelligibility, especially as a metaphysical doctrine, has not been adequately accomplished. The main thrust of my paper is to exposit, by a close reading of the papers of the *Monist* series, the metaphysics of Peirce's objective idealism, and to assess its viability as the "one intelligible theory of the universe" as it is proposed over and against the alternative metaphysical worldviews of Cartesian dualism, neutralism, and materialism.

## 2. Objective idealism and its historical roots

It is valuable to begin by recognizing the provenance of Peirce's mature philosophical ideas in the work of Ralph Waldo Emerson.<sup>6</sup> In the *Monist* series, Peirce acknowledges an elective affinity to Emerson as his philosophical and American predecessor. In the beginning of "The Law of Mind," for example, he includes Emerson and Trans-

4 Thomas L. SHORT, "What was Peirce's Objective Idealism?", p. 337 and 342. For a direct engagement and detailed refutation of Short's critical position, I highly recommend Dilworth's response to it in his "Peirce's Objective Idealism".

5 See Joseph L. ESPOSITO, *Evolutionary Metaphysics: The Development of Peirce's Categories* (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 1980); John K. SHERIFF, *Charles Peirce's Guess at the Riddle: Grounds for Human Significance* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994); Kelly A. PARKER, *The Continuity of Peirce's Thought* (Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 1998); and DILWORTH, "Peirce's Objective Idealism."

6 The critics have largely missed or ignored the precedence of Peirce's philosophy in the history of philosophy, especially in New England Transcendentalism and F. W. J. Schelling. Short provides a brief mention of Schelling but only to degrade and not take the possibility of an influence into account, despite Peirce's remarks to the contrary ("What was Peirce's Objective Idealism?" 334). As for Emerson and Transcendentalism, Short's blind-spot is conspicuous when his quote of the opening passage of "The Law of Mind" stops short immediately before the sentence where Peirce refers to his biographical background in the New England philosophical tradition that includes Emerson and Transcendentalism (ibid.).

cidentalism as influences that shaped his intellectual biography. Also, in “A Guess at the Riddle”—Peirce’s ambitious plan for a book from which the *Monist* series was born—the selection of the title and decision to include “a Vignette of the Sphynx below” it, seem, without question, to have Emerson and his famous poem in mind.<sup>7</sup>

There are perhaps only a handful of philosophical positions in Emerson that readers will agree are indubitably present in his writings. Among them is the interpretation that he is a naturalist, and that he often waxes philosophical on metaphysical monism. It is fair to say that, for Emerson, *everything* is natural. Nature is the one reality. Philosophy, he says at the opening of his book, *Nature*, may distinguish between nature and the soul, between the not-me and me, and between things found in wild nature and artificial things constructed by humankind, however, truly speaking, the human soul along with its activities and creations are ultimately part of one (co-)natural universe. Nature is not the only concept Emerson uses to orchestrate a monistic or synechistic worldview; he pronounces the interconnectivity of individual things in the concepts of Spirit, the Over-soul, and the Universal Mind. In “The Transcendentalist” he states that the idealism, associated with himself and his New England colleagues, affirms that “Mind is the only reality, of which men and all other natures are better or worse reflectors.”<sup>8</sup> And again in his late career text, *Natural History of Intellect* (a work originally presented as part of a Harvard lecture program [1870] that included Emerson and Peirce on the list of faculty) Emerson still maintains his metaphysics of the mind: “I am of the oldest religion. Leaving aside the question which was prior, egg or bird, I believe the mind is the creator of the world, and is ever creating;—that at last Matter is dead Mind; that mind makes the senses it sees with.”<sup>9</sup>

7 Quoted in editor’s introduction to “A Guess at the Riddle,” in EPI 245. “The Sphinx” was one of Emerson’s most popular poems and personal favorites; he included it as the first poem in his collection, *Poems* (see Tiffany K. WAYNE, *Encyclopedia of Transcendentalism* [New York: Facts on File, Inc., 2006]). Dilworth has cogently shown Emerson as the background of Peirce’s fundamental metaphysical doctrines; see his “Elective Metaphysical Affinities: Emerson’s ‘Natural History of Intellect’ and Peirce’s Synechism”, *Cognitio: Revista de Filosofia* v. 11, no. 1 (2010): 22-47; and his, “Elective Affinities: Emerson’s ‘Poetry and Imagination’ as Anticipation of Peirce’s Buddhist-Christian Metaphysics”, *Cognitio: Revista de Filosofia* v. 10, no. 1 (2009): 43-59. Beyond “The Law of Mind,” there is a healthy amount of evidence supporting that Peirce was not only aware of Emerson’s philosophy but that he associated himself with it: such as his early memory of listening to a lecture on nature by Emerson (see Felicia E. KRUSE, “Peirce, God, and the ‘Transcendentalist Virus’”, *Transactions of the Charles S. Peirce Society* 46, no. 3 [2010]: 398n1); the personal acquaintance that his father Benjamin Peirce shared with Emerson and their joint membership in the Saturday Club; his unpublished statement that he is a kind of New England Transcendentalist (see MS 958, unpublished manuscript as listed in Richard S. ROBIN, *Annotated Catalogue of the Papers of Charles S. Peirce* [Amherst: The University of Massachusetts Press, 1967]); and his musings about Emerson being a categorical genius of world history (see e.g. Charles S. PEIRCE, *Writings of Charles S. Peirce: A Chronological Edition*, vol. 8 [Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986–2010], 261; cited as W followed by volume followed by page number); also see footnote 13.

8 Ralph Waldo EMERSON, “The Transcendentalist”, in *Essays & Lectures* (New York: The Library of America, 1983), p. 195.

9 Ralph Waldo EMERSON, *Natural History of the Intellect*, in vol. XII of *The Complete Works*

In his opening article and with his theory of objective idealism, Peirce announces his metaphysical affinity to Emersonian idealism and puts the monism in the *Monist*:

The old dualistic notion of mind and matter, so prominent in Cartesianism, as two radically different kinds of substance, will hardly find defenders to-day. Rejecting this, we are driven to some form of hylopathy,<sup>10</sup> otherwise called monism [...]. The one intelligible theory of the universe is that of objective idealism, that matter is effete mind, inveterate habits becoming physical laws. (EP1 293).

Thus Peirce names his philosophy that of objective idealism. It is his theory of metaphysics that envisions mind and matter, and psychical law and physical law, on a single natural continuum of reality. As soul and material nature, for Emerson, are connatural (or "consanguineous"<sup>11</sup>) entities, mind and matter, for Peirce, exist as two ends of a single spectrum whose ontological difference is not absolute but a matter of degree. Their monistic vision of the world Emerson elegantly captures when he recollects the wonderful hint given to science of "a bough of a fossil tree which was perfect wood at one end and perfect mineral coal at the other."<sup>12</sup> Furthermore, the natural continuum of this worldview is ultimately mental in nature. Peirce is a votary of Emerson's "oldest religion" as demonstrated by the astounding parallel formulation between the dictums, "matter is effete mind," and "Matter is dead Mind."<sup>13</sup> His metaphysics of objective idealism (contra: subjective idealism<sup>14</sup>), thus, in opting out of metaphysical dualism, rejects matter as an independently existing substance

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of Ralph Waldo Emerson, Centenary Edition, ed. Edward Waldo Emerson (Boston and New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1904), p. 17.

- 10 Peirce's *Century Dictionary* definition of "hylopathism" is: "The doctrine that matter is sentient" (*The Century Dictionary*, "hylopathism," <http://www.global-language.com/century>). This directly follows from the Greek etymology.
- 11 EMERSON, *Nature*, in *Essays & Lectures*, p. 41.
- 12 Ralph Waldo EMERSON, "Poetry and Imagination," in vol. VIII of *The Complete Works of Ralph Waldo Emerson*, Riverside Edition, ed. Edward Waldo Emerson (Boston and New: Houghton Mifflin, 1883), p. 14.
- 13 Indeed, the idea, and in part its formulation, have their origin in Schelling whom both Emerson and Peirce acknowledge as their idealist predecessor. Ivo A. IBRI has recently addressed Peirce's metaphysical debt to Schelling in "Reflections on a Poetic Ground in Peirce's Philosophy", *Transactions of the Charles S. Peirce Society* 45, no. 3 (2009): 273-307; Dilworth also has in his "Peirce's Objective Idealism"; Esposito's *Evolutionary Metaphysics* is the ground-breaking work that first established the connection between Peirce and Schelling. With regard to the influence of Emerson's metaphysical ideas on Peirce, further see Peirce's statement that the Over-soul is Emerson's "greatest conception" (PEIRCE, W5: 84-5).
- 14 I take subjective idealism as the position that the real is dependent on its being known. One version of it is Berkeley's, which claims that "to be is to be perceived." Peirce's objective idealism, however, holds to a position of metaphysical realism about the mind; the real is mind, whether it is known or not. (See Robert ALMEDER, "The Idealism of Charles S. Peirce", *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 9 [1971], p. 481, who marks the distinction by using the terms "metaphysical idealism" and "idealist metaphysics" respectively). This is clarified below when knowledge and the objectivity of objective idealism is further addressed.

or reality, and rather interprets it as fundamentally mental in nature. Matter—or, more accurately, that which we ordinarily take to be matter—is a form of mind, in particular, “effete mind.” There is no material substance in the absolute sense, that is, no mind that is absolutely dead. As Peirce likes to qualify it, matter is “*partially* deadened mind” (EP1 312; my emphasis).<sup>15</sup> The psychic vitality of matter receives full articulation in “Man’s Glassy Essence,” and is briefly explicated in “Architecture” when Peirce connects the psychological phenomena of feeling, sensation of reaction, and general conception to the physiological activities found in nerve-cells.<sup>16</sup> In Peirce’s monistic reduction, material particles and events turn out to be one with the great cosmic mind, a position consonant with Emersonian idealism.<sup>17</sup>

## 2.1. Realism and epistemology

It is useful to think of the “idealism” half of Peirce’s philosophy of objective idealism as pointing to a theory of metaphysics, and the “objective” half, pointing to a theory of epistemology. In announcing his philosophy of objective idealism, in “Architecture,” Peirce’s primary concern is to sketch its metaphysical doctrine rather than explain its epistemological doctrine. Nothing is explicitly stated regarding the latter. Epistemic objectivity can mean many things to a philosopher, and whatever its details on which Peirce elaborates in other writings, one thing is certain—that he does not hold to an epistemological idealism, whereby the real is taken to be determined by the mind of the individual knowing subject. We need only consider the discussion on “the happy system,” at the beginning of “Architecture,” and its precedence in the “*a priori* philosopher” presented in “Fixation of Belief,” to get a sense for the epistemic objectivity Peirce has in mind. Real things and truth do not depend on the inclination, will, knowledge, or any other aspect of the individual. As Carl Hausman informs us in his thorough analysis of Peirce’s epistemology, there is an extra-mental condition that constrains all knowledge and inquiry. That is, there is a reality or mind-independent condition that resists human thought. Beyond the *Monist* series, this reality is called the “dynamic object,” and it functions as a constraint both with regard to the final object of inquiry, and in any local context or stage of inquiry.<sup>18</sup>

15 Peirce consistently formulates it as such throughout the *Monist* series; see e.g. “The Law”, EP1 331; and “Man’s Glassy Essence,” EP1 347–8.

16 See “The Architecture of Theories”, EP1 292.

17 Peirce’s *Century Dictionary* definition of “objective idealism” is congruent with this interpretation: “the doctrine of F.W.J. von Schelling, that the relation between the subject and the object of thought is one of absolute identity. It supposes that all things exist in the absolute reason, that matter is extinct mind, and that the laws of physics are the same as those of mental representation” (quoted in editorial note in W8:391).

18 See Carl R. HAUSMAN, *Charles S. Peirce’s Evolutionary Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), p. 140–68. Hausman covers the same issue in his other writings on Peirce; see his “Peirce’s Evolutionary Realism”, *Transactions of the Charles S. Peirce Society: A Quarterly Journal in American Philosophy* 27:4 (1991): 475-500; and his “Charles Peirce’s Evolutionary Realism as a Process Philosophy”, *Transactions of the Charles S. Peirce Society: A Quarterly Journal in American Philosophy* 38, no. 1–2 (2002): 13-27. Hausman’s claims about idealism and realism appear to focus more on Peirce’s epistemology than metaphysics. When he does approach the latter his position appears to diverge from my own. He

Now, this objective sense of reality appears to conflict with the idealist metaphysics that claims that reality is fundamentally mental in nature. I think the apparent contradiction is resolved by noting the distinction, Peirce sometimes makes, between thought in general and thought in particular (that is, as possessed by a particular rational agent).<sup>19</sup> As Christopher Hookway observes, “[w]hen it is claimed that external objects are ‘mental,’ there need be no suggestion that they are parts of, or produced by, the minds of ordinary agents and inquirers. All that is urged is that they *resemble* minds in certain respects.”<sup>20</sup> In other words, although all things are fundamentally part of the cosmic mind, they are not produced by particular human minds. On this reading, Peirce is a realist as defined by his *Century Dictionary* definition of “Realist”: “A philosopher who believes in the real existence of the external world as independent of all thought about it, or, at least, of the thought of any individual or any number of individuals.”<sup>21</sup> Yet and simultaneously, he holds to the doctrine of idealism as also defined by his dictionary definition: “The metaphysical doctrine that the real is of the nature of thought; the doctrine that all reality is in its nature psychical.”<sup>22</sup> We can say that objective idealism includes epistemological realism and idealist metaphysics.

## 2.2. Idealism and metaphysics

The *metaphysics* of objective idealism can be further elaborated on by inspecting the reasons Peirce provides, in “Architecture,” for rejecting alternative theories of metaphysics. Objective idealism is first proposed as a flat rejection of the metaphysical dualism held by Cartesianism. Peirce’s contending with Cartesianism is more a dismissal or banishment than a reasoned rejection; he does not explicate the Cartesian position other than by identifying it as a form of strict dualism holding to a “radical” divide between the two substances, mind and matter. Although he provides no reason, in “Architecture,” for rejecting dualism, based on other writings and his idea of synechism, Peirce clearly found it unsatisfactory because of its theoretical conclusions that defy common sense and ordinary experience. For example in “The Law of Mind”, we learn that dualism will not do because it makes inexplicable the indubitable facts of the interaction between mind and matter, the communication between separate minds, as well as corporate personalities. Only like can affect like—or in terms of idealism, only an idea can affect an idea.<sup>23</sup>

Taking dualism as untenable, Peirce next turns to monism juxtaposing his own theory with two alternative flavors. Each version, he says, takes psychical law and physical law either,

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believes that the restraint or condition of the real is not exhausted by what is mind-like, and suggests that Peirce does not hold to the idea of a cosmic or absolute mind (see e.g. HAUSMAN, *Peirce's Evolutionary Philosophy*, p. 144).

19 See, e.g., “How to Make Our Ideas Clear,” EP1 139.

20 Christopher HOOKWAY, *Peirce: The Arguments of the Philosophers* (New York: Routledge, 2009), p. 286.

21 PEIRCE, *The Century Dictionary*, “realist.”

22 Ibid., “idealism.”

23 See “The Law”, esp. EP1 331–2. The interaction between ideas and rejection of Cartesian dualism also occurs in “*Fraser's The Works of George Berkeley*,” EP1 99.

(A) as independent, a doctrine often called *monism*, but which I would name *neutralism*; or,

(B) the psychical law as derived and special, the physical law alone as primordial, which is *materialism*; or,

(C) the physical law as derived and special, the psychical law alone as primordial, which is *idealism*. (EP1 292).

The most curious flavor on this list of monistic philosophies is (A). The doctrine that takes psychical law and physical law, or mind and matter, as independent sounds more like a form of dualism, than so-called “*monism*” or “*neutralism*”. Peirce gives the reader little to go on to allay the confusion. The term “neutralism” is absent from his other writings.<sup>24</sup> In fact, in his paper, “Immortality in the Light of Synechism”, submitted to Paul Carus two and a half years after “Architecture”, he does not mention neutralism on a list of schools of philosophy; only materialism, idealism, and dualism make the cut.<sup>25</sup> By this time, perhaps Peirce came to see neutralism as just another form of, or nothing more than, dualism.

The term neutralism in all likelihood has its source in the philosophy of Ernst Mach, with which Peirce was familiar. Mach—a nominalist and follower of August Comte—in his writings speaks of “neutral monism”. His theory (one which William James later appropriated) claims that the basic elements of conscious experience—qualities such as, hot, cold, red, green, sweet, sour—are in themselves neutral to any categorical distinction between psychical and physical things. A basic element of pure experience is identified as either psychic or physical only in retrospect and on the basis of a functional interpretation. Hence it is not pure experience that is dual, that is, “[n]ot the subject matter, but the direction of investigation, [that] is different in the two domains.”<sup>26</sup>

24 It is at least absent from the *Collected Papers of Charles Sanders Peirce*, and the indexes of the Robin Catalogue, *The Essential Peirce*, and the *Writings*. However, as the editors of vol. 8 of the *Writings* suggest, Peirce appears to be thinking of neutralism in his review of Théodule Ribot’s *The Psychology of Attention* when he criticizes the doctrine of the “physiological psychologists” who “have struck a happy compromise between materialism and spiritualism” (W8:14).

25 See “Immortality in the Light of Synechism”, EP2 1.

26 Ernst MACH, *Die Analyse der Empfindungen und das Verhältnis des Physischen zum Psychischen* (*The Analysis of Sensations and the Relation of Physical to the Psychical*, 1886), quoted in *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, “Neutral Monism” (by Leopold Stubenberg), <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/neutral-monism> (accessed July 5, 2010). The interpretations of “neutralism” in Peirce scholarship are neither thorough nor consistent. Hookway provides the generic definition of neutralism as the conception that “matter and mind are alike modes of an underlying form of reality which is, in itself, neither mental nor material” (HOOKWAY, *Peirce*, p. 275). He, however, does not consider Peirce’s own reason for dismissing neutralism. Hausman, when recalling Peirce’s list of metaphysical theories in “Architecture”, simply ignores neutralism (see HAUSMAN, *Evolutionary Philosophy*, p. 147–8). Sandra B. ROSENTHAL, in *Speculative Pragmatism* (Amherst: The University of Massachusetts Press, 1986), p. 114–5, first says that Peirce calls neutralism both monism and dualism, but that he intends a form of dualism, and that he rejects the theory from a pragmatic, behaviorist, and Jamesian orientation. This bewildering interpretation, besides



Despite neutralism having its origin in Mach, Peirce's understanding of the theory appears to be different. Following Peirce's definition, in "Architecture", that neutralism takes psychical and physical law as independent, is one additional comment about the theory, which provides an important hint for understanding it. Neutralism, he says, is "sufficiently condemned by the logical maxim known as Ockham's razor, i.e., that not more independent elements are to be supposed than necessary. By placing the inward and outward aspects of substance on a par, it seems to render both [or neither] primordial" (EP1 292-3). The condemnation sheds light on the feature that makes neutralism monistic for Peirce. Unlike Mach's object of pure experience, the monistic element of Peirce's neutralism appears not to lie in the existence of a single thing (there is an inward and outward aspect), but in the relation between things. The two aspects are "on a par," they are on level ground together, that is, in some way equivalent or equal. The metaphysics of Spinoza may serve to illustrate the subtlety of neutralism. His monism takes mind and matter, or thought and extension, to be separate attributes of the one infinite substance God. Ontologically speaking, the two attributes are equal or neutral, for no one attribute is reducible to the other; neither one is primordial and both are essential to God. However, when we contemplate the activities of nature, we perceive it either under the attribute of thought or under the attribute of extension, and thus find either ideas or bodies operating within their particular causal nexuses. Thus, in terms of Spinoza's worldview, mind and matter are, on the one hand, the same by being both an attribute of the divine substance, and on the other hand, different by being unique ways in which substance is experienced or expressed as finite entities in nature. In describing neutralism, Peirce uses, not the language of attribution or finitude, but "primordially" to equate mind and matter on a single ("monistic" or "neutral") playing field.

Primordially is in fact the concept Peirce employs to relate mind and matter in each of the three versions of monism. Neutralism conceives mind and matter as both primordial; materialism conceives matter as primordial; and idealism conceives mind as primordial. The three possible configurations are clear enough, but the word "primordial" is an ambiguous term. It can mean first in a time series, logical priority, or convey some other sense of being fundamental or basic.

Talk of the primordial recalls other discussions in "Architecture", specifically those on biological evolution and cosmogony. In both of these discussions the theoretical framework Peirce uses to conceptualize a world in process is, as expected, his phenomenology.<sup>27</sup> When proposing, in particular, his cosmogony, he says that it is the "metaphysics [that] would appropriately be constructed" (EP1 297) from the

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misreading the passage in "Architecture", appears not to take Peirce's metaphysical speculations seriously.

27 The failure to conceive of Peirce's cosmogony and cosmology in terms of his categories—that is, from a *Peircean* perspective—plagues the commentaries that polemicize against his metaphysics. For example, it infects the early interpretation of his cosmogony by GALLIE (*Peirce and Pragmatism*, p. 222–42); Almeder's belief that Peirce's evolutionary account is a mechanical description, an egregious mistake given Peirce's explicit and sustained criticism and rejection of such a view (see his "The Idealism," p. 482–3); and the most recent critique by SHORT (see footnote 30 below).

three phenomenological categories. As such, then, it is the creation story of his idealist cosmology. The cosmogony goes:

[I]n the beginning,—infinitely remote,—there was a chaos of unpersonalised feeling, which being without connection or regularity would properly be without existence. This feeling, sporting here and there in pure arbitrariness, would have started the germ of a generalising tendency. Its other sportings would be evanescent, but this would have a growing virtue. Thus, the tendency to habit would be started; and from this with the other principles of evolution all the regularities of the universe would be evolved. (Ibid.).

The primordial soup of Peircean cosmogony, although so remote as to be on the fringe of existence and comprehensibility, is best understood as a pure state of feeling, that is, of psychic firstness, spontaneously sporting in random chaos. For Peirce, such spontaneity is the essence of mind, which is the principle of life or catalyst of cosmic development and order as we know it. The complete narrative of the cosmogony appears to follow the logic of a particular trichotomy Peirce provides in the previous paragraph: by a process of evolution (thirdness) the spontaneity of mind (firstness) grows into matter and other regularities (secondness) of the universe. In cosmic logic, thus, mind is primordial, not because it is first in a time series, but because it has (phenomeno-)logical priority. As the spontaneous element in the world—the tychistic “swerving of the facts” (EP1 289), or “sporting here and there in pure arbitrariness”, inherent in nature—it is the *necessary* pre-condition for evolutionary growth.<sup>28</sup> In other words, it is the necessary *a priori* or transcendental condition for the possibility of a chance “generalizing tendency” to physical law, time, matter, and other regularities or “main features of the universe as we know it” (EP1 297). (The condition of spontaneity and process of generalization together can be understood as being orchestrated by the ultimate Law of law, The Law of Mind,<sup>29</sup> enthroned as the Law of Peirce’s idealist metaphysics).<sup>30</sup>

28 Peirce recognizes tychism as a primary concern of “Architecture” several months later in the following *Monist* articles; see, e.g., the opening of “The Law”, EP1 312.

29 For a direct statement of The Law of Mind, see “Architecture”, EP1 291; and “The Law,” EP1 313 and 328, with the entirety of the article delivering its fullest expression. Besides the tendency to generalize, another important feature of The Law of Mind is that it involves a degree of teleology or intentionality. Mechanistic law is taken to be completely blind, but psychical law contains purpose. At any given moment, habit tends towards a particular end, despite the fact that habit is never permanent. SHORT, “Did Peirce Have a Cosmology?”, p. 537–40, provides an account of teleology or final causality in Peirce’s cosmology, albeit an unsympathetic and a contentious one.

30 Short rejects the validity of Peirce’s cosmogony, for he claims that it presupposes determinate events in conformity with pre-existing law, and that it is self-contradictory because it claims that both nothing happens and that there is a pool of feelings sporting (“Did Peirce Have a Cosmology?”, p. 529–33). There is a lot of non-Peircean thinking here. With regard to the latter claim, the pool of firstness properly speaking does not “exist,” yet nevertheless is *real*. Reality begets reality, and one form of reality is existence. There is no problem of self-contradiction or creation *ex nihilo*, as Short believes. With regard to the former claim, Short’s argument is mistakenly based on a temporal interpretation of the cosmogony. An

Just as real spontaneity in nature is necessary for an intelligible account of cosmic evolution, so is mind's primordially to matter for an intelligible account of cosmic metaphysics. We see that upon rejecting the theory of neutralism, Peirce does not arbitrarily settle on idealism over materialism, nor select it out of personal preference, à la the *a priori* philosopher. Rather, logic recommends idealism: "[t]he one intelligible theory of the universe." The theory of materialism will not do, for it "seems," Peirce says, "quite as repugnant to scientific logic as to common sense; since it requires us to suppose that a certain kind of mechanism will feel, which would be a hypothesis absolutely irreducible to reason,—an ultimate, inexplicable regularity" (EP1 292). The (il)logic of materialism is the same (il)logic of Spencerian (biological) evolution, criticized earlier in "Architecture". Spencerian evolution is unintelligible because it conceives law as the cause rather than the result of an evolutionary process; in other words, it assumes that heterogeneity is produced out of homogeneity. Imagine a biologist inquiring into the nature of evolution. She begins her studies by empirically recognizing the fossil records and current existence of certain species, which are further recognized as each exhibiting a variety of regular characteristics, such as anatomical structures, eating habits, and other indubitable zoological facts. Imagine then that the question arises, to the biologist: What is the source of such regularities? To propose as a hypothetical explanation the presence of some physical law that drove the evolutionary development and established the various observed regularities in nature is only to provide an additional regularity, that is, an additional law, which itself would

event is something temporal, an occurrence in time, and as such not an inherent feature of Peirce's evolutionary cosmology. Rather, events and time itself are regularities that are phenomenological *results* of the evolutionary process; in other words, temporality is a stage of development logically (not temporally) consequent to the primal chaos. (The parallel account of the cosmogony drafted in "A Guess", EP1 278–9 provides a duplicate description of time as a regularity or habit of the universe, and thus further confirms a non-temporal interpretation). Besides events, Short also believes that law, namely The Law of Mind, is presupposed. The pre-existence of law would be a problem for Peirce who is attempting to account for the derivation of all natural laws. Yet, the presupposition may not be fatal, and even seems not to be from the perspective of Short's own interpretation. Short recognizes that The Law of Mind is a general or formal character of particular natural laws. If this is a satisfactory description then one need not be so quick to dismiss grounding the latter on the former since the two are not identical. I believe that if one reads Peirce's explicit formulations of The Law of Mind it is clear that it is such a formal, or better, phenomenological description of the general features of psychic phenomena: that ideas possess an inherent quality, tend to spread, affect each other, lose intensity, gain generality, and that these features are logically related in terms of the universal categories of firstness, secondness, and thirdness. Short would do better in claiming that the cosmogony presupposes the truth of the categories. But, what in Peirce's philosophy does not!? For a better interpretation of Peirce's cosmogony that properly approaches it from the perspective of the categories, I recommend the thorough commentaries of SHERIFF, *Charles Peirce's Guess at the Riddle*, chap. 1; Douglas R. ANDERSON, *Strands of System: The Philosophy of Charles Peirce* (West Lafayette, IA: Purdue University Press, 1995), p. 63–7; and PARKER, *The Continuity of Peirce's Thought*, p. 206–15. Kelly Parker's account stands out for its detail and thoughtful analysis of the logic of the various stages of the evolutionary process, such as the development of space and time.

further beg to be explained by yet another law, *ad infinitum*. The hypothesis would be an insufficient scientific explanation.

Even worse, though, the hypothetical law qua “physical” would be, in a sense, impotent, not accomplishing the work hoped for by the biologist. Evolutionary cosmology makes of physical law a hardened habit of nature, yet natural scientists assume it is absolute law (for Peirce anyway<sup>1</sup>). Physical law as absolute can surely explain more law, but it cannot explain departure from law, for any departure whatsoever is precisely unlawful, a phenomenon that is ungoverned. The materialist who assumes absolutely determined matter to be the foundation of all substances—say, that mind is fertile matter (contra: “matter is effete mind”)—and physical law to be the foundation of psychical (i.e. statistical or probable) law cannot tell an evolutionary tale. For, not admitting the reality of pure spontaneity as a metaphysical tenet of the cosmos leaves unfilled the condition for the possibility of an evolutionary process.

The loss of genuine evolution in nature may seem small at first sight, but I think the materialist who holds a “doctrine of necessity” finds herself in a position more than she bargained for. Rejecting spontaneity denies not only all apparent instances of genuine evolution, but also personal growth, and the introduction of novelty into the world. For Peirce, these amount to a wealth of “broad and ubiquitous facts,” which the special sciences have already amassed for our philosophical consideration:

Consider the life of an individual animal or plant, or of a mind. Glance at the history of states, of institutions, of language, of ideas. Examine the successions of forms shown by paleontology, the history of the globe as set forth in geology, of what the astronomer is able to make out concerning the changes of stellar systems. Everywhere the main fact is growth and increasing complexity. (EP1 307–8).

These facts—not to mention in addition the sheer variety and specification of things at any given moment<sup>2</sup>—demand an explanation, one which a philosophy of determinism cannot but struggle to provide, yet a philosophy of idealism freely embraces by establishing mind and thus possibility at the “fountain of existence” (EP1 309).

Taking stock of the above arguments against the necessitarianism of materialism, Peirce’s justification for postulating his metaphysical theory of objective idealism appears to come down to the following reasoning: taking evolution, growth, novelty, variety, and specificity as facts about the world, mind must be primordial to matter, since it is a necessary condition of such facts.

Before closing my discussion on Peirce’s contention with the metaphysics of materialism, there is one more important facet that should not be overlooked, since it further contributes to an understanding of the metaphysics of objective idealism. Taking my lead from the evolutionary cosmology in “Architecture”, I have so far focused on the spontaneous element of mind in contrast to the determinism of materialism. This somewhat understates the case of Peirce’s idealist metaphysics. Recall that the cosmogony story explicitly characterizes the “pure arbitrariness” of the cosmic starting conditions as “a chaos of unpersonalized *feeling*” (my emphasis), that is, of

1 See e.g. “Architecture”, EP1 292; and “The Doctrine of Necessity Examined”.

2 See “The Doctrine”, EP1 310.

*psychic* firstness. The specification is crucial, for it furthers the meaning of “mind” as the metaphysical basis of reality.<sup>3</sup> It is one thing for a theory of metaphysics to argue for a vague unqualified spontaneity in the world, and another thing to argue for a spontaneity of feeling. Think of the atomic swerve of the Epicureans together with their resistance towards anthropomorphic accounts of the primordial atoms; they neither predicate atoms with feeling, nor any other property of mind. It seems likely that a materialist would sooner warm up to the idea that underlying her coveted physical reality is a vague and qualitative-less spontaneity than a qualitative-rich spontaneity of feeling. The indeterminacy fundamental to quantum mechanics may be a case of modern physics finally conceding the former, but not the latter. Such a notion, I think, remains a stretch for the physical sciences today and our common desire to explain everything in physical terms. Perhaps then we can take it as a final challenge to the reasonableness of objective idealism as the “one intelligible theory of the universe”.

The import of Peirce's theory that feeling is primordial in nature is most acute when he applies his idealism to the science of physiology, that is, to the micro-context of cellular and molecular phenomena. His infamous speculations, such as on the psychical behavior of protoplasm or life-slimes—the basic material of cells—recur throughout the *Monist* series, and receive a sustained discussion in “Man's Glassy Essence.”<sup>4</sup> Peirce explains that protoplasm grows, decays (“wastes”), reproduces, takes on habits, fatigues, and “not only feels but exercises all the functions of mind” (EP1 343). The meaning of these psychical functions is described by connecting each to a corresponding physiological observation and explanation. In particular, feeling is associated with a point of excitation or agitation in the protoplasmic material, and habit with the tendency of successive agitations to spread throughout the material along similar paths. Such events occur as a result of protoplasm being highly unstable in various ways: excitations do not always follow the same path, old habitual paths periodically break down, new habitual paths are created, and sometimes excitations simply fail to spread whatsoever.<sup>5</sup>

For an idealist, this is all good news; for one reason because we have discovered chance-spontaneity at the micro-level of biology. The fact that protoplasm is unstable and takes on general ways of behaving suggests that the strict physical law endemic to determinist explanations in biology is false, and that psychical law (The Law of Mind) has a primordial presence. Peirce makes this argument, and thus claims that materialism must call in a theory of tychism; however, he further insists that materialism “is bound to call in a *tychistic idealism* as its indispensable adjunct” (EP1

3 Peirce's *Century Dictionary* definition of the noun “mind” is a long one. The first definition begins: “That which feels, wills, and thinks” (*The Century Dictionary*, “mind”). In the other definitions there appears an effort on behalf of the author to attend to the role of feeling in mind. The second definition says that the “old psychologists” left out feeling in their account of mind; and the fourth definition is “Disposition; cast of thought and feeling; inclination; desire”.

4 For the account in “Man's Glassy Essence”, see esp. EP1 341–3; in “A Guess”, see EP1 262–70; in “Architecture”, see EP1 292; in “The Law”, see EP1 331–2; and in “Evolutionary Love”, see EP1 361.

5 See “Man's Glassy Essence”, EP1 348.

348; my emphasis). That is, it must accept not just that spontaneity is primordial in nature, but that psychic spontaneity, that is that feeling is primordial. He continues:

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. I long ago showed that real existence or thing-ness consists in regularities. So, that primeval chaos in which there was no regularity was mere nothing, from a physical aspect. Yet it was not a blank zero; for there was an intensity of consciousness there. (Ibid.)

For Peirce, a tychistic *idealism* provides a sufficient theory of physiology and of the universe. In line with Peirce's genetic way of thinking, I think the reason for envisioning feeling as primordial is in order to explain the existence of certain things found higher up in the evolutionary process. Regarding physiology, complex organisms are observed to depend on and be built up from cells, protoplasm, and molecules. In order to account for the macro-level of existing sentient creatures, feeling is assumed as real and present all the way down the scales of micro-biology. That is, establishing feeling or "an intensity of consciousness" as primordial permits an explanation of qualitative lived-experience, as well as the complexities of human consciousness (which is at bottom a collection of feelings and habits of feelings<sup>6</sup>). The alternative of materialism that takes mind as secondary or derived seems forced to introduce feeling and consciousness into nature at some arbitrary point (say brains, but not nerve-cells). Like the traditional emergentist position of Lloyd Morgan who envisions a pyramid where at its base are atoms, higher up are molecules, and highest are living organisms, sentience and consciousness are miraculously introduced without explanation.<sup>7</sup> Such an emergentism, despite its effort to the contrary, I think opens up a discontinuity or "weak dualism" (EP1 347) in nature. Likewise it seems would be a materialism that denied lived-consciousness as merely illusory or epiphenomenal, or reduced it to an abstract mechanism—say by representing it with mathematical models of wave vibrations.<sup>8</sup>

As Peirce says, the idea that protoplasm feels may "seem extravagant" (EP1 332). Yes, and ungenerous readers of Peirce have dismissed the theory on such shallow grounds. Yet, Peirce believes that it is "as extraordinary as indubitable" (EP1 343). If

6 On Peirce's understanding of consciousness see e.g. "The Law", EP1 325.

7 See Claudine TIERCELIN, "Sur l'idéalisme de C. S. Peirce", in *Revue philosophique de la France et de l'Étranger* 187, no. 3 (1997), p. 346–7; and the later English version, "Peirce's Objective Idealism: A Defense", in *Transactions of the Charles S. Peirce Society* 34, no. 1 (1998), p. 13–5. Tiercelin claims that Peirce himself is an emergentist. Tiercelin's claim is perplexing, especially since his explanation involves noting that the position of representative emergentists is a form of materialism.

8 Peirce's argument for the primordially of feeling in "Man's Glassy Essence" is not always adequately treated. Andrew REYNOLDS believes that Peirce equates spontaneity and feeling without reason and thus "attempts to sidestep" an explanation of how feeling is primordial (*Peirce's Scientific Metaphysics: The Philosophy of Chance, Law, and Evolution* [Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 2002], p. 62 and 116). On the contrary, my interpretation can serve as a clarification of Peirce's argument; see also Dilworth, "Peirce's Objective Idealism."

conceiving of feeling and moreover mind as primordial in nature requires a stretch in the imagination, this is no reason to condemn it. Returning to the prophetic words of Peirce's fellow New England idealist, Emerson insists on the essential importance of imagination in our contemplation of nature, and affirms that philosophy as well as "[s]cience [are] false by being unpoetical."<sup>9</sup> A stretch in the faculty of imagination may be just what materialism then needs.

### 3. Conclusion

Peirce's theory of objective idealism is a metaphysics that conceives the universe as a great cosmic mind, includes matter and physical law on one end of an ideal continuum conceiving them as the most regular phenomena of the universe, and envisions a vitality of feeling as primordial in nature.

I remarked in the introduction that critics of Peirce's objective idealism, and his cosmology as a whole, take them to be departures from his other work. In particular, it is believed that the cosmological theories do not lend themselves to pragmatism and the scientific method of inquiry in which Peirce and his intellectual peers had so much confidence. However, the fact of the matter is that Peirce himself believed his cosmological speculations to be thoroughly scientific, and his handling of them shows as much. It is appropriate, then, to conclude with a final remark on the scientific legitimacy of his metaphysics of objective idealism.

I see the theory of objective idealism in harmony with Peirce's scientific attitude and method of inquiry. In his metaphysical inquiries, his speculations obey the scientific method by meeting the demands of both logical coherence and fallibility to experimental testing.<sup>10</sup> Objective idealism initially recommends itself as a plausible scientific theory because it accounts for such ubiquitous facts as the phenomena of variety in the world, evolutionary process, and consciousness as a lived qualitative experience. That is to say that it is reasonable in that it provides an explanation for the actuality of these facts. Furthermore, out of the conceivable set of different metaphysical theories, only objective idealism fulfills the criterion of logical intelligibility, and thus makes the cut as a candidate for the true metaphysical explanation of the world. It is *an* intelligible theory of the universe—others may be proposed by future inquirers (and it is the burden of those who disagree to do so)—and is tentatively accepted as a hypothesis until it can explain “the tridimensionality of space, the laws of motion, and the general characteristics of the universe, with mathematical clearness and precision; for no less should be demanded of every Philosophy” (EP1 293). Like the architectonic system with which Peirce identifies his own philosophy at the opening of “Architecture,” it must contain both an explanatory power, as well as a responsive sensitivity to external facts. The consequences of objective idealism, thus, must be thoroughly worked out to determine if it is a theoretical framework capable of accounting for all the regularities found in the universe. To that end, one generous scholar, Parker, has proposed certain experimental findings of the contemporary sciences as possible evidence confirming it. One is the discovery in quantum mechanics of real spontaneity, and another, of the reality of generals, for

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9 EMERSON, “Poetry and Imagination,” in vol. VIII of *The Complete Works*, p. 15.

10 For the double criterion, see “the method of science” stated in EP1 120–3.

example in the vague state (momentum and position) of an electron as expressed by the Heisenberg uncertainty principle.<sup>11</sup> That is all well and good for testing objective idealism experimentally. Yet, I add that the empirical consequences of the theory need not be restricted to the *special* kind of data gleaned in the instruments of the laboratories of the natural scientists. Peirce in his later classification of the sciences classifies metaphysics as a science of philosophy, which is the science concerned with truth “as can be inferred from common experience” (EP2 259). In that case, then, we need only become more receptive of the world we daily inhabit in order to discern the “broad and ubiquitous facts” already served up for our philosophical contemplation. Our recurrent observations of the common occurrences of genuine growth, novelty, specificity, and variety are empirical confirmations themselves, and should not be dismissed or ignored. Thus, the scientific analysis of objective idealism appears in part a chore of philosophical contemplation, a rational examination of the theory’s logical intelligibility and explanatory power to account for the different regularities observed in nature. Indeed, an examination, as such, appears to be precisely the task of the enjoiner to future inquirers Peirce’s final sentence of “Architecture” has in mind: “May some future student go over this ground again, and have the leisure to give his results to the world” (EP1 297).

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11 See PARKER, *The Continuity of Peirce’s Thought*, 223–8; and REYNOLDS, *Peirce’s Scientific Metaphysics*, 136-7, that covers Peirce’s belief that the truth of Fechner’s Law is a confirmation of synechism.



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Data de envio: 26-10-2011

Data de aprovação: 22-12-2011