

What was Peirce's Objective Idealism?

O que foi o Idealismo Objetivo de Peirce?

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Abstract: The doctrine that Peirce named “objective idealism” was limited to the 1891-3 period and contradicts doctrines prominently asserted by him in years preceding and in years following. It consists in the identification of the subjective or introspectable with the objective or observable, taking William James’ description of the “stream of thought,” contrary to James’ intention, ontologically. The argument in support of that step, in the 1892 essay, “Man’s Glassy Essence,” is examined critically.

Keywords: Peirce. James. Objective idealism. Materialism. Feeling. Ideas. Consciousness.

Resumo: *A doutrina que Peirce chamou “idealismo objetivo” foi limitada ao período de 1891-3 e contradita doutrinas proeminentemente afirmadas por ele em anos anteriores e em anos seguintes. Ela consiste na identificação do subjetivo e introspectivo com o objetivo e observável, tomando a descrição de William James do “fluxo do pensamento”, ao contrário da intenção de James, ontologicamente. O argumento em apoio a este passo, no ensaio de 1892 “Man’s Glassy Essence” [A Essência Cristalina do Homem], é examinado criticamente.*

Palavras-chave: Peirce. James. Idealismo objetivo. Materialismo. Sentimento. Ideias. Consciência.

1. In the multi-volume *Century Dictionary*, 1889-91, to which Peirce contributed, he defined “objective idealism” as

[...] the doctrine of F.W.J. 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 representations. (quoted in an editorial note, W8:391).¹

There is little in this definition to distinguish objective from subjective idealism. Berkeley, too, said that the laws of physics are relations of ideas. That matter is extinct mind (*erloschener Geist*, Schelling said), suggests a difference, as does the reference to “absolute reason,” which is not an individual mind.

¹ Citations of the form “W” followed by volume and page number of Peirce’s *Writings*, “CP” followed by the volume and paragraph number of the *Collected Papers*, and as “EP” followed by volume and page number of the *Essential Peirce*. See References.

Beyond that dictionary definition, Peirce's references to Schelling are few and brief. He adopted the term "objective idealism" for a view of his own, but that was during a brief period only, 1891-3, in five cosmological essays he wrote for the *Monist* and in related manuscripts. In the first of the essays, "The Architecture of Theories," he proclaimed that "The one intelligible theory of the universe is that of objective idealism, that matter is effete mind, inveterate habits becoming physical laws." (EP1: 293).

In the third essay of the series, "The Law of Mind," 1892, he wrote of an

[...] evolutionary cosmology, in which all the regularities of nature and of mind are regarded as products of growth, and [...] a Schelling-fashioned idealism which holds matter to be mere specialised and partially deadened mind. (EP1:312).

Earlier, in a manuscript of 1887-8, "A Guess at the Riddle," which anticipates the doctrines of the *Monist* series, he alluded dismissively to Schelling, or rather to "the new Schelling-Hegel mansion, lately run up in the German taste, but with such oversights in its construction that, although brand new, it is already pronounced uninhabitable" (EP1: 247). Six years later, in a letter of 1894 to William James, he wrote to opposite effect:

[...] my views were probably influenced by Schelling, -- by all stages of Schelling, but especially by the *Philosophie der Natur*. I consider Schelling as enormous; and one thing I admire about him is his freedom from the trammels of system, and his holding himself uncommitted to any previous utterance. In that, he is like a scientific man. If you call my philosophy Schellingism transformed in the light of modern physics, I should not take it hard [...] (quoted in PERRY, 1935, vol. II, p.415-6).

We cannot assume any detailed debt to Schelling, and therefore we cannot turn to Schelling to tell us what Peirce's objective idealism was. Schelling's ideas of reason and of mind would not necessarily be Peirce's, even while the latter agreed with the former that matter is decayed mind. In 1893, in response to criticism by Paul Carus of his *Monist* cosmological articles, Peirce described himself as "a Schellingian, *of some stripe*" (6.605, my emphasis).

The same sort of problem pertains to any attempt to explicate Peirce's objective idealism in light of his writings of other periods, when he did not describe himself as either an objective idealist or a Schellingian. That there must be an affinity of mind and nature and that knowledge is one with its objects, or is in some respect one with its objects, are themes persistent throughout most of Peirce's career. But, again, the details might differ, so that what, exactly, mind is or what its affinity to nature is, would not necessarily be the same as that which he thought in 1891-3; nor would he necessarily have continued to think that matter is effete mind. In some broad sense, Peirce continued to be an objective idealist through to the end of his life, and was one long before he adopted the term. But the fact that he did not persist in calling himself an objective idealist suggests that he associated a specific content with that label, which, some time after 1893, no longer applied to what he was willing to affirm. In light of that possibility, I propose in this essay to explicate Peirce's objective idealism entirely with reference to the five *Monist* articles alone. I will conclude by briefly citing some evidence that it was later abandoned.

Peirce's objective idealism (limited to the period when he used that term) was developed in the context of his hypothesis that the laws of nature evolved from an initial chaos. In the passage from EP1:312 quoted above, he associates but distinguishes the two doctrines: "[...] an evolutionary cosmology [...] *and* [...] a Schelling-fashioned idealism..." (my emphasis). I shall make some comments about the cosmogonic hypothesis, but this essay is not about it.² Its focus is narrower.

2. Subjective idealism views the mind as a container (EP1:91), the contents of which are immediately known, while the world outside is known only by inference. But an inference to what is neither another mind nor a mental content is nonsensical; for I can have no idea of anything that is utterly unlike anything that I know immediately. What I have mistakenly taken to be "external" objects are no more than orderly complexes of my ideas – complexes united by such inferential relations as those that issue in predictions satisfied by what is experienced later. That there are minds other than my own, which I sometimes doubt, can be known only by analogy: as the ideas that constitute what I call "my hand" are responsive to ideas I call "my desires and decisions," I suppose that other hand-like complexes of ideas – those not responsive to my volitions – may be responsive to volitions hidden away from me in minds other than my own. All that I can meaningfully assert to exist are minds and mental contents. Of nothing else can I conceive. And neither can you, if you exist.

Objective idealism, by contrast, does not deny that things exist unknown, unthought, unfelt by any individual mind. In that respect, objective idealism is like materialism and Cartesian dualism. But, unlike dualism, it asserts an identity between knowledge and its objects. When I am not mistaken, the things which I feel or about which I think are exactly what I feel or think them to be – though they will be much more, as well. It follows that the mind is not a container: what's "out" can also be "in" (so Peirce in 1871, EP 1:91). Does it also follow that all that can be known is of the nature of knowledge? That it does follow is the argument of objective idealism. Feeling and/or thought therefore compose the universe, so that mind, properly speaking, is everything. But mind, in that sense, is not minds ordinarily so-called, i.e., individual minds. The latter are organizations within the universe – specifically and paradoxically, Peirce, as we shall see, held them to be or to depend on organizations of matter, i.e., of decayed mind, of a special type.

But materialism also identifies what we call "minds" with special organizations of what makes up the universe. There is much that objective idealism has in common with materialism. Both make one metaphysical substance to be everything; hence, both deny a Cartesian dualism of mind and matter. And both deny that anything depends for its existence on its being known by any individual; that is, both reject subjective idealism. But how, then, apart from a different choice of words, do materialism and objective idealism differ? What gives "matter" and "mind" distinct meanings? That is the key question to which we later return.

² In a companion piece to this essay (SHORT, forthcoming), I describe the cosmogonic hypothesis as part of a scientific research program, 1884-98, that Peirce never brought to fruition.

In the preceding paragraphs, I have reiterated the distinction between thought and feeling. One could suppose either that objective idealism identifies the universe with thought or that it identifies it with feeling or with both. With what did Peirce identify it during the period when he called himself an objective idealist?

3. In “Architecture”, Peirce wrote of the three “elementary phenomena of mind”: “Feelings, comprising all that is immediately present”; “Sensations of reaction”; and “general conceptions” or “a connection among feelings [...] determined by a general rule” (EP1: 290-1). Feeling, then, is implicated in all three elements. What is not feeling simpliciter is either a special sort of feeling, that of reaction, or a rule-governed complex of feelings. Thus, in what is next said, the word “ideas” may be supposed to refer to general conceptions, hence, to feelings connected:

The one primary and fundamental law of mental action consists in a tendency to generalization. Feeling tends to spread; connections between feelings awaken feelings; neighboring feelings become assimilated; ideas are apt to reproduce themselves. These are so many formulations of the one law of growth of mind. (EP1: 291).

The law of growth of mind is one law, because it pertains to one underlying substance, viz., feeling. The third article of the series, “The Law of Mind,” names that law in its title:

[...] there is but one law of mind, namely, that ideas tend to spread continuously and to affect certain others which stand to them in peculiar relations of affectability. In this spreading they lose intensity, and especially the power of affecting others, but gain generality and become welded with other ideas. (EP1:313).

Later in the essay, we are told that an idea’s “intrinsic quality” is feeling, while its other two “elements” are the “energy with which it affects other ideas” and its “tendency to bring along other ideas with it” (EP1: 325). Later still, “general ideas” are spoken of as “continua of feeling” (EP1:330). Feeling is basic.

Peirce’s objective idealism, then, is the doctrine that the universe is composed, not of the abstractions of thought, but of concrete feelings. The “mind” that, when deadened by habit, makes matter, is feeling.

But what is feeling? To what does that word refer? Do we know what Peirce was saying? Did he? It is by introspection that we know feeling: the taste of papaya, the pain of toothache – you have to have them to know them. Peirce’s objective idealism is the paradoxical doctrine that what is most intimate and private, not observable but only introspectable, in fact exists objectively: it composes the universe and all the things in it that we objectively observe. The “law of mind” must be known by introspection (see below, Section 6) but applies objectively, so that, by looking within our own minds, we grasp the fundamental law of the universe.

That law is fundamental, but not in the sense that all other laws – the laws of nature – may be deduced from it. Rather, according to the 1891-3 cosmogony, these laws have evolved by chance, from feelings “sporting” randomly (EP1: 297). The “law of mind” explains only why it is that feelings, once having “sporting,” spread and weld together, forming habits, i.e., law-governed matter. Which habits are formed

depends on which feelings sport first and in what combinations – matters of chance. Therefore, knowing the “law of mind,” we can predict that there will be laws, but we cannot predict the specific laws that there will be. To know the laws of nature, we have to observe patterns in what actually happens in the material universe.

Apart from its implicit appeal to introspection, there would be nothing to distinguish objective idealism from materialism – a non-Newtonian, non-deterministic materialism – except a perverse choice of words. Both doctrines maintain that all things, including individual minds, are composed of the same stuff; one calls that stuff “matter,” the other calls it “feeling.” The difference is that feeling is what we know by introspection. And that is a surprising position for Peirce to have held, given that earlier, in 1868-9, he famously argued that “We have no power of Introspection, but all knowledge of the internal world is derived by hypothetical reasoning from our knowledge of external facts” (EP1: 30).³

4. “The Law of Mind” states that feeling is “an element of consciousness” (EP1:290), while a preliminary draft of “Architecture” states that “feeling does not essentially involve consciousness proper” (W8:96). Presumably, then, “consciousness proper” is something that contains feeling but is more than feeling. As feeling makes up everything, consciousness can only be a particular organization of feeling. In 1888, Peirce had written of “Single, Dual, and Plural consciousness,” anticipating the list of three elements of mind in “Architecture.” The first of these, he continued, is “pure Feeling which forms the warp and woof of consciousness, or in Kant’s phrase its matter” (EP1: 282, cf. 8.73). That suggests a substantial conception of feeling. Rather than being an attribute or a function of the complex organization of certain sorts of organism (perhaps only animals, perhaps only vertebrates), feeling is the (nonphysical or, if you wish, immaterial) material out of which “consciousness proper” is formed, as clay is formed into a vase. But then consciousness also is not an attribute or function merely, even if it be found only in certain individual organisms, but consists of a kind of stuff somehow organized. And that stuff is the stuff of the universe! This surprising doctrine, that consciousness has substantial being, is, I believe, plain though unstated throughout the *Monist* series.

Since Peirce held that space and time must themselves have evolved from out of the original chaos, as feelings became organized, it is not clear what he meant when he said, in a passage quoted above, that “Feeling tends to spread.” It cannot spread spatially or temporally, at least not at first. It would seem that that phrase has to be understood in light of the next two phrases, that “connections between feelings awaken feelings” and that “neighboring feelings become assimilated,” though what “neighboring” means is mysterious also, as is what a feeling was before it was woken. In that same passage, spreading, assimilation, and so on are referred to as “generalization.” Peirce appears to have been trying to persuade us that the generality of concepts (ideas) somehow derives from the particularity of feelings as they “assimilate” with one another. Except for its extreme vagueness, one might

³ Mats Bergman (2007) accurately illuminates Peirce’s change of view on this most important question.

almost think that Peirce was here resuscitating Locke's theory that a general idea is a composite of particular ideas, as if our idea of triangularity were a composite image of all triangles. Such a composite would be a terrible mess, a mere smudge, and couldn't represent anything.

The next passage quoted above refers to an "intensity" of ideas, which they "lose" as they "gain generality and become welded with other ideas." What is that intensity? It seems to include "especially the power of affecting others [i.e., other ideas]." Compare: "As an idea spreads, its power of affecting other ideas gets rapidly reduced" (EP1: 325). But what effect on another idea or feeling does an idea or feeling have? The only effect mentioned is that the two become "assimilated" or "welded." It appears, then, that intensity is lost in its exercise: its power to meld with others is lost in the melding.

But not lost entirely. Peirce also spoke of the "vivacity" of feeling (see the quotation from EP1: 330, below), which remains and is even augmented in the ideas formed from feeling. And what could this vivacity be, but the aforementioned intensity or power to affect others? Consider another passage from "The Law of Mind":

A finite interval of time generally contains innumerable series of feelings; and when these become welded together in association, the result is a general idea... The first character of a general idea so resulting is that it is living feeling. (EP1:325).

The word "living," introduced abruptly, is surprisingly applied to ideas, and more basically to feeling, as if ideas and feelings are living things. A little later:

[...] instantaneous feelings flow together into a continuum of feeling, which has in a modified degree the peculiar vivacity of feeling and has gained generality [...] such general ideas or continua of feeling [...] are just as much as, or rather far more, living realities than the feelings themselves out of which they are concentered. (EP1: 330; might "concentered" be a misprint for "concerted"?).

Here, the quality of being alive is said to have grown, rather than diminished, as feelings "flow together" into ideas. One is tempted to suppose that when feelings merely spread, they lose vivacity, but when they meld together in an idea, that melding focuses their individual vivacities into one intense beam (consciousness?). But that temptation must be resisted, in light of the fact that we cannot say what spreading is, unless it is melding.

Peirce went so far as to account for one's ego and personality, including the phenomenon of multiple personalities, by tracing it back to "some kind of coördination or connection of ideas" or "teleological harmony in ideas"; for, "[...] a general idea is a living feeling" (EP1: 331). The next essay in the series states that "All that is necessary [...] to the existence of a person is that the feelings out of which he is constructed should be in close enough connection to influence one another" (EP1: 350).

Whatever the uncertainties of its formulation in these essays (Murray Murphey works hard to make sense of it: 1961, p. 335-44), the attraction of this doctrine of objective idealism is that it precludes even the statement of two of the seemingly unsolvable "problems" of modern philosophy, viz., "How could consciousness arise within a universe of unconscious matter?" and, "What is the relation of consciousness to its material objects?" As to the latter problem: "[...] the difficulties about resemblance and suggestion and reference to the external, cease to have any force" (EP1: 330).

5. A sentence fragment quoted above should be quoted in full, as, in it, Peirce appears deliberately to have been rejecting two of his earlier doctrines, Scholastic realism and (what came later to be called) pragmatism:

Third, these general ideas are not mere words, nor do they consist in this, that certain concrete facts will every time happen under certain descriptions of conditions; but they are just as much as, or rather far more, living realities than the feelings themselves out of which they are concreated. (EP1: 330).

It is clear in all his early writings, and especially in the three *Journal of Speculative Philosophy* papers of 1868-9 and the Berkeley review of 1871, that Peirce's idealism of that period was one of thought rather than of feeling, where thought has the abstractness of predicates or words:

[...] since no cognition of ours is absolutely determinate, generals must have a real existence. Now this scholastic realism is usually set down as a belief in metaphysical fictions. But, in fact, a realist is simply one who knows no more recondate reality than that which is represented in a true representation. (EP1:53).

[...] the mind is a sign developing according to the laws of inference. What distinguishes a man from a word? [...] consciousness, being a mere sensation, is only part of the *material quality* of the man-sign. (EP1: 53-4, Peirce's emphasis).

Any number of such passages might be cited to the same effect, that reality is general and so is mind, one being as it is represented and the other being the representation. That consciousness is a sensation, is consistent with the later view of consciousness as feeling. But its distinction as *only* part of a sign's material quality – hence, not part of its representative essence, which is general and not material – is at odds with the objective idealism of 1891-3. In the latter, feeling is made to account for everything.

As to pragmatism, the maxim later known by that name was published in 1878, in the next paragraph after the one that contains this sentence: “Our idea of anything *is* our idea of its sensible effects; and if we fancy that we have any other we deceive ourselves, and mistake a mere sensation accompanying the thought for a part of the thought itself.” (EP1: 132).

The pragmatic maxim for clarifying an idea is to explicate it in terms of conditional statements about what can be expected under certain conditions. The sentence just quoted says that that is all that an idea is, and that is precisely what Peirce denied in 1892, in the passage quoted from EP1: 330.

The word “mere” that in 1892 Peirce prefixed to the word “word” would not have been so prefixed in these earlier writings, in which, instead, it was prefixed, twice in the passages quoted, to the word “sensation.” If we attend carefully to Peirce's “mere”s and “only”s, we find that he has reversed himself dramatically.

In his earlier period, when he had not yet adopted the term, “objective idealism,” Peirce had already identified mind and reality, but the mind with which he identified reality was that of thought, cognition, conception. It was not mind as feeling. The identity was between the final opinion and the reality it represents. An opinion is a matter of words or of what can be fully expressed in words. Feelings and sensations, which are not wholly expressible in words, are part of what is individual and arbitrary that drops away on our march toward the final opinion. See, for example, the

important and luminous pages (EP1: 88-91) of the Berkeley review, where it is stated that “This final opinion, then, is independent, not indeed of thought in general, but of all that is arbitrary and individual in thought [...] any reality more absolute than what is thought in it [the final opinion], is a fiction of metaphysics.” (EP1: 89-90).

6. What accounts for this revolution in Peirce’s view? Nathan Houser, in his Introduction to W8, (Houser, 2010, p. xxxvi) remarks that “many of Peirce’s notes” c.1890 seem “almost as though they could have been drawn up while reading the book,” i.e., the first volume of William James’ *Principles of Psychology* (2 vols., 1890), and especially the chapter on “The Stream of Thought.”⁴ Houser reports that that work did not appear until September of 1890 but that the “Stream of Thought” had initially appeared under a different title in an 1884 issue of *Mind* (Ibid., p. xxxviii18). Other chapters of the *Psychology* – one on the perception of time and one on the perception of space – also appeared earlier, in 1886 and 1887 (Ibid., p. xxxii) and seem to have influenced Peirce’s views (SHORT, 2007, p. 81n12). In the five essays of 1891-3, James is cited but twice, both times with reference to doctrines that may be found (no sources were given) in his *Psychology* or in the earlier published articles. However, “The Law of Mind” seems especially to reflect some aspects of “The Stream of Thought.” (In “The Stream of Thought,” the word “thought” is used as a generic term encompassing feelings; in James’ 1892 abridgment of his *Psychology*, the *Briefer Course*, that chapter is renamed “The Stream of Consciousness” and is rewritten, substituting “consciousness” for “thought”).

In the non-physiological portions of his book, James attempted merely to describe our “mental life” (v. I, p. 1). Such description he characterized as “introspective” and he regarded the thesis that there is something to introspect as “the most fundamental of all the postulates of Psychology” (v. I, p. 185). The opening pages of “The Stream of Thought” show this method of description to be close in spirit to what would later be called “phenomenology” (whether by Peirce or by Husserl). It is so, in its rigorous refusal to admit anything explanatory, theoretical, or assumed (v. I, p.224). In particular, what is described is not ascribed to any underlying substance:

*The first fact for us, then, as psychologists, is that thinking of some sort goes on. I use the word thinking, in accordance with what was said on p.186, for every form of consciousness indiscriminately. If we could say in English ‘it thinks,’ as we say ‘it rains’ or ‘it blows,’ we should be stating the fact most simply and with the minimum of assumption. As we cannot, we must simply say that *thought goes on.* (v.1, p. 224-5, James’ emphases).*

⁴ In 1891, Peirce wrote a markedly critical review of James’ *Principles* for the *Nation* (8.55-71), and in later years (between 1894 and 1897: HOUSER, 2010, p. 1.n42) he jotted down a list of questions pertaining to it (8.72-89 contains some; see GIREL, 2003, for a careful discussion of the entire set). But these criticisms and questions are compatible with the specific influences I am alleging here. In general, James’ lack of rigor exasperated Peirce but there was much sympathy not only personal but sometimes on matters of substance, and each influenced the other.

Thoughts (feelings, etc.), then, are reported *as if* free-floating, independently of their being functions or attributes of any organism. But that does not mean that James asserted that they *are* independent. It means only that he was careful to avoid any explanatory hypothesis in his descriptions of them, hence, any claim either positive or negative about what they are in reality. Peirce made the bold move, doubtless deliberately, of taking what is described in this way as being *in fact* independent existents. In standard metaphysical language, he took feelings to be substances, i.e., as not existing dependently on anything else.

James, while being careful (in this part of his book) not to say what does the thinking, nonetheless did explicitly, indeed emphatically, suppose that thinking is “personal” (v. I, p. 225-9). That is a corollary of his introspective method and the fact that what is introspected by one person is not available to observation by others. However, having taken a substantial view of the “thoughts” described, Peirce was free to suppose that they exist impersonally, e.g., in an original chaos before there were any persons. But still, it is by introspection that we understand the reference of such words as “thought” and “feeling.” Thus Peirce was enabled to make the further astounding move, that we can know by introspection a non-mathematical, logically contingent “law” that governs what may emerge from that chaos: “There is no doubt about one idea affecting another, when we can directly perceive the one gradually modified and shaping itself into the other” (EP1: 326).⁵

7. How can these bold moves be justified? Ultimately, they were to have been justified by the success (in guiding empirical inquiry) of the cosmogonic hypothesis of which they form a part – a success that never came. However, something had to be said initially to render plausible, or even intelligible, the idea that feelings may have a substantial and objective existence. That seems to be an unstated purpose of the penultimate essay of the *Monist* series, “Man’s Glassy Essence.”

The argument of that essay depends on another view of James’, though held also by other psychologists of the time, that “habit diminishes [...] conscious attention” and, conversely, that when habits fail their purpose and break down, atten-

⁵ It is difficult to chart likely influences between Peirce and James; they were in frequent communication and inhabited the same scientific milieu where ideas like theirs were being discussed. Much of Peirce’s description of feelings, such as having extension spatial and temporal, as well as the basic approach to the mind described above, may well be due to James. In James’ later writing, the appearance of influence is reversed. In the last book published in his lifetime, *A Pluralistic Universe* (1909), James, in Lecture V, rejected his argument in the *Psychology* (v.I, p.158-62), that “states of consciousness” cannot “compound,” as if here he adopted Peirce’s theory that ideas do influence one another. More astoundingly, in this and in his posthumously published (but earlier written) *Radical Empiricism* (1912), he appears to have followed Peirce in ontologizing the contents of phenomenological description. In an appendix to *A Pluralistic Universe*, James cites Peirce’s 1891-3 *Monist* series with characteristic enthusiasm, but primarily to compare Peirce to Henri Bergson; it is of Bergson’s influence that James makes much in the text, where Peirce is never mentioned. Peirce rejected the comparison in the most strenuous terms (letter quoted in PERRY, 1935, v. II, p.437-8).

tion to stimuli is called for (James 1890, v. I, p. 114-5). The unhabitual actions then taken may if successful result in a new habit. While it is by introspection that we understand what consciousness is, James emphasized that habit can be observed in the behavior of others: “When we look at living creatures from an outward point of view, one of the first things that strike us is that they are bundles of habits” (v. I, p. 104). So also, when habit breaks down, that may be observed. Thus the observable is correlated with the introspectable. As we do not introspect the consciousness of others, the reasoning behind this correlation can only be analogical: I suppose that you feel as I do, when I observe you behaving as I do, and we suppose that lower animals, like ourselves, are more attentive to stimuli when their habitual reactions are thwarted. In “Essence,” Peirce cited the “principle of accommodation” stated by another psychologist: “Physiologically, [...] accommodation means the breaking up of a habit [...]. Psychologically, it means reviving consciousness.” (EP1: 348*n*, quoting from James Mark Baldwin’s 1889 *Psychology*).

“Essence” begins with and is more than half occupied by a wonderfully concise discussion of then-current molecular science. The discussion next moves to the complex molecules that make up the substance of a living cell, viz., protoplasm. Protoplasm is irritable: disturb it at one point and it begins to liquefy, which liquefaction spreads out from that center until, the disturbance being evaded or removed, the protoplasm regroups itself anew (EP1: 324). In some cases, “The course which the spread of liquefaction has taken in the past is rendered thereby more likely to be taken in the future [...]” (EP1: 343). This, Peirce said, is “habit-taking,” and, hence, “[...]there is a fair analogical inference that all protoplasm feels.” How far may analogical reasoning justifiably take us?

Peirce then made a persuasive argument that protoplasm’s habit-taking can be explained mechanically, given the instability and other characteristics of its molecules (EP1: 343-6). But of the correlative, analogically supposed feeling, he said, “Yet the attempt to deduce it from the three laws of mechanics [...] would obviously be futile” (EP1: 347). If habit-taking entails feeling, then it cannot be fully explained by what cannot explain feeling. No reason, beyond obvious futility, is given why feeling or consciousness cannot be explained by the three laws of mechanics, i.e., Newton’s.

Christopher Hookway (his reference to 6.245 must be a mistake for 6.264 (EP1: 347-8)) objects to the undefended assumption that (a non-idealistic) account of matter must be Newtonian (1985, p. 275); so also Murphey (1961, p. 345-6). Neither of these critics mentions that Peirce argued, two paragraphs earlier, that his mechanical explanation of habit-taking in protoplasm does not explain why habit-taking is an action “apparently violating the law of energy,” i.e., why it is irreversible.⁶ Such processes, he said, “depend upon aggregations of trillions of molecules” and that aggregation is not explained by the laws of mechanics (EP1: 347). Peirce was right about this: the thermodynamic Second Law makes the lumpiness of the existing universe a puzzle. The growth of entropy is toward uniform distribution of matter and energy. If the universe is fated to “heat death,” why hasn’t it died? This has been much-discussed. And the puzzle remains even when Newtonian mechanics is replaced by quantum

⁶ The breaking of a habit is not its formation reversed any more than a wilting flower becomes a bud.

mechanics. It is reasonable to suppose that Peirce saw that the problem is one of mechanics in general, and referred to Newton's exclusively, only because it was the only mechanics of corpuscular motion then known. He had already written that future inquiry would probably show that Newton's laws do not apply to small particles (EP1: 288). Therefore, his rejection of a mechanistic world-view does not rest alone on his quick comment about feeling, and it does not depend on a Newtonian understanding of mechanics.

Hookway's complaint, that the argument about feeling is "rapid and unsatisfactory," seems nonetheless just and applies also to the argument about irreversibility. Granted aggregations of molecules, statistical reasoning explains why the reversion of certain processes is practically impossible, i.e., as having a probability very near zero (nearer, the larger the aggregation). Boltzmann used the tiny probability left over to argue that, over the immensity of time, reversions could occur, resulting in occasional lumpiness in the universe. We just happen to live in one of the lumpy periods (there is no life in an unlumpy one). It is, therefore, far from obvious that we need objective idealism to explain lumpiness. It is even less obvious that it could explain it. In the first place, the hypothesis of an initial chaos ("in which nothing existed or really happened," EP1: 278) sounds very much like the maximum of entropy, as if the universe were heat-dead from the beginning. So, Peirce's cosmogonic speculation actually exacerbates the problem. In the second place, all through his cosmological period (1884-98), he tried to combine explanation of the evolution of general laws of nature with explanation of the evolution of heterogeneous systems, such as solar systems and organisms (e.g., EP1: 218); but how could one law, the supposed law that feelings spread, explain facts of such opposite types? If objective idealism explains the evolution of laws of nature, it probably cannot also explain aggregations of molecules.

8. Toward the end of "Essence," objective idealism is given a new twist. The inverse relation of habitualness and consciousness, having been taken by analogy all the way to protoplasm, is next extended to any irregularity anywhere:

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 [...] 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 [...] (EP1: 348).

Notice how far Peirce's substantial view of consciousness and feeling has taken him: contrary to ordinary usage, in which to be conscious is to be conscious of something and to feel is to feel something, he was led to assert that consciousness is most intense when there is nothing to be conscious of.

And even where there is no "chance-spontaneity", but only physical things behaving themselves, consciousness is still present (presumably, less intensely):

Viewing a thing from the outside [...] it appears as matter. Viewing it from the inside, looking at its immediate character as feeling, it appears as consciousness. These two views are combined when we remember that mechanical laws are nothing but acquired habits [...] the spreading of feelings. (EP1:349).

First, chance is feeling's "outward aspect," then matter and mechanistic law are also. So, feeling always has an outer aspect, which means that feeling always is inward.

What could "inside" and "outside" mean in this case? This talk inevitably makes us think of physical things, like baseballs – things having an outside and an inside, a surface and an interior, a skin and a stuffing. But Peirce spoke so of chance as well as of material things. Furthermore, *this* supposed "inside" of a material thing is supposed not to be itself material, like the string on the inside of a baseball. There is no other way of understanding these words than by a correlative dichotomy, between observation and introspection. The outside is what is observable by others, the inside is what can only be introspected by one whose inside it is. The inside might exist independently of introspective knowledge of it: feeling pain is not the same thing as introspectively remarking that one is feeling pain. It might exist independently of there being a power of introspection: we suppose that a rat in a trap feels pain and maybe anxiety but not that rats are much given to introspection. But can we understand this talk of feeling and of consciousness and of what is "inside," except through our own introspection? Its extension to others can only be analogical.

That is a remarkable development. We began by being instructed that what we know by introspection – our own feelings – is the sort of stuff that exists objectively and makes up everything in the universe. And then we learn that in its objective existence, this substance retains its subjectivity. The inside/outside dichotomy, implicated in subjective idealism's container theory of mind, was supposed to have been exploded by objective idealism. Instead, it now seems not exploded but projected: it has been made universal.

This is not the place to explore the host of problems such a doctrine raises. But there is one problem that should be mentioned; it parallels Peirce's difficulty accounting by one principle both for universal law and for heterogeneous organization. On the one hand, mind *qua* consciousness or feeling is the substance of everything and is most intently itself in the initial chaos when nothing in particular existed. On the other hand, particular minds depend on particular organizations of matter and have something of the intensity of the primordial consciousness only because of the peculiar instability of certain complex organic molecules: "[...] mind is to be regarded as a chemical genus of extreme complexity and instability," Peirce wrote in 1902 (6.101). After a long interregnum of mind becoming progressively deadened by the evolution of physical law, some of the most elaborate forms of matter, subject to complex laws of chemical combination, exhibit the old spark. But it is not as if protoplasm and the organisms it composes violate the laws of chemistry. Their instability is determined by those laws. So, at one end of the cosmic process, intensity of consciousness is associated with lawless chance, but at the other end it must be associated with something else, about which Peirce was in the 1890s less than clear.

Whether because of these problems or for other reasons, Peirce later returned, it seems, to his earlier view of mind. In 1902, he still identified consciousness with feeling – '[...] consciousness is nothing but Feeling, in general [...]' (7. 365) – but denied that consciousness is essential to mind:

The psychologists say that consciousness is the essential attribute of mind; and that purpose is only a special modification. I hold that purpose, or rather, final causation, of which purpose is the conscious modification, is the essential sub-

ject of psychologists' own studies; and that consciousness is a special, and not a universal accompaniment of mind. (7. 366).

In Peirce's view, purposefulness and, more broadly, final causation are observable in patterns of variation and uniform outcome. Like all observation, this is fallible because depending on the truth of an explanatory hypothesis; in this case, the hypothesis is that the pattern is due to there being selection for a type of outcome (SHORT, 2007, Ch.5). Introspection plays no part in this observation, and analogy to what we introspect in ourselves plays no part in the pattern's explanation, unless in those cases where selection is supposed to be done consciously. In denying that consciousness is essential to mind, Peirce rejected not only James' psychology but also his own objective idealism c.1891-3.⁷

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