

# Elective Metaphysical Affinities: Emerson's "Natural History of Intellect" and Peirce's Synechism

*Afinidades Eletivas Metafísicas:  
A "História Natural do Intelecto" de Emerson e o Sinequismo de Peirce*

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**Abstract:** The paper suggests that Peirce's late-phase metaphysical system aftermathed Emerson's basic philosophical ideas elaborated over four decades before him. Peirce, with characteristic brilliance, transformed Emerson's own luminous ideas into his categorial elaborations of abduction, cosmogonic synechism, universal semiosis, and the like. To illustrate this process of transformation, the paper provides a running synopsis of Emerson's last significant writing, "The Natural History of Intellect" (1870), which was originally part of a team-taught lecture series at Harvard that Emerson shared with six others, one of whom was the young C. S. Peirce. The synopsis evidences that virtually all of Peirce's major metaphysical tenets had their precedent in Emerson. Among other places, Peirce acknowledged Emerson's influence (together with that of Schelling) in his 1892 essay, "The Law of Mind." Even before that, he referenced Emerson's poem "The Sphinx" in his "A Guess at the Riddle" of 1887-88, the turning-point in Peirce's career toward metaphysical speculation. Peirce's conscious awareness of Emerson's philosophy and poetry traces back to many sources (including Emerson's long friendship with his father, Benjamin Peirce). The elective affinity between his and Emerson's views allows us to appreciate that the two authors forged a central strain of idealistic-cum-realistic metaphysical thinking that framed the later Pragmatisms of James and Dewey, among others.

**Keywords:** Abduction. Connaturality, or affinity of mind and nature. Critique of nominalism. Emerson's natural history of intellect. Evolutionary objective idealism. Generalities of thought. Identity and metamorphosis. Imagination as the basis of poetic and scientific discovery. Instinct and inspiration. Memory. Peirce's later-phase metaphysics.

**Resumo:** O ensaio propõe que o sistema metafísico de Peirce em sua última fase foi consequência das ideias filosóficas básicas de Emerson, elaboradas mais de quatro décadas antes. Peirce, com seu brilho característico, transformou as ideias luminosas de Emerson em elaborações categoriais de abdução, sinequismo cosmogônico, semiose universal e assim por diante. Para ilustrar esse processo de transformação, o ensaio apresenta uma sinopse contínua do último escrito significativo de Emerson, "The Natural History of Intellect"

(1870), que originalmente fez parte de uma série de palestras de equipe em Harvard que Emerson dividiu com seis outros, um dos quais o jovem C.S. Peirce. A sinopse demonstra que praticamente todas as principais doutrinas metafísicas de Peirce tiveram seu precedente em Emerson. Entre as várias referências, Peirce reconheceu a influência de Emerson (juntamente com a de Schelling) em seu ensaio de 1892, "The Law of Mind". Mesmo antes disso, ele citou o poema de Emerson "The Sphinx" em seu "A Guess at the Riddle" de 1887-88, o momento decisivo da carreira de Peirce em direção à especulação metafísica. Sua recepção consciente da filosofia e poesia de Emerson é oriunda de muitas fontes (inclusive da longa amizade de Emerson com seu pai, Benjamin Peirce). A afinidade eletiva entre sua visão e a de Emerson nos permite perceber que os dois autores forjaram uma linha central de pensamento metafísico ideal-realístico que modelou os pragmatismos posteriores de James e Dewey, entre outros.

**Palavras-chave:** *Abdução. Conaturalidade, ou afinidade de mente e natureza. Crítica do nominalismo. Generalidades de pensamento. História natural do intelecto, de Emerson. Idealismo objetivo evolucionário. Identidade e metamorfose. Imaginação como base da descoberta poética e científica. Instinto e inspiração. Memória. Última fase da metafísica de Peirce.*

In this paper I shall be concerned with focusing the metaphysical component of Peirce's career-text. By career-text I mean the system of ideas he finally settled into as the "completely developed system" he claimed to achieve in his 1902 letter to Wm. James. My approach will be both historical and comparative, providing evidence that, against the background of his brilliant career in the generation before Peirce, Emerson's last substantial philosophical work, "The Natural History of Intellect" (April 1870), set the parameters for Peirce's mature metaphysical speculation. Peirce, it appears, reprised and acknowledged that influence in the opening paragraph of his most important metaphysical essay, "The Law of Mind" (*The Monist* 1892).<sup>1</sup> Emerson's

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1 On the influence of Concord transcendentalism on Peirce's mature metaphysical thought, see FN (Footnote) 3 in my companion paper: "Elective Affinities: Emerson's "Poetry and Imagination" as Anticipation of Peirce's Buddhisto-Christian Metaphysics" (San Paulo, Oct. 31, 2008): "Referring first to his theory of spontaneous variation in nature, which he classified under the phenomenological rubric of Firstness, Peirce wrote: "I have begun by showing that tyichism must give birth to an evolutionary cosmology, in which all the regularities of nature and of mind are regarded as products of growth, and to a Schelling-fashioned idealism which holds matter to be mere specialized and partially deadened mind." In sly and charming fashion, Peirce went on to acknowledge that his system had its provenance in the atmosphere of Transcendentalism he had breathed as a young man:

I may mention, for the benefit of those who are curious in studying mental biographies [as Peirce himself was], that I was born and reared in the neighborhood of Concord — I mean in Cambridge — at the time when Emerson, Hedge, and their friends were disseminating the ideas that they had caught from Schelling, and Schelling from Plotinus, from Boehm, and from God knows what minds stricken with the monstrous monism of the East. But the atmosphere of Cambridge held many an antiseptic against Concord transcendentalism; and I am not conscious of having contracted any of that virus. Nevertheless, it is probable that some cultured

impact on Peirce's thinking already appeared in his unpublished manuscript "A Guess at the Riddle," one variant of which intended to begin with an allusion to one of Emerson's most popular poems, "The Sphinx" — concerning which, more below.

Emerson's "The Natural History of Intellect" originated from a team-taught university lecture series on philosophy to which Emerson contributed sixteen lectures at Harvard College in 1870-71.<sup>2</sup> The young Charles Sanders Peirce was one of the seven lecturers in this series.<sup>3</sup> It is plausible to surmise that the younger philosopher took cognizance of the contents of Emerson's lecture series and, consciously and unconsciously, nurtured certain seeds of influence which grew over the years and were harvested by Peirce in the mature phase of his own career.

Emerson's 1870 work is at any rate a key background material for divining the direction, if not elective affinity, of Emerson's and Peirce's mature metaphysical thinking. Emerson's "The Natural History of Intellect" was his last sustained philosophical work. It was something into which he put his intellectual energy, not only for the Harvard lecture series in 1870 — he was returning to the campus after a thirty

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bacilli, some benignant form of the disease was implanted in my soul, unawares, and that now, after long incubation, it comes to the surface, modified by mathematical conceptions and by training in physical investigations. (CP 6.102)

On this passage his biographer Joseph Brent astutely comments: "Peirce left us to decide whether he was actually unaware of the long idealist (and realist) infection, or had simply been hiding it from the incredulous gaze of his nominalist and mechanist fellow scientists. The latter seems far more likely" (*Charles Sanders Peirce: A Life*, p. 209).

- 2 "The Natural History of Intellect" appears in Emerson's Works, vol. XII, *Natural History of Intellect and Other Papers*, Cambridge, The Riverside Press, 1893. It is a composite work, melding together materials beginning in the earlier lecture series "Mind and Manners of the Nineteenth Century" (1848-49), and again during each of the "Natural Method of Mental Philosophy" (1858) and "Philosophy for the People" (1866) lecture series. Emerson himself did not complete the existing text of "Natural History of Intellect." It was first compiled by James Eliott Cabot for the 1893 Riverside Edition of Emerson's Works, and subsequently re-edited with additions by Emerson's son, Edward, in the 1903-04 Centenary Edition. The contents of it were broadly sketched across decades of journal entries and had their literary precedents in his most important writing such as *Nature* (1836), "Circles," "The Method of Nature" (1844), "Fate" (1860), *Society and Solitude* (1870), and *Letters and Social Aims* (1876).

While the manuscript for the 1870 Harvard lectures is no longer extant, Ronald A. Bosco has synthesized and annotated the surviving lecture notes of Annie Adams Fields and Francis Greenwood Peabody who attended Emerson's course. Despite such lingering authorial and editorial issues, the "The Natural History of Intellect" remains the culminating work of Emerson's philosophical output. James Eliot Cabot, his friend, editor, and biographer, who had as good a grasp of Emerson's papers as anyone after Emerson himself, said that Emerson "appears to have regarded ["The Natural History of Intellect"] as the chief task of his life" (cited by Richardson). The published text is comprised of three sections: "Powers and Laws of Thought" (the title added by Edward Emerson in 1903-04), "Instinct and Inspiration" (added by Edward in 1903-04 from manuscript sources), and "Memory" (previously an independent essay, also added by Edward in 1903-04).

- 3 On Emerson and Peirce participating in the 1870-71 Harvard Lectures, cf. FN 2 of my paper for the Benedictine university, Oct. 1, 2008, "Elective Affinities: Emerson's "Poetry and Imagination" as Anticipation of Peirce's Buddhisto-Christian Metaphysics."

year banishment after his “Divinity School Address”—but over long stretches of time before that. He nurtured the core idea of this work at intervals from 1848 to 1866, as announced in such headings for lecture courses on the “Mind and Manners of the Nineteenth Century (1848-49), “The Natural Method of Mental Philosophy” (1858) and “Philosophy for the People” (1866).

Now the early phase of Peirce’s career overlapped with the final phase of Emerson’s. Peirce’s polymathic career took off on its complicated trajectory, one devoted to formulating the phenomenological, normative, and metaphysical parameters of a grand “logic of inquiry.” Among other things, he developed an architectonic of the existing research sciences to clarify the gamut of trajectories of the mathematical, philosophical, and special disciplines. All of these came to a head in his formulation of a consummate metaphysical theory, which he called Synechism, comprising an objective idealism — namely that “matter is effete mind,” or “mind hide-bound with habits,” — set within an evolutionary cosmology that grounds the human mind’s affinity with the laws of nature, a sense of ascending melioration motivated by the normative ideal of concrete reasonableness, and a theory of abductive inference that subverts his pragmatism — itself a theory of rational conduct — and fallibilism.<sup>4</sup>

Emerson, I will argue, provided a substantial background for all of that, as Peirce pointedly acknowledged in his “The Law of Mind.” And in terms of historical precedents, much of the Pragmatism of James and Dewey ensued from this metaphysical-naturalistic logic of inquiry initiated by Emerson and Peirce. Let us also remember that, on the other side of the ocean, Nietzsche was so engrossed in Emerson that he carried a translated copy of his essays — *Versuche* — in his travel-bag.<sup>5</sup> In this light, Emerson’s philosophical finale in “The Natural History of Intellect” takes on a huge historical significance — though it is one that has been obscured by the professionalization and nationalization of philosophy in the contemporary academy.

The value of “The Natural History of Intellect” is precisely its *late* position in the corpus of Emerson’s writings. It affords the opportunity to verify the view that he continued to draw from the same pools of thought that energized his earlier writings, which in famous literary expressions blended Platonic, Neo-Platonic, transcendentalist Idealist, Hindu, Buddhist, and even Sufi ideas. This is an important hermeneutical

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4 On Peirce’s synechism: I call my philosophy synechism (6.202); defined as theory of continuity in reality (6.169); continuity is a form of generality, or homogeneity (7.735n6); the universe’s habit-formation has its origin in the original continuity which is inherent in potentiality. Continuity, as generality, is inherent in potentiality, which is essentially general (6.204); synechism is a regulative principle of logic (6.175); imports logical realism, objective idealism, tychism, and evolution (6.163); the “one law of mind,” ideas tend to spread continuously, losing intensity but gaining in generality (6.104); Thirdness represents continuity almost to perfection (1.337); Thirdness (7.653); all things swim in continua, the basis of fallibilism (1.171); pragmatism presupposes synechism, 5.402n, 5.415, 8.257, 1.62; Hegel theorized about continuity, which is the chief idea in modern mathematics and physical science (5.67); cf. “Questions Concerning Certain Faculties Claimed for Men” (1868) (5.213 ff.); Peirce, in a 1902 letter to James, claimed to have a completely developed system, and referred to pragmatism leading to synechism, “which is the keystone of the arch” (8.257).

5 STACK, George J. *Emerson and Nietzsche: An Elective Affinity*, Ohio University Press, 1992.

point in view of the variety of interpretive approaches to Emerson that have sought to represent shifts and declines in his philosophy over time. For our present purposes, it is also important for solving the riddle of Peirce's metaphysical thought.<sup>6</sup>

### I. Powers and Laws of Thought

With the young Peirce literally in the wings, Emerson began his sixteen Harvard lectures of 1870 with references to certain lectures on science he had recently attended in London and Paris.<sup>7</sup> The attitude of the speakers there was of one of "irresponsible security," he said, one that "takes for granted our admiration of the scientific facts." This led him to think of making a "natural history of the intellect," namely an enumeration of a "higher class of facts," — namely, those laws of the mind that are common to chemistry, anatomy, astronomy, geometry, but are also inclusive of intellect, morals, and social life. Why not?, he asks. Such laws are also "natural facts," and they have a deeper interest in bringing us closer to the mysterious seat and power of creation. "For at the last, it is only the exceeding and universal part that interests us," namely, "the laws of the world that are as true for a thousand years as of one day."

We see at once that Emerson's "natural facts" are metaphysical facts. The root of this interest, Emerson continued, is that man's mind is has a natural affinity with the world. In discovering the laws of nature we are coincidentally discovering the laws of our own minds. Hence the delight of such discoveries. This is a point he had previously made with regard to appreciation of the works of poetic genius in "Poetry and the Imagination" and any number of other essays that preceded that work.

And not only works of poetic imagination, the chief breakthroughs of the sciences,—he insisted here, — are in the same case. No matter how high or far-ranging it goes, "science adopts the method of the universe as fast as it appears while simultaneously comprehending its own powers of comprehension." Science, like poetry, is essentially anthropocentric and anthropomorphic. "In astronomy, vast distances, but we never go into a foreign system. In geology, vast duration, but we are never

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6 Another late work, Emerson's "Poetry and Imagination," was a companion piece in this chronological respect. The latter's composition dates from the mid-1850s, and it was ready for publication before 1872 (finally appearing in *Letters and Social Aims of 1876*). The two writings, "Poetry and Imagination" and "The Natural History of Intellect," together can be considered "grand cru" compositions that reap the harvest of four decades of Emerson's career-text aptly culminating as his metaphysics of the natural-metaphysical history of the intellect. Both now exist as composite works. "Poetry and Imagination" was assembled by James Eliott Cabot and Ellen Emerson from several previous lectures, especially the 1854 "Poetry and English Poetry"; it appeared in *Letters and Social Aims* (1876), vol. VIII of Emerson's Works, The Riverside Press edition, 1875, 1888. (Abridged text in Emerson's Prose and Poetry, selected and edited by Joel Porte and Sandra Morris, The Norton Critical Edition,, 2001, 297-31.)

7 The following presentation is a running synopsis of "The Natural History of Intellect;" therefore all citations of Emerson's text come in their exact sequence. As noted above, Edward Emerson supplied the headings of the three main sections, namely "Powers and Laws of Thought," "Instinct and Inspiration," and "Memory," for the published text in the Centenary edition of 1903-04.

strangers.” In many contexts Peirce would come to reprise this same doctrine of the mind’s affinity with nature as the basis of the possibility of scientific discovery. I will return to this crucial point in due course.<sup>8</sup>

Now, we know from his Journal entry of 1857 that the two principal laws of Emerson’s metaphysics of Nature were 1. Identity and 2. Metamorphosis.<sup>9</sup> Here he says that our metaphysics should be geared “to follow the flying force through all transformations, and name the pair identical through all variety.” Such a metaphysics of Nature involves “belief in the physical world as the expression of the spiritual or the real, and in the impenetrable mystery which hides (and hides through absolute transparency) the mental nature. I await the insight which our advancing knowledge of material laws shall furnish.”

In this higher dialectic Emerson reprised his earliest teaching that “Every object in nature is a word to signify some fact of the mind, if only it can be disclosed in a human language.” Meanwhile, he said here, we are impressed with the possibilities, and thrill to the truths, of scientific or poetic languages that express the constitution of any part of nature. The basic reason is that “Nature itself is a vast trope, and all particular natures are tropes.” Peirce was also to develop such Emersonian insights into brilliant articulations of social semiosis — his several complicated semiotic systems of interpretation — set with a theory of pansemiosis, or the universe as a single “vast representamen.”<sup>10</sup>

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8 Peirce on affinity and anthropocentrism: AFFINITY OF HUMAN MIND with NATURE (1.81, 2.754); INSTINCT and evolution (1.81, 2.754, also 5.172-73); ergo Peirce’s endorsement of ANTHROPOMORPHIC conceptions: “Bad poetry is false, I grant; but nothing is truer than true poetry. And let me tell the scientific man that the artists are much finer and more accurate observers than they are” (1.316); “‘Anthropomorphic’ is what pretty much all conceptions are at bottom [...] It is well to remember that every single truth of science is due to the affinity of the human soul to the soul of the universe, imperfect as that affinity no doubt is. Note: [...] an anthropomorphic conception, whether it makes the best nucleus for a scientific working hypothesis or not, is far more likely to be approximately true than one that is not anthropomorphic” (5.47). We are interested not just in Kant’s synthetic a priori but how synthetic reasoning is possible at all (5.348). “Man’s mind, having been developed under the influence of the laws of nature, for that reason naturally thinks somewhat after nature’s pattern” (7.39). “Man divines something of the secret of the principles of the universe because his mind has developed as a part of the universe and under the influence of these same secret principles” (7.46). Reality is not independent of Thought in general (7.336). The difference between mental and natural events is only a matter of degree (7.463). All mind partakes more or less of the nature of matter; hence it is a mistake to conceive of the psychical and physical aspects of matter as absolutely distinct (6.265).

9 For Emerson’s Journal entry on Identity and Metamorphosis, cf. RICHARDSON Jr., Robert D. *Emerson: The Mind on Fire*. University of California Press, 1995, ch. 55, 332-36.

10 Peirce on social and universal semiosis: *Anthropological semiosis*: Man is a sign 5.505, 5.283; signs anthropomorphically constitute mental behavior (5.253); we are in thought, not that thoughts are in us (5.289n); 5.314, 6.270, 7.583.) Cosmic semiosis: the universe is composed of signs (5.448n1); “If you ask me what part Qualities can play in the economy of the universe, I shall reply that the universe is a vast representamen, a great symbol of God’s purpose, working out its conclusions in living realities [...] The Universe as an argument is necessarily a great work of art, a great poem — for every fine argument is a poem and a symphony — just as every true poem is a sound argument” (5.119). In another

Emerson's career-long stock in trade was his theme of the metaphoric miracle of the mind, its discovery of "correspondences" with nature and its accompanying self-revelations as the source of all traditions — revelations in which "to cleave to God against the name of God." Here in his first Harvard lecture Emerson digressed to criticize the so-to-speak nominalistic secularity of the university, as well as the literary and scientific circles, in which egotistic and competitive agendas trump the pursuit of the idealistic truths he had in mind.<sup>11</sup> To balance the secular conspiracies of scholars, Emerson declared, we are in sore need of a genuine and sincere piety toward the legitimate inspirations of our intellectual nature, which contains the fundamental sources of all knowledge and action.

Emerson charmingly remarked here that his contribution to this philosophical focus would consist of writing "anecdotes on the intellect," "a sort of Farmer's Almanac of mental moods," not a methodic treatise but rather "dotting a fragmentary curve," which is system enough in its own fashion. Indeed, "I confess a little distrust of that completeness of system which metaphysicians are apt to affect. 'T is the gnat grasping the world." "All these exhaustive theories appear indeed a false and vain attempt to introvert and analyze the Primal Thought. That is upstream, and what a stream! Can you swim up Niagara Falls?"

Here paralleling Peirce's 1868 paper "Certain Faculties Claimed for Man," Emerson declared that we have no such legitimate powers of introspection. "I share the belief that the natural direction of the intellectual powers is from within outward, and that just in proportion to the activity of thoughts on the study of outward objects, as architecture, or farming, or natural history, ships, animals, chemistry — in that proportion the faculties of the mind had a healthy growth; but a study in the opposite [e.g., Cartesian, introspective] direction had damaging effect on the mind."

Metaphysics, he went on to say, can be dangerous as a single pursuit. It must be reinforced by life; by the observations of the working-man; must be biography, the record of some law whose working was surprised by the observer in natural action. Logic too must be "the logic of life." He looked forward to the day when metaphysics is taught by the poets. "The poet is in the natural attitude; he is believing; the philosopher, after some struggle having only reasons for believing."

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context Peirce spoke of man as a true symbol; in Pythagorean/Platonic fashion he endeavored to prove immortality from a consideration of eternal mathematical symbols, saying the necessary and true symbol is immortal (7.593); a man carries spiritual existence along with him in his opinions and sentiments, through sympathy and love; God is perpetually creating our spiritual reality (6.507).

- 11 Emerson's criticism of the academy in "Natural History of the Intellect," somewhat reminiscent of Schopenhauer's "On University Professors" in *Parerga and Paralipomena* (1850), is worth reading. Along the same lines, Peirce added a crucial perspective on the "takeover" of the universities by the nominalistic Humanists, "who hated the Dunses, and very naturally embraced the simpler doctrine of Ockham" — see the whole context in "Answers to Questions Concerning My Belief in God". In: STUHR, John J. (Ed.). *Classical American Philosophy: Essential Readings and Interpretive Essays*. Oxford University Press, 1987, p. 86-88. Emerson, Schopenhauer, and Peirce were all on the same page in critiquing philosophical nominalism and psychologism in favor of "Platonic" and "Scholastic realist" doctrines of general or universal realities.

(Peirce was later to concur, writing “Bad poetry is false, I grant; but nothing is truer than true poetry. And let me tell the scientific men that the artists are much finer and more accurate observers than they are” [CP 1.315]. Peirce’s conception of metaphysics was that it is not idiosyncratic; it deals with our public experience.)

### 1. The Excellencies and Auguries of Intellect

Emerson subdivided his sixteen lectures’ first main section, “Powers and Laws of Thought,” into three subsections, namely “The Excellencies and Auguries of Intellect,” “The Identity of Thought with Nature,” and “Instinct and Inspiration.” It is significant to note that the third topic, which virtually wrote the script for Peirce’s theory of abduction, continued as the title and contents of the second main section.

In “The Excellencies and Auguries of Intellect,” Emerson proceeded in his wonted way of focusing concrete analogies and metaphors instead of the bare abstractions of the philosophers. He first likened Thought to “an ethereal sea, which ebbs and flows, which surges and washes hither and thither, carrying its whole virtue in every creek and inlet.” It is “as the light, public and entire to each, and on the same terms. It is the excellence of this ethereal water that deepens human life, making us better than cow or cat.” Or again: “The grandeur of the impression the stars and heavenly bodies make on us is surely more valuable than our exact perception of a tub or a table on the ground.” The grand reality of our sublime perceptions is ever an unsolved, and unsolvable wonder. What we can and must say is this: “Who we are and what is Nature have one answer in the life that rushes into us.” Emerson then changed the metaphor of Thought as an ethereal sea to that of a “mystic stream.” In his Thought, he writes, a man stands on the bank of a river and watches an endless flow of the stream, floating objects of all shapes, colors, and natures. It is the stream of Reality present to his mind. His metaphysics of Identity and Metamorphosis was his approach to “the riddle of the Sphinx,” as he also wrote in one of his most personal and popular poems, “The Sphinx” (*Poems*, 1847).<sup>12</sup>

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12 “The Sphinx” was first published in the January 1841 issue of the Transcendentalist literary journal, the *Dial*, and later included as the first poem of his 1846 collection, *Poems*. It is worth noting that Emerson placed this poem first in all the later collections of his poetry. In the poem, the Sphinx tells the poet that if a person seeks out even one aspect of the mysteries of life, he or she will understand it all: “Who telleth one of my meanings, / Is master of all I am.” Of this very popular poem Emerson later wrote his own commentary: “I have often been asked the meaning of ‘The Sphinx.’ It is this, — The perception of identity unites all things and explains one by another, and the most rare and strange is equally facile as the most common. But if the mind live only in particulars, and see only differences [ . . . ] then the world addresses to this mind a question it cannot answer, and each new fact tears it to pieces, and it is vanquished by the distracting variety” (cf. WAYNE, Tiffany. *Encyclopedia of Transcendentalism*. New York: Facts on File, 2006. p. 262). Peirce’s “A Guess at the Riddle” (MS 909 1.354 ff.), which according to Houser and Kloesel, is “perhaps Peirce’s greatest and most original contribution to speculative philosophy, and marks his deliberate turn to architectonic thought,” evidently had Emerson’s poem “The Sphinx” in mind. One of the earlier drafts has the title, “Notes for a Book, to be entitled ‘A Guess at the Riddle,’ with a Vignette of the Sphynx below the title.” He wrote, on a variant

Peirce developed a similar metaphor of consciousness as a bottomless lake.<sup>13</sup> Discussing the Reality of God in another context, Peirce wrote: “Enter your skiff of Musement, push off into the lake of thought, and leave the breath of heaven to swell your sail. With your eyes open, awake to what is about or within you, and open conversation with yourself; for such is all meditation” (6.461).

Here Emerson, in “The Natural History of Intellect,” added that he has the suspicion that, as geologists say every river makes its own valley, so does this mystic stream. “It makes its valley, makes its banks and makes perhaps the observer too.” “The oldest religion” is the belief “that 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; that the genius of man is a continuation of the power that made him and that has not done making him” (my emphasis).

We note again that these thoughts anticipate the heart of Peirce’s objective idealism. In his companion work, “Poetry and Imagination,” Emerson had already developed the view that what we call “matter” are only “arrested” forms of mind in an evolutionary perspective. He harkened back to the “electric word pronounced by John Hunter a hundred years ago,” namely, nature’s two aspects of “*arrested and progressive development*” (Emerson’s emphasis). This “electric word” of progressive development indicated the evolutionary way upward from the invisible protoplasm to the highest organisms, — a doctrine which Emerson crucially notes here gives “the poetic key to Natural Science,” — while Hunter’s “arrested development” signified what Peirce would later thematize as the patterns of physical nature in the form of “mind hide-bound with habits.”<sup>14</sup>

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opening page, “this book if ever written, [ . . . ] will be one of the births of time.” Though never written, his major ideas in “A Guess at the Riddle” would soon appear in Peirce’s major papers of the *Monist* Metaphysical Series (1891-93), comprised of “The Architecture of Theories,” “The Doctrine of Necessity Examined,” “The Law of Mind,” “Man’s Glassy Essence,” and “Evolutionary Love” (Cf. *The Essential Peirce: Selected Philosophical Writings*. Ed. by Houser and Koelel. Indiana University Press, 1991, v. I [1867-1893], ch. 19).

13 Consciousness as a bottomless lake: “There are such vast numbers of ideas in consciousness of low degree of vividness, that I think it may be true, — and at any rate is roughly true, [ . . . ] that our whole past experience is continually in our consciousness, though most of it sunk to a great depth of dimness. I think of consciousness as a bottomless lake, whose waters seem transparent, yet into which we can clearly see but a little way. But in this water there are countless objects of different depths; and certain influences will give certain kinds of those objects an upward impulse which may be intense enough and continue long enough to bring them into the upper visible layer. After the impulse ceases they commence to sink downward” (7.547; cf. 7. 554).

14 On Peirce’s panpsychism or objective idealism: matter is effete mind, or mind hide-bound by habit (2.228); “The one intelligible theory of the universe is that of objective idealism, that matter is effete mind, inveterate habits becoming physical laws” (6.25); All mind partakes more or less of the nature of matter; hence it is a mistake to conceive of the psychical and physical aspects of matter as absolutely distinct (6.265); From the outside, considering its relation of action and reaction with other things, it is matter [ . . . ] From the inside, looking at its immediate character as feeling, it appears as consciousness (6.268). See also 6.104, 6.201, 7.364, 7.570. (A few of these paragraphs on Emerson’s reformulation of John Hunter’s theory of arrested and progressive growth have been

We can reformulate this doctrine by saying that Emerson's Hunterian view of Nature consisted of horizontal and vertical parameters. Nature's incessant manifestations along *horizontal* lines accounts for its specific, iterative differences, as these are generalized into the laws of the hard sciences; Nature's *vertical* lines of ascent appear in certain psychical parameters of the soft sciences, and more particularly in the anthropomorphic and meliorative perspective of idealistic philosophy. Peirce was similarly to argue that Thought appears in the gradations of Nature's patterns of habit-formation, such habits not being restricted to the humanly mental.<sup>15</sup> And his overall cosmology featured a metaphysical principle of growth, or cosmogony, the outstanding examples of which occur in the plasticity of human thought.<sup>16</sup>

In his day in 1870, after citing John Hunter's "electric word" of a hundred years standing, Emerson associated "this poetic key to Natural Science" with the contributions of Geoffroy St. Hilaire, of Oken, of Goethe, and of Agassiz and Owen and Darwin in zoology and botany, and he mused that the hints of this concept of "arrested and progressive development" are yet to be exhausted by physics. The hardest chemist, severest analyzer, scornful of all but the driest facts, he wrote, "is forced to keep the poetic curve of nature." All multiplicity rushes to be resolved into resemblance, identity, affinity, unity. Anatomy, osteology, "exhibit arrested or progressive ascent in each kind; the lower pointing to the higher forms, the higher to the highest, from the fluid in an elastic sack, from radiate, mollusk, articulate, vertebrate, up to man: as if the whole animal world were only a Hunterian museum to exhibit the genesis of mankind."

Accordingly, Emerson went on to say, the natural history of intellect is "a science of degrees." As man becomes conscious of the laws of intelligence through the laws of vegetable and animal nature, "so he is aware of an Intellect which overhangs his consciousness like a sky, of degree above degree, of heaven within heaven." Every just thinker has to account for these degrees, "these steps on the heavenly stair, until he comes to light where language fails him."

Emerson's application of the law of ascending metamorphosis reformulated the trajectory of the idealistic metaphysics he featured in his earliest writings. With regard to the "levels" of Intellect he insisted on here in his 1870 Harvard lectures, he metaphorically wrote in his wonted "Platonic" perspective:

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adopted from my paper on "Poetry and Imagination.")

- 15 Peirce on habits in nature: Habits in nature are not just mental (5.492); most plants take habits; the bed formed by a stream of water is a habit (5.492); habits are not mechanical (1.132); the law of mind (6.21), 6.86 intellect consists of a plasticity of habit (6.86).
- 16 Peirce's cosmogony articulates how law is developed out of pure chance, irregularity, and indeterminacy (6.213); cosmogony describes a growing virtue after the universe started the germ of a generalizing tendency (6.33); it postulates a continuous growth in the universe (1.175,1.362); all law is the result of evolution (6.91), from chaos to cosmos (6.262); "The evolutionary process is, therefore, not a mere evolution of the existing universe, but rather a process by which the very Platonic forms themselves have become or are becoming developed" (6.194). "We must search for this generalizing tendency in such departments of nature where we find plasticity and evolution still at work. The most plastic of all things is the human mind, and next after that come the organic world, the world of protoplasm. Now the generalizing tendency is the great law of mind, the law of association, the law of habit taking" (7.515).

It is a steep stair down from the essence of Intellect pure to [mundane] thoughts and intellections. As the sun is conceived to have made our system by hurling out from itself the outer rings of diffuse ether which slowly condensed into earths and moons, by a higher force of the same law the mind detaches minds, and a mind detaches thoughts or intellections. These again mimic in their sphericity the first mind, and share its power.

Organic life itself is another level, Emerson continued, and it is “an incessant parturition.” The parallelism of mind with nature is exemplified in the perception that just as there are viviparous and oviparous animals, so there are minds that produce new thoughts complete and entire, like armed men going out into the world, and others that deposit their dangerous unripe thoughts here and there to be brooded in other minds at slower paces. The “wonderous progeny” of mental intercourse is then born by conversation and communication, which are the marriage of souls.

Detached from their parents, thoughts become embodied in other vessels. “They gather to themselves wood and stone and iron, ships and cities, nations and armies of men; the ages of duration become the pomps of religion, the armaments of war, the codes of heraldry and states, agriculture, trade, commerce.” Our eating, trading, marrying, and learning are mistakenly taken by us as independent ends, whereas in reality they are only signifiers in the vast cultural symbolic of human life that participates in an encompassing world of Thought. This “cosmic semiosis,” I have noted, anticipated a like trajectory of Peirce’s writings, as we will now further explore.

## 2. The Identity of Thought with Nature

In the next subsection of “The Natural History of Intellect” Emerson re-focused his concept of the affinity of mind and nature — a concept which he first sounded in *Nature* (1836) and then re-inscribed in his major lectures, essays, and poems for the next 35 years. The mind’s appetite to arrange its phenomena, he noted here, is paralleled by the unities of nature which correspond to the mind’s organizing powers. “This methodizing mind meets no resistance in its attempts. The scattered blocks, with which it strives to form a symmetrical structure, fit. This design following after finds with joy that like design that went before.”

In his *Critique of Judgment* (1790) Kant, to be sure, had explored this ground of the formal presuppositions of the reflective judgment in which the mind takes delight in discovering its harmonious correspondences with nature. Emerson’s articulation is more properly idealistic, postulating a metaphysical identity for synthetic judgments: “It is necessary to suppose that every hose in nature fits every hydrant; so only is combination, chemistry, vegetation, animation, intellection possible. Without identity at base, chaos must be forever.”

We note here how Emerson’s thought continues to interweave his twin laws of Identity and Metamorphosis. They also illuminate my point that Peirce’s master-concepts of synechism and abduction are anticipated, — if not have their very provenance, — in Emerson’s 1870 lecture series at Harvard (which the young Peirce and a few other non-faculty members shared with the old Sage of Concord). Thus Emerson wrote as follows:

And as mind, our mind or mind like ours, reappears in us in our study of nature, nature being formed after the method which we can well understand, and all the parts, to the most remote, allied or explicable, — therefore our own organization is a perpetual key, and a well-ordered mind brings to the study of every new fact or class of facts a certain divination of that which it shall find.

The “divination” aspect precisely anticipates Peirce’s concept of abduction, the “first” heuristic moment of what can become a scientific or poetic inference.<sup>17</sup>

For Emerson, the scientific and poetic geniuses especially exhibit this power of instinctive discovery of new qualitative vistas, though such an instinct is, in degrees, a shared gift of every active animal intelligence. Such a “heuristic” of abductory inference can again be regarded as a “naturalized” form of Kant’s reflective judgment, here set within the allied *continua* of Nature that stream through the radiant prism of the inquiring human mind. At the same time it is Emerson’s key tenet of idealistic metaphysics.

As noted above, Emerson’s two laws of Identity and Metamorphosis were already prominent in several of his earlier essays on Nature — for example, his “Method of Nature” and “Nominalist and Realist” of his *Essays: Second Series* (1844). Here again, in his current mood of final distillation of his philosophy, Emerson precisely wrote: “Well, having accepted this law of identity pervading the universe, we next perceive that whilst every creature represents and obeys it, there is diversity, there is more or less of power; that the lowest only means incipient form, and over it is a higher class in which its rudiments are opened, raised to higher powers; that there is development from less to more, from lower to superior function, steadily ascending to man.”

For his part, Peirce’s master-concept of synechism can be construed as combining Emerson’s twin laws of Identity and Metamorphosis into one metaphysical prism — a prism which refracts into his concepts of continuity, generality, and homogeneity; his pan-psychistic theory of matter as mind hide-bound with habits; and his theory of the affinity of mind and nature at the basis of abductory inference and the ensuing representations of thought in a pansemiotic universe.

Goethe’s key word *metamorphosis* ubiquitously recurs in Emerson’s writing, and in two simultaneous connotations. As exhibited in the last citation, it stands both for the *lateral* differentiation of nature and the *vertical* continuum of evolutionary ascent to mankind. In the former sphere of “arrested growth,” we experience the endless repetitions of the starry heavens above, the cyclical seasons of our earthly years, the physical rhythms, pulsations, and resistances, the chemical affinities, and the extravagant profusions of lives and deaths of all vegetable and animal creatures.

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17 Peirce on abduction, 5.195-205; on pragmatism as the logic of abduction (5.171, 8.209); “After the passion to learn there is no quality so indispensable to the successful prosecution of science as imagination” (1.47); on Galileo’s *il lumen naturale* (1.80, 6.10); this retroductive reason rooted in the human mind’s affinity with the laws of nature (1.81); see also 2.86, 274, 7.38-39, 7.48; “every single item of scientific theory which stands established today has been due to Abduction” (5.172-73); all systems of rational performance have had instinct for their first germ. (7.381-82); “Man divines something of the secret of the principles of the universe because his mind has developed as a part of the universe and under the influence of these same secret principles” (7.46).

“Progressive growth,” on the other hand, is another axis of the nature of things; it is illustrated in the ascent to man and the ameliorative advance of intelligence in human civilization, — as both Emerson and Peirce emphasized.

Emerson concentrated here on both aspects in another brilliant expression of the affinity of the human mind with nature that undergirds scientific and poetic intelligence. He indicated that “man’s organs for breathing, for sight, for locomotion, for digesting, for protection by house-building, for attack and defense, for reproduction and nurture of his young,” — and so on endlessly in the naturalist’s account, — are all continuous with the organic functions of the lower animals. Accordingly, “If we go through the British Museum or the Jardin des Plantes in Paris, or any cabinet where is some representation of all the kingdoms of nature, we are surprised with occult sympathies; we feel as if looking at our own bone and flesh through coloring and distorting glasses.” The genius with which humans hunt or fish, or with which the robber proceeds stealthily about his work, and so on, “still remind us of visages in the forest” and that “the escape from the quadruped type [is] not yet perfectly accomplished.”

Though certainly not to his audience in 1870, all this may now seem like “Evolution 101.” But in his day Emerson, as also Peirce after him, eschewed a mechanistic interpretation of Darwinian evolution, rather placing this cosmology of family resemblances within an idealistic metaphysical framework. He thus insisted, for example, that “the affinity of particles accurately translates the affinity of thoughts, and what a modern experimenter calls ‘the contagious influence of chemical action’ is so true of mind that I have only to read the law that its application may be evident.” Or again: “The idea of vegetation is irresistible in considering mental activity. Man seems a higher plant.” He speaks also of the “arrests and progresses” of aboriginal human races. And with regard to “the palsy of misassociation” in contemporary theory, “The mechanical laws might as easily be shown pervading the kingdom of mind as the vegetative.” “Wisdom is like electricity.”

We are noting here that Emerson’s empirical instantiation of chemical, vegetable, and animal “occult sympathies” are functions of his metaphysical principles of Identity and Metamorphosis. Accordingly, “The Natural History of Intellect” now segues to the following two consecutive paragraphs that encapsulate his essential philosophy:

An individual [human] body is the momentary arrest or fixation of certain atoms, which, after performing compulsory duty to this enchanted statue [man], are released again to flow in the currents of the world. An individual mind in like manner is a fixation or momentary eddy in which certain services and powers are taken up and minister in petty niches and localities, and then, being released, return to the unbounded soul of the world.

In this eternal resurrection and rehabilitation of transitory persons, who and what are they? ‘T is only the source that we can see; — the eternal mind, careless of its channels, omnipotent in itself, and continually ejaculating its torrent into every artery and vein and veinlet of humanity. Wherever there is health, that is, consent to the cause and constitution of the universe, there is perception and power.

Then, in the final paragraph of this section of “The Natural History of Intellect,” Emerson drew the fundamental idealistic and pragmatistic conclusion. “Each man is a new power in Nature,” he stated. “He holds the keys to the world in his hands. No

quality in Nature's vast magazines he cannot touch, no truth he cannot see. Silent, passive, even sulky Nature offers every morning her wealth to man. She is immensely rich; he is welcome to her entire goods, but she speaks no word, will not so much as beckon or cough. Only this, she is careful to leave all her doors ajar, — towers, hall, storeroom and cellar."

All this, for the man who can take it. While "To the idle blockhead she is poor, sterile, inhospitable," "To the gardener her loam is all strawberries, pears, and pine-apples. To the sculptor her stone is soft; to the painter her plumbago and marl are pencils and chromes. To the poet all sounds and words are melodies and rhythms. In her hundred-gated Thebes every chamber is a new door."

These Emersonian sentences of cosmological and indeed metaphysical import fed the gamut of writings of his direct philosophical disciples, Peirce, Nietzsche, Wm. James, Royce, and Dewey, and indirectly through various networkings of influence, Bergson and Whitehead as well. Emerson, I am contending here, should be recognized as the forerunning *wholesaler* of such strains of the thought of philosophers who have followed after him, subsequently *retailing* his views in various pragmatismal and theoretical trajectories.

### 3. Instinct and Inspiration

This next heading, "Instinct and Inspiration," indicates a cluster of themes that the young Peirce, co-lecturer in the Harvard series of 1870, must have especially taken as food for his own thought. He was in a position to note that Emerson keenly developed this theme of Instinct, calling it the one source "upstream" of our mental powers from which all the rest flow — an apt metaphor for Peirce's anthropomorphic theory of abduction, the "first" phase of the logic of scientific and poetic discovery, which also he grounded in his metaphysical concept of synechism.<sup>18</sup>

A precedent to Peirce, Emerson here stated in 1870: "The healthy mind lies parallel to the currents of nature and sees things in place, or makes discoveries. Newton did not exercise more ingenuity but less than another to see the world. Right thought comes spontaneously, comes like the morning wind; comes daily, like our daily bread, to humble service; comes duty to those who look for it." Peirce, as we have already seen, was also keen to develop this kind of reflection into his emphasis on *il lumen naturale*, the spontaneous illumination prompting the discoveries of Galileo, Kepler, Newton, and the rest of the paradigm changers of modern science, while placing it front and center in his phenomenology of Firstness and the types of logical inference.

The evidence is that Emerson anticipated Peirce in highlighting this doctrine of the primacy of abduction as "the universality of instinctive wit." Instinctive wit, he said in his lecture of 1870, is "a universal capacity of discovery which we recognize whenever it appears, in high or in low forms." "T is a taper, a spark in the great night. Yet a spark at which all the illuminations of human arts and sciences were kindled." It is "that glimpse or indistinguishable light by which men are guided; though it does not show objects, it shows the way."

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18 Cf. footnote 17.

Emerson goes on to say that Instinct passes over into Inspiration in the sense of the latter being the former in a more exalted state, — “breaking the silence of Instinct, the spark bursting into flame.” Through this linkage we are entitled to go back through the pages of Emerson’s corpus of writings to read this doctrine of Instinct into his many formulations of transcendentalist “intuition” and the creative imagination — as also formulated in his late essay “Poetry and Imagination” — where poetic and religious revelations as well as scientific hypothesis-making consist of the same pre-rational promptings of the spirit.

And in view of its provenance for Peirce, it is worth noticing how Emerson described Instinct in his accustomed literary manner:

Instinct is a shapeless giant in the cave, massive, without hands or fingers or articulating tips or teeth or tongue; Behemoth, disdainful speech, disdainful particulars, lurking, surly, invincible, disdainful thoughts, always whole, never distributed, aboriginal, old as nature, and saying, like poor Topsy, “never was born, growed.” Indifferent to the dignity of its function, it plays the god in animal nature as in human or in the angelic, and spends omniscience on the lowest wants.

But while Instinct begins at this low point, at the surface of the earth, it also “ascends step by step to suggestions which are when expressed the intellectual and moral laws.” In this typical Platonic fashion, he thus worked his way upward from the instinctual to the inspirational outreaches of the soul.

As noted above, Peirce reprised this sense of abductory Instinct in his description of the Pure Play of Musement in “the lake of thought” that constituted his “Neglected Argument for the Reality of God” (6.452 ff.). He placed the prompting of Instinct front and center in his entire logic of inquiry. It remains his greatest contribution to the philosophy of science, though it has broader and deeper philosophical extensions.

Here Emerson temporarily retained the focus on the “Behemoth” character of Instinct which — again preceding Peirce, if not also Nietzsche — he calls “nature when it first becomes intelligent.” He likened the mythological depiction of “Pan, god of shepherds, who was not completely finished in god-like form, with emblematic horns and feet, or wearing a coat of leopard spots or stars,” as, in its own metaphorical way, signifying “Pan, that is, All.” “Pan dwells in mountains, tooting like a cricket in the sun, refusing to speak, yet his pipes made the intoxicating music of the spheres, though not heard by the dull, but only by the attentive mind.” This god of Instinct could terrify by earth-born fears called panics. Yet he was the secret of nature, and sometimes just a placid omnipotence. Such, says Emerson, was the homage paid to Pan by the Greeks, who delighted in accurate description and were not fond of the extravagant and unbounded. His own perceptive as well as literary powers of imagination came to bear on this topic that plays a proportionately large role in his lectures on “The Natural History of the Intellect.”

Humanity properly begins, as it did for the Greeks, he continued, when Perception and Will are added to Instinct, which is nevertheless “first” in the order of intelligence. Here again Emerson’s discourse alternates between the poles of Metamorphosis and Identity. Instinct is the working of Nature’s Metamorphosis. With ascending intelligence the Mind detaches, that is, differentiates. Such detachment or differentiation ultimately consists in seeing things “under a new order, not under a personal but under a universal light. To us they were economic, but to the universe

they have poetic relations.” “Indeed this is the measure of all intellectual power among men, the power to complete this detachment, the power of genius to hurl a new individual into the world.” The Socratic quest to know oneself is a corollary of the same movement of the spirit.

Emerson goes on to reaffirm that “A perception is always a generalization.” “It lifts the object, whether in material or moral nature, into a type. The animals, the low degrees of intellect, know only individuals. The philosopher knows only laws. That is, he considers a pure mental fact, part of the soul itself.” With this human power of generalization — so dear to Peirce’s antinominalistic pragmatism and agapistic cosmology — insight assimilates things in their just connections. It “sees all in God.” “In all healthy souls,” he continues, “is an inborn necessity of presupposing for each particular fact a prior Being which compels it to a harmony with all other natures.”

We note that these are not just poetic, but considered philosophical pronouncements of the ideal of concrete reasonableness. We might now characterize this Emersonian doctrine as Kant’s reflective power of judgment combined with Peirce’s synechistic objective idealism. Resonating with Hegel too, Emerson added that the Game of Intellect — whose heuristic paths begin in Instinct — is the perception that whatever befalls or can be stated is potentially a universal proposition, and contrariwise, with Schelling, that every general proposition is poetical again by being particularized or impersonated. He had already addressed the latter consideration at some length in his “Poetry and Imagination” that appeared in *Letters and Social Aims* of 1876, though written before this Harvard series of lectures in 1870.

“Seeing new facts” has the added quality of fatality, Emerson declared, in the sense that “the seeing is as much a fact in the natural history of the world as is the freezing of water in thirty-two degrees of Fahrenheit.” And such percipiency “affirms the presence and perfection of law, as much as all the martyrs.” It is “of a necessity older than the sun and the moon, and the Father of the Gods.” For a new act of perception is there with all its semiotic destinies, so to speak, which is to say its ramifications and implications leading to larger perception of mind in Nature, and so to new action.

Emerson here again writes the script of Peirce’s Pragmaticism and Pragmatism. “Thought,” he says, “exists to be expressed. That which cannot externalize itself is not thought.” Do not trifle with your perceptions, he says, or hold them cheap. They are the threads, fine as gossamer, on which the earth and the heaven of heavens are strung. “The universe is traversed by paths or bridges or stepping stones across the gulfs of space in every direction. To every soul that is created is its path, invisible to all but itself. Each soul, therefore, walking in its own path walks firmly.”

And Inspiration, as we have just seen, is the “high end” of Instinct. This reopens the door to a fairly lengthy consideration of one of the central topics of his philosophical and poetic output, Genius. The Geniuses are those who “represent” our own alienated majesty as Nature’s incarnations of Instinct maximized into Inspiration, thereby accomplishing new interpretive vistas of the affinity of mind with Nature.

But to recapitulate here, all of these spiraling formulations of Emerson’s “natural history of intellect” rang the changes on his idealistic metaphysics of Identity and Metamorphosis. I have suggested that Peirce, in his mature metaphysics, reprised the entire set of Emerson’s principal metaphysical tenets. One of Peirce’s many contributions

to philosophy consisted in converting Emerson's elliptical and analogizing method philosophizing into his own logical and analytical style, while otherwise agreeing on all the big-ticket items of Emerson's thought. Neither style is philosophically superior to the other, and we are blessed to inherit their mutual illumination, based on the magnetic affinity between them.

## II. Instinct, and Inspiration

We gain further insight into how deeply Emerson had reflected on this matter of the "natural facts" of mental activity by noting that, despite the foregoing considerable expatiation on the subject of Instinct and Inspiration as excellencies of the human mind, he returned to it as the topic front and center of the second main part of his sixteen Harvard lectures. And my surmise has been that the young Peirce, one of his co-lecturers at Harvard in 1870, must have taken this doctrine to heart.

Emerson begins this second segment of his 1870 Harvard lecture course with a remark that would anticipate Peirce's later theory of the "firstness" quality of consciousness and its role in his theory of abductive inference (poetical and scientific):

In reckoning the sources of our mental power, it were fatal to omit the one which pours all the others into mould — that unknown country in which all the rivers of our knowledge have their fountains, which by its qualities and structures determines both the nature of the waters, and the direction in which they flow. We have a certain blind wisdom, a brain of the brain, a seminal brain, which has not yet put forth organs, which rests in oversight and presence, but which seems to sheathe a certain omniscience; and which, in the despair of language, is commonly called Instinct.

He goes on to say "... a man's whole possibility of experience is contained in this 'habitual first look which he casts on all objects'." It is the basis of metaphysical discovery, as well as of every religion and civic order. It puts men on an equal footing, though it is activated differentially. "All true wisdom of thought and action, comes of deference to this instinct, patience with its delays."

Accordingly, Emerson continues, we must form the habit "of preferring instinct over the understanding in all cases." There is "a logic to the eyes and ears that transcends the skill of the tongue." Then, in the terms of his Platonizing theory of metamorphosis, "The Instinct begins at this low point at the surface of the earth, and works for the necessities of the human being; then ascends, step by step, to suggestions, which are, when expressed, the intellectual and moral laws." This, too, is Peirce's philosophy in a nutshell.<sup>19</sup>

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19 Peirce on amelioration, esthetic ideal, concrete reasonableness, axiagastics, agapism: Meliorative esthetic ideal and self-control: 5.402; self-control as means of participating in the on-going process of creation and the growth of concrete reasonableness — associated with Swedenborg's concept of *vir* — 1.575, 1.588, 1.615, 8.138n4. "The pragmaticist does not make the *summum bonum* to consist in action, but makes it to consist in that process of evolution whereby the existent comes more and more to embody those generals which were just now said to be *destined*, which is what we strive to express in calling them *reasonable*. In its higher stages, evolution takes place more and more largely through

Inspiration, as we have seen above, is precisely Instinct, whose normal state is passive, now functioning at the higher, active end of our mental powers. "It is the inventor of all arts, and is melodious, and at all points a god." The question then is how to awaken this drowsy giant. He devotes a considerable space lamenting the fact that even the geniuses only begin, but do not finish, this task of activating their inspirations, as if Nature delighted in continually diverting their attention from themselves.

Nevertheless, in the healthy mind, thought illustrates the pattern of ascension of instinctual discovery to certain levels of metaphysical inspiration. Such thoughts also circulate. "Thoughts expand, vary, recruit themselves with relation to all Nature, paint themselves in wonderful symbols, appear in new men, in institutions, in social arrangements." "The mark and sign of it is newness. The divine energy never rests or repeats itself, but casts its old garb, and reappears, another creature; the old energy in a new form, with all the vigor of the earth; the Ancient of Days in the dew of the morning."

This theme of newness too is the Metamorphosis — a theme Emerson, as both a literary and philosophical figure, bequeathed to the American Pragmatists that came after him.<sup>20</sup> "Novelty is the means by which we arrive at the old universal ends; it is the test of the presence of the highest power, alike in intellectual and in moral action. How incomparable beyond all price seems to us a new poem — say Spenser — or true work of literary genius! In five hundred years we shall not have a second. The poet, indeed, is incredible, inexplicable." The new vista of the spirit the poet momentarily discovers is incredible to himself as well. "The poet works to an end above his will, and by means, too, which are out of his will. Every part of the poem is therefore a true surprise to the reader, like the parts of the plant, and legitimate as they." Or as he poeticized elsewhere, both poet and reader shall "mount to paradise / By the stairway of surprise" ("Merlin". In: *Poems*, 1847).

Instinct *qua* Inspiration is such a miraculous power to convert all Nature to the poet's use. "It is a tap-root that sucks all the juices of the earth." "This employment of a new means — of means not mechanical, but spontaneously, appearing for the new need, and as good as the end — that denotes the inspired man." "This is equally obvious in all the fine arts; and in action as well as fine arts." In this context Emerson adds cogently: "What a revelation of power is music! Yet, when we consider who and what the professors of that art usually are, does it not seem as if music falls accidentally and superficially on its artists? Is it not otherwise with poetry?" (We have just to examine the lives of the Mozarts, Schuberts, Beethovens, Baudelaires, and Prousts to confirm this observation.)

All this he places within his long-practiced articulation of the spontaneities of Nature, whose deep basis is the *natura naturans* he expressed in "The Method of Nature" (1844) and other earlier writings. "Yes, this wonderful source of knowledge remains a mystery; and its arts and methods of working remain a mystery: it is unta-

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self-control, and this gives the pragmatist a sort of justification for making the rational purport to be general" (5.433).

20 Cf. HOWE, Irving. *The American Newness*. Harvard University Press, 1986. For Emerson and Peirce, the poets, whose concrete perceptions come in under the radar of abstract concepts, precede the philosophers and scientists in the discoveries of mind leading to growth in concrete reasonableness. But this is properly an Emersonian, not a Peircean, theme.

mable; the ship of heaven guides itself, and will not accept a wooden rudder." "It is not our will." Its quality is that it commands, and is not commanded.

The inexorable Laws, the Ideas, the private Fate, the Instinct, the Intellect, Memory, Imagination, Fancy, Number, Inspiration, Nature, Duty; — 't is very certain that these things have been hid as under towels and blankets, most part of our days, and, at certain privileged moments, they emerge unaccountably into light. I know not why, in all our popular and proverbial language, divine, to signify its independence of our will. Intellect is universal, not individual. [...] We have a higher than a personal interest, which, in the ruin of the personal, is secured.

From this key statement Emerson segues to one of the most conspicuous themes of his entire career, one that came in for strong underlining, for example, in the other cornerstone of his later career, "Poetry and Imagination." The higher than personal interest involved in inspiration, which is instinct functioning actively at the higher end of consciousness, is that a writer, who writes by the grace of God, "should write affirmatively, not polemically, or should write nothing that will not help somebody" [...] "that we must affirm and affirm, but neither you nor I know the value of what we say; that we must be openers of doors and not a blind alley; that we must hope and strive, for despair is no muse, and vigor always liberates." This reiterates his rejection of the Nay-sayers that he had expressed from such early lectures as "The Tragic," "Experience," "Fate," and "Illusions," as well as in his poetry. It became a conspicuous theme in his disciple Nietzsche.

The whole ethics of thought, he adds, is of this kind, "flowing out of reverence of the source, and is a sort of religious office." All intellectual virtue consists in a reliance on affirmative Ideas. "It must be carried with a certain magnificence. We must live by our strength, not by our weakness." "Why should we be the dupes of our senses, the victims of our own works, and always inferior to ourselves?"

Normally we are alienated from ourselves, not trusting the unknown powers of our own thought. Still, the whole world is nothing but an exhibition of the powers of this principle, which distributes men. "Whence came all these tools, inventions, books, laws, parties, kingdoms: Out of the invisible world, through a few brains." The world is intellectual, and every man is. "Every man comes into Nature impressed with his own polarity of bias, in obeying his power, opportunity and happiness reside." He is strong by his personal genius or not at all. The secret of power therefore is "delight in one's work." "All we ask of any man is to be contented with his own work. An enthusiastic workman dignifies his art and arrives at results. Him we account the fortunate man whose determination to his aim is sufficiently strong to leave him no doubt." These themes of personal "power" in the metamorphoses of Nature and its distributions have been a consistent theme from "Self-Reliance," the companion piece to his "The Over-soul" essay in *Essays: First Series* (1841); they reappeared in "Nominalist and Realist" of *Essay: Second Series* (1844), and then in the all later essays ("Fate," "Power," "Wealth," "Beauty," "Worship," "Illusions" etc.) of *The Conduct of Life* (1860) .

To this magical power derived from fidelity to his nature, Emerson continued, a man may add the mechanical force of perseverance. In such persistency of disciplined will he harnesses the strength of Nature. "There is but one liberator in this life from the demons that invade us, and that is, Endeavor, — earnest, entire, perennial

endeavor.” This too is Nature’s way. She requires that men put their lives into their deeds even to excess, to partiality, as well as to the sacrifice finally of that individualism, as she scatters her seeds of inspiration inexhaustibly. Peirce, we can note, in his own way reprised this theme in his normative science of rationally controlled conduct in pursuit of the idea of concrete reasonableness.

Emerson ends this section on Instinct and Inspiration with further reflections on their religious implication within a general theory of the natural history of the intellect. “There is probity of the Intellect,” he says, “which demands, if possible, virtues more costly than any Bible has consecrated. It consists in an absolute devotion to truth, found in a faith in truth.” As Emerson states: “In short, the whole moral of modern science is the transference of that trust which is felt in Nature’s admired arrangements, to the sphere of freedom and of rational life.” And indeed such scientific studies “seem to me to derive an importance from their bearing on the universal question of modern science, the question of Religion.”<sup>21</sup>

Emerson, like Peirce after him, framed an Objective Idealism that roundly rejected the bluff empiricism and reductive materialism of his day. (These are still the issues today; in philosophy they sometimes hide behind the names of empiricism, ordinary language philosophy, skepticism, contextualism, historicism, and the like.) He contrasts this mounting secularism with the more affirmative religiosity of bygone days. “The Buddhist who finds gods masked in all this friends and enemies, and reads the issue of the conflict beforehand in the rank of the actors, is calm. The old Greek was respectable and we are not yet able to forget his dramas, — who found the genius of tragedy in the conflict between Destiny and the strong *should*, and not like the moderns, in the weak *would* ...” He considers his own philosophy of the Identity and Metamorphosis of Nature to be a version of such a perennially affirmative religion.

The joy of knowledge, the late discovery that the veil which hid all things from him is really transparent, transparent everywhere to pure eyes, and the heart of trust which every perception fortifies, — renew life for him. He finds that events spring from the same roots as persons; the universe understand itself, and all the parts play with a sure harmony.

This is an Objective Idealism highlighting the affinity of mind and nature motivated by a Platonic principle of the Good and the Beautiful. Such a “cosmic” principle allows Emerson to authorize once again his persistent themes of transparent episteme, metaphoric correspondence of mind and nature, and inexhaustible metamorphosis, into his signature affirmation of the ascendancy of life. Certainly it gives the lie to those nay-sayers among his critics who have said that his position shifted in his later years into skepticism, or declined into a secular, or merely pragmatic epistemology and ethics. Peirce, James, Nietzsche, Dewey, and others all drank from these religious waters.

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21 In Peirce’s terms, religious faith is the presupposition and precondition of science. Cf. my paper “Elective Affinities: Emerson’s ‘Poetry and Imagination’ as Anticipation of Peirce’s Buddhisto-Christian Philosophy of Science.”

### III. Memory

The third main heading of “The Natural History of Intellect” is “Memory.” Originally this was a stand-alone essay, which Edward Emerson added to the former work in the Centenary edition of Emerson’s complete works in 1903-04. It provides another “anticipation” of Peirce’s philosophy, particularly those aspects of synechism articulated in terms of the infinitesimal continuities of time.<sup>22</sup>

Emerson identifies Memory as a “primary and fundamental faculty, without which none other can work.” “It is the cement, the bitumen, the matrix in which the other faculties are embedded.” “Without it all life and thought were an unrelated succession. As gravity holds matter from flying off into space, so memory gives stability to knowledge. It is the cohesion which keeps from fallings into a lump, or flowing in waves.” Memory, we may say, mediates between Identity and Metamorphosis.

It will be important, in other words, to see how he folds this topic of Memory into his broader discussion of novelty via the mysterious workings of Instinct and Inspiration. “We like longevity,” he begins, “we appreciate the signs of riches and extent of nature in an individual.” This too enters his framework of ascending metamorphosis. The lowest life remembers. “The sparrow, the ant, the worm, have the same memory as we. If you bar their path, and offer them somewhat disagreeable to their senses, they make one or two trials, and then once for all avoid it.” In Peirce’s terms, they form new habits.

We also prize machines for their iterative and reversible powers. “The builder of the mind found it not less needful that it should have retroaction, and command of its past act and deed. Perception, though it were immense and could pierce through the universe, was not sufficient.” In man, in addition to his technological inventions, memory also performs the work of the higher spiritual life “by the strength of these divine arms.” “It holds together past and present, beholding both, abides in the flowing, and gives continuity and dignity to human life. It holds us to our family, to our friends. Hereby a home is possible; hereby only a new fact has value.” Here memory functions in the mediating sense which Peirce ascribes to Thirdness, the associative faculty of human consciousness interpretive of and thereby generative of the ongoing significance of facts.

Opportunities for investment, Emerson metaphorizes, are useful only to those who have capital. The Past has a new value every moment to mind endowed through the incessant purification and better method of its memory. The old whim or perception was an augury of a broader insight, at which we arrive later with securer conviction. “This is the companion, this is the tutor, the poet, the library, with which you travel.” Memory is not a picket, “but a living instructor, with a prophetic sense of the values which he guards; a guardian angel set there within you to record your life, and by recording to animate you to uplift it.” It begins to accumulate from

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22 Peirce on infinitesimals and time: An infinitesimal is that which is quantitatively greater than zero but smaller than any number; they are not discrete units, but potencies producing both continuity and spontaneity. Immediate consciousness has an infinitesimal interval of time, 6.109-111; 1.499 instants or possible events form a continuum, in which there are no self-identical and distinct parts (1.499); cf. 6.170, 1.337; rejects atomism via synechism (6.173); rejects mechanical interpretation of association (6.36).

the day of your birth, gathering and expanding meanings, “until it shall become the whole law of Nature and life.”

True then to his intention of writing the “natural history of intellect,” Emerson now declares that the memory is a perfect apparatus, on a par with the organic functions of the teeth and the stomach. In Peirce’s terms, nature is ever a continuum. Memory is one of her vectors of transmission. One can think, for example, of the prodigious capacity for comparative evaluation in the associative powers of a master wine-taster in the following remark: “There is no book like the memory, none with such a good index, and that every kind, alphabetic, systematic, arranged by names of persons, by colors, tastes, smells, shapes, likeness, unlikeness, by all sorts of mysterious hooks and eyes to catch and hold, and contrivances for giving a hint.”

The miracle of this collecting and re-collecting power is that of all the million images that are imprinted on it, the very one we want reappears in the center of its clear plate in the moment when we want it — and sometimes when we do not want it! “On hearing a fact told I am aware that I knew it already. You say the first words of the old song, and I finish the line and stanza.” Late in life, he notes, we live by our memory, which is then a *vespertina cognitio*, but also in our solstices or periods of stagnation. The differences between men is that in one the memory with inconceivable rapidity flies after and recollects the flying leaves of the past, — “flies on wings as fast as that mysterious whirlwind, and the envious Fate is baffled.” Where it exists, such a command of old facts is our splendid privilege. “The seneschal of Parnassus is Mnemosyne. This power alone will make a man remarkable.”

In the implied framework of his Platonizing philosophy, Emerson here adds that the quality of association by which a man remembers is the high difference. One man’s memory is a farm-book or a pocket diary; another’s is the history of science and civility and thought; and still another deals with laws and perceptions that are the theory of the world.

But this mysterious power that binds our life together has its own vagaries and interruptions. Memory can have a personality of its own. Sometimes it “departs like an old aunt with her anecdotes.” “We hate this fatal shortness of Memory, these docked men whom we behold.” “Only so much iron will the loadstone draw; it gains new particles all the way as you move it, but one falls off for every one that adheres.” For this reason Plato (in the *Phaedrus*) deplored writing as a barbarous invention which would weaken the memory by disuse. The rhapsodists in Athens could recite at once any passage of Homer that was desired. And if writing weakens the memory, what now of printing, where the newspaper “is a sponge or invention for oblivion,” the journalistic rule being that for every fact added to the memory, another is crowded out, and only that which the affection animates can be remembered?

In views of these vagaries of memory, Emerson concludes, the mind has a better secret in its active power of generalization. “Short memory is shallow thought.” “As deep as the thought, so great is the attraction. An act of understanding will marshal and concatenate a few facts; a principle of reason will thrill and magnetize and redistribute the whole world.” Every fact of a new science is mutually explaining, each one adding transparency to the whole mass. His affirmative suggestion here is that the damages of forgetting are more than compensated by the large values which new thoughts and knowledge give to what we already know. “If new impressions

sometimes efface old ones, yet we steadily gain insight; and because all Nature has one law and meaning, — part corresponding to part, — all we have known aids us continually to the knowledge of the rest of Nature.”

The good Memory is thus one of the compensations which Nature grants to those who have used their days well. “I would rather have a perfect recollection of all I have thought and felt in a day or a week of high activity than read all the books that have been published in a century.” “You may perish out of your senses, but not out of your memory and imagination.” And the memory “has a fine art of sifting out the pain and keeping the joy.” It is a familiar experience that the most romantic fact becomes more romantic in memory. There is this power of sinking the pain of any experience and of recalling the saddest in tranquility — themes Emerson self-referentially explored in such essays as “The Tragic,” “Experience,” and “Fate,” and with which he dealt intimately in “Threnody,” his poetic lament on the death of his son Waldo.

But Fate also is an artist. We forget also according to beautiful laws. We must therefore be severe with ourselves. What we wish to keep, we must once thoroughly possess. “Then the thing seen will no longer be what it was, a mere sensuous object before the eye or ear, but a reminder of its law, a possession of the intellect.” “I have several times forgotten the name of Flamsteed, never that of Newton; and can drop easily many poets out of the Elizabethan chronology, but not Shakespeare.”

For the most part, Emerson is content in this short essay with providing a desultory phenomenology of the power of Memory. He comes to its conclusion with a renewed emphasis on his central concern to describe the mind’s actively ascending power. This has in effect been his life’s work, to assert our power to have “an original relation to the universe.” Here he states:

You cannot overstate our debt to the past, but has the present no claim? This past memory is the baggage, but where is the troop? The divine gift is not the old but the new. The divine is the instant life that receives and uses, the life that can well bury the old in the omnipotency with which it makes all things new.

New knowledge calls upon old knowledge, “new giving undreamed-of value to old.” This gives us “a sublime hint that there must be an endless increase in the power of memory and the amount of knowables; and since the Universe opens to us, the reach of the memory must be as large.”

Peirce added to this his “law of mind,” that is, of the infinitesimal continuities of mind obtaining between past, present, and future in various intensifications and generalizations.

Emerson ends this lecture on this note of the mind’s ongoing continuity with the Universe. “With every broader generalization which the mind makes, with every deeper insight, its retrospect is also wider. With every new insight into the duty or fact of today we come into new possession of the past.”

This consideration again sets the stage for Peirce’s category of Thirdness as the mind’s mediating capacity in phenomenological and cosmological senses.

Again obliquely referring to his own creative career as exemplary of his doctrine, Emerson writes: “When we live by principles instead of traditions, by obedience to the law of the mind instead of by passion, the Great Mind will enter into us, not as now in fragments and detached thoughts, but the light of today will shine backward and forward.” Memory therefore is a presumption of a possession of the future in

which a more ideal and symmetrical universe is presaged. “Now we are halves, we see the past but not the future, but in that day will the hemisphere complete itself and foresight be as perfect as aftersight.”

In sum, these are intimations of the symmetrical Universe which occupied Emerson’s own Instinct, Inspiration, and Memory through his long career, set within the binary of Identity and ascending Metamorphosis that became the parallel, corresponding, affine laws of mind and nature in his vintage philosophical articulations. We can say that Peirce, with his genius for cosmological speculation, reformulated Emerson’s metaphysical worldview in his own fashion.

In retrospect, Peirce “remembered” Emerson. He acknowledged that he grew up in the atmosphere of “Concord transcendentalism,” and my surmise has been that he must have been generally familiar with the lineaments of Emerson’s metaphysical worldview expressed in “The Natural History of Intellect.” He shared in the same Harvard lecture series in which Emerson wrote and presented this final philosophical effort of his life. He appears to have drawn the line of interface with Emerson’s metaphysics in every significant respect. Compared with Emerson’s generation which wrestled with the new dying Calvinist religiosity and the new scientific universe in transcendentalist terms, Peirce represented the leading edge of a new generation of mathematicians, scientists, logicians, and philosophers who traded in the coin of more analytical and pragmatical categories. But symbolically speaking, Peirce “recollected” Emerson. The trajectory of his “completely developed system” was stunningly Emersonian, reformulating the “big ticket items” of Emerson’s metaphysics in his own brilliant way.

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