

Elective Affinities: Emerson's "Poetry and Imagination" as Anticipation of Peirce's Buddhisto-Christian Metaphysics

Afinidades Eletivas: "Poetry and Imagination" de Emerson como Antecipação à Metafísica Budista-Cristã de Peirce

David A. Dilworth

Philosophy Department

State University of New York at Stony Brook

Dd9414@aol.com

Abstract: The paper is the first of two to be published in **Cognitio** which explore the hypothesis that the thought of Ralph Waldo Emerson (1803-1882), brilliantly expounded in the generation before Charles Sanders Peirce (1839-1914), anticipated, if not provided the direct provenance of, Peirce's mature metaphysical ideas. The papers provide running commentaries on Emerson's later-phase essays, "Poetry and Imagination" (1854, published in 1876) and "The Natural History of Intellect" (1870). "Poetry and Imagination" is shown to contain the seeds of Peirce's 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 connaturality or affinity with the laws of nature, a doctrine subtending his abductory logic of scientific discovery. Mutatis mutandis, all these components were already present in Emerson's essay. Peirce spoke of his "buddhisto-christian religion," which was another name for Emersonian cosmosemiosis. His originality consisted in applying Emerson's emphasis on the poetic to the scientific imagination, though the seeds of the latter are present in Emerson's "The Natural History of Intellect" and other essays as well.

Keywords: Objective idealism. Evolutionary cosmology. Connaturality of mind and nature. Logic of abduction. Cosmosemiosis. Poetic and scientific imagination.

Resumo: Este trabalho é o primeiro de dois a serem publicados em **Cognitio**, explorando a hipótese de que o pensamento de Ralph Waldo Emerson (1803-1882), brilhantemente exposto na geração anterior a Charles Sanders Peirce (1839-1914), antecipou, ou mesmo forneceu a origem direta das idéias metafísicas maduras de Peirce. Os trabalhos fornecem comentários contínuos sobre os ensaios da fase posterior de Emerson, "Poetry and Imagination" (1854, publicado em 1876) e "The Natural History of Intellect" (1870). "Poetry and Imagination" contém as sementes do idealismo objetivo de Peirce — notadamente, que "matéria é mente exaurida" ou "mente inflexível com hábitos" —, estabelecido dentro de uma cosmologia evolucionária que fundamenta a conaturalidade ou afinidade da mente humana com as leis da natureza, uma doutrina subtendo sua lógica abductiva de descoberta cientí-

fica. Mutatis mutandis, todos esses componentes já estavam presentes no ensaio de Emerson. Peirce referiu-se a sua “religião budista-cristã”, outra denominação da cosmoemiose emersoniana. Sua originalidade consistia em aplicar a ênfase de Emerson à imaginação poética e científica, embora as sementes desta última estejam presentes em “The Natural History of Intellect” de Emerson, como também em outros ensaios.

Palavras-chave: Idealismo objetivo. Cosmologia evolucionária. Conaturalidade da mente e da natureza. Lógica da abdução. Cosmoemiose. Imaginação poética e científica.

Peirce and Concord Transcendentalism

This is the first of two related papers on Emerson’s “anticipation” of Peirce’s philosophy — the second will be presented at the 11th International Meeting on Pragmatism at the Pontifical Catholic University of São Paulo on November 3, 2008.

John Dewey wrote that the name of Ralph Waldo Emerson (1803-82) should be mentioned in the same breath as that of Plato. Emerson was indeed our modern Plato. He and Charles Sanders Peirce (1839-1914), — who has been called the modern Aristotle and could well be considered the modern Leibniz, — remain America’s two greatest philosophical names. Both, while covering the gamut of philosophical topics, were essentially metaphysicians. They flourished a generation apart, but their careers overlapped. Emerson was a poet-metaphysician whose method was analogy; Peirce was a scientist-logician-metaphysician whose method was analysis. On the “big-ticket items” of metaphysical idealism and cosmogony they shared a common worldview, so that, in terms of elective affinities, — I will contend, — Peirce, in his philosophical maturity, came to repossess the essential thrust of Emerson’s metaphysical idealism — just as Nietzsche, across the ocean, did so in his own fashion.¹

This will not be to deny manifold influences, not limited to Emerson, on Peirce’s mature metaphysical views. Peirce came to be the polymath *par excellence* in American intellectual history and he was possessed of an especially inventive mind. He absorbed and transformed ideas from all quarters, ancient and contemporary. But Emerson, the nineteenth-century’s most important literary and philosophical figure, flourished in the generation preceding Peirce and was well known to Peirce as the leading intellectual of that generation. My thesis will be that Peirce, a genius in his own right, inevitably absorbed the genius of Emerson. And indeed in due course Peirce recognized their elective affinities.

Crucial in this respect is the probability that Emerson’s writings served as a conduit for Peirce’s “Schelling-like” objective idealism. My humble approach to this vastly ramifying topic will be to limit my focus to the two vintage metaphysical writings of Emerson: (1) “Poetry and Imagination”, and (2) “The Natural History of Intellect,” as providing the essential metaphysical framework of Peirce’s mature philosophy. (The latter work will be my topic for the 11th Int’l Meeting on Pragmatism, while the former will occupy this paper.)

¹ STACK, George J. *Emerson and Nietzsche: An Elective Affinity*. Ohio University Press, 1992.

First, in passing but entirely relevant, a word about the latter, “The Natural History of Intellect.” This was the published form of Emerson’s sixteen lecture course delivered at Harvard in 1870 in a series of graduate-level lectures by various scholars not formally affiliated with the Harvard faculty. Emerson, at age 67, was then the world-famous “Sage of Concord”; one of his co-lecturers was an upstart of a logician, mathematician, scientist, and philosopher, Charles S. Peirce, 30 or 31 years old at the time!²

² As a step toward graduate education, the new young president of Harvard Charles Eliot took an existing program called University Lectures and reorganized it into two sequences of lectures, each running a full year, and costing one hundred fifty dollars, the equivalent of a year’s undergraduate education. These series of courses ran sequentially.

There were seven lecture courses in the philosophy series; besides Emerson, the other lecturers were Francis Bowen, John Fiske, C. S. Peirce, James E. Cabot, Frederic Henry Hedge, and George Fisher. Emerson was next to last; he gave three lectures a week starting April 26, “The Natural History of Intellect.” The entire series of lectures was a failure. The total enrollment was nine. The series was dropped after the first year. Four took the sequence through to the end. Emerson continued; lower fees were set for each separate course, and some thirty people came to hear him. (From RICHARDSON Jr., Robert D. *Emerson: The Mind on Fire*. University of California Press, 1995. p. 562-63.)

Emerson gave sixteen lectures between April 26 and June 3. Bowen led off on seventeenth-century philosophy, followed by John Fiske on Positivism, and Peirce on the British logicians. Cabot and Hedge came next with roughly concurrent lectures, Cabot’s on Kant, Hedge’s on theism, pantheism, and atheism. Fisher on Stoicism was the last. Emerson was paid \$8.75 for each of his sixteen lectures. (From RUSK, Ralph L. *The Life of Ralph Waldo Emerson*. Scribners, 1949. p. 442).

Charles S. Peirce’s father, Benjamin Peirce, mathematician and astronomer, was, with his friend Emerson, one of the founding members of the Saturday Club in 1856. (Other members included Louis Agassiz, James Russell Lowell, Sam Ward, Henry Longfellow, Oliver Wendell Holmes, John Greenleaf Whittier, Nathaniel Hawthorne, and Frederic Henry Hedge.) Emerson made the trip to Boston, commonly every month, for the meetings of the club (RUSK, p. 392).

Charles Peirce’s first wife, Harriet Melusina Fay, a woman of considerable intellectual accomplishment who influenced Peirce’s early metaphysical views, was a friend of Emerson. (BRENT, Joseph. *Charles Sanders Peirce: A Life*. Indiana University Press, 1993. p. 64). Emerson was also a friend of Henry James Sr., whose theological interests, though somewhat atwart Emerson’s, provided another personal “family” link to the intellectual atmosphere in which the young Peirce grew up. Peirce also referred to the influence of Henry James Sr. on his agapism in “The Law of Mind.”

Peirce’s “The Law of Mind” (1892) refers to “Concord Transcendentalism,” pinpointing the influence of Emerson and Frederic Henry Hedge (1805-1890). Hedge (1805-1890) was a roommate of Emerson at the Harvard Divinity School and remained an intellectual companion of Emerson throughout his life. He became a Unitarian minister in West Cambridge. The son of a Harvard Professor of Logic and two years younger than Emerson, at age thirteen he had gone to Germany, where he studied four years in the gymnasium, returned to Cambridge in 1822, and enter the junior class at Harvard, which included Edward Emerson and others. From there he went to Harvard Divinity School, taking a degree in 1829. He became known as “Germanicus Hedge” in college. Later he made a forceful impression on Carlyle. His early articles in *The Christian Examiner* in 1833 and

My surmise is that Peirce would certainly have known of the contents of the prestigious Emerson's Harvard lectures in 1870. Moreover, my surmise is that, in the opening paragraph of his "The Law of Mind" (*The Monist*, 1892), perhaps his most important metaphysical essay, Peirce obliquely referenced Emerson's "The Natural History of Intellect" in his remarks on the influence of "Concord transcendentalism" on him by Emerson and Frederic Henry Hedge.³

1834 on Samuel Taylor Coleridge and Emanuel Swedenborg powerfully impacted the young Emerson. He regularly attended the Transcendentalist Club that was founded in 1836. Some people called it "Hedge's Club" because of his intellectual influence. He eventually served as a minister in Bangor, Maine, but remained a peripheral member of the transcendentalist movement (while not abandoning his Christian faith and ministry). In the 1850s he returned to Boston, embarking on a career as Harvard professor of church history and German, and continued to move in transcendentalist circles, such as the Saturday Club, the Radical Club, and Bronson Alcott's Concord School of Philosophy (1879-88). All this and more gives us a glimpse of the peripheral intellectual atmosphere to which Charles S. Peirce grew up and alluded in his "The Law of Mind" (1892). (Cf. WAYNE, Tiffany K. *Encyclopedia of Transcendentalism*. NY: Facts on File, 2006. p. 140-42, and RICHARDSON, p. 164-65; more information on Hedge, Coleridge, Carlyle, Goethe, *et al.* in RUSK, e.g., p. 208.)

As there were no English translations of Schelling's works available at the time Emerson and other American Transcendentalists were writing, Hedge's 1833 review of Coleridge played the key role of transmitting his ideas to the early wave of American transcendentalism. In the 1840s, more Americans gained access to Schelling, through his writings or attending his lectures in Germany. A young American Charles Stearns Wheeler (1816-43), who worked on a multivolume series of Carlyle's writings published in 1838-39, traveled with James Eliot Cabot (1821-1903, later Emerson's literary executor) and John Weiss (1818-79, later a Unitarian minister active in Transcendentalist circles) to Germany; they attended Schelling's lectures, and Wheeler sent notes back to Emerson, who published them in the Boston-based Transcendentalist journal *Dial* in 1843. James Eliot Cabot provided Emerson with early English translations of some of Schelling's essays before publishing one of Schelling's lectures in Hedge's 1848 collection, *The Prose Writers of Germany*. Beyond this early interest among the Transcendentalists, little of Schelling's work was available in English, and he never developed a place in American scholarship comparable to his contemporaries, Coleridge, Kant, and Hegel. As for Peirce, the question is (and I cannot presently answer), when and how much Schelling's primary sources did he actually read, as distinguished from what he picked up from secondary sources, as per the information of this paragraph?

³ 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 *tychism* 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 neighbourhood 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,

But the verifiability of this surmise is not essential to the thrust of either of my papers, which consist of close textual readings of Emerson's "anticipation" (if not, direct influence on) Peirce's mature philosophy on Peirce's "big-ticket" themes of *synechism*, *objective idealism*, *the affinity of mind and nature*, *man's glassy essence*, *agapism* and *the growth of concrete reasonableness*, *instinct and abductive inference*, *fallibilism*, *pragmatism* etc. Except for Peirce's theory of infinitesimals in the synechistic flow of time-consciousness, we might even ask whether Peirce's metaphysical ideas transcended those of Emerson at all.⁴

On the crucial metaphysical items, at any rate, I think we can establish elective affinities between the two philosophers that are mutually elucidating. Once you see them, you are not likely to forget them. It is the case of the poet preceding the scientist, which happens exactly to be the epistemology of both Emerson and Peirce.

My thesis, then, is that Peirce's mature philosophy consciously "aftermathed" Emerson's. In Peirce's own terms, their overlapping careers were infinitesimally continuous. Peirce's father, the distinguished Harvard mathematician and astronomer Benjamin Peirce (1809-1880), by the way, was another friend of Emerson; they were founding members of the 1856 Saturday Club, to which Emerson journeyed to Boston every month, as did the aforementioned Frederic Henry Hedge. There are many other biographical connections that can be pursued — some of these I pursue in the footnotes of this paper — as well as the general consideration of the young Peirce having grown up in "Emerson's intellectual

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 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).

⁴ On Synechism: CP 6.202 "I call my philosophy synechism"; 6.169 defined as theory of continuity in reality; 7.735n6 continuity is a form of generality, or homogeneity; 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); 6.175 synechism is a regulative principle of logic; 6.163 imports logical realism, objective idealism, tychism, and evolution; 6.104 the "one law of mind," namely, that ideas tend to spread continuously, losing intensity but gaining in generality; 1.337 Thirdness represents continuity almost to perfection; 7.653 Thirdness; 1.171 *all things* swim in continua, the basis of fallibilism; 5.402n, pragmatism presupposes synechism 5.415, 8.257, 1.62; 5.67 Hegel theorized continuity, which is the chief idea in modern mathematics and physical science; 5.213 ff. on Questions concerning Certain Faculties Claimed for Men (1868); Peirce's 1902 letter to James re his completely developed system, and pragmatism leading to synechism, "which is the keystone of the arch" (8.257).

backyard,” as can be surmised in the respect of the chronology and itinerary of Emerson’s lectures tours on the Lyceum circuit.⁵

Now, in this paper, I will concentrate on Emerson’s companion publication roughly contemporary with “The Natural History of Intellect,” namely “Poetry and the Imagination,” to indicate something of the intricate continuity between the metaphysical worldviews of Emerson and Peirce.⁶ I think this, my own “natural-historical” approach, will shed an important light on the thrust of Peirce’s metaphysics, — though mine is one

⁵ C. S. Peirce, a precocious genius in his own right, grew up in “Emerson’s intellectual backyard.” In his career between 1833-1881, as reconstructed by account books, journal entries, local press accounts, etc., Emerson gave 1,469 (possibly 1,602) lectures in 22 or 23 states and 283 (or 289) in Canada; 1,035 were in New England, of these 899 in Massachusetts, one-fourth of these in Boston (283) and Concord (126). These grass-roots lectures eventually found their ways into his published essays; his lectures to such a wide audience formed the basis of his readership, not to mention the impact of his first book of *Poetry* (1847). The young Emily Dickinson kept her own marked-up copy of the latter. Peirce was evidently familiar with Emerson’s prose and poetry, as were all the Boston Brahmins of his social class. For Emerson’s lecture career, cf. Townsend Scudder, 3rd, “A Chronological List of Emerson’s Lectures on His British Lecture Tour of 1847-1848.” *PMLA*, v. 51, n. 1 (Mar., 1936), p. 243-48.; and CHARVART, William. “Emerson’s American Lecture Engagements: A Chronological List.” The New York Public Library, 1961. p. 5-47.

⁶ Both now exist as composite works. “Poetry and Imagination” was assembled by James Elliott Cabot and Ellen Emerson from several previous lectures, especially the 1854 “Poetry and English Poetry”; it appeared in *Letters and Social Aims* (1876), v. 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, p. 297-318.)

“The Natural History of Intellect” appears in *Emerson’s Works*, v. XII, *Natural History of Intellect and Other Papers*, Cambridge, The Riverside Press, 1893. It is a melding together of materials beginning in the 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 text of “Natural History of Intellect,” nor is there an existing manuscript. It was rather first compiled by James Elliott 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” (1841), “The Method of Nature” (1844), “Fate” (1860), *Society and Solitude* (1870), and *Letters and Social Aims* (1876). While the manuscript for the 1870-71 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 “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.” 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).

methodologically very different than the usual “slice and dice” approaches of the standard analytic studies on Peirce (which for the most part are conspicuous in neglecting or downplaying his metaphysics and his 19th-century historical background).

Seeds of Peirce in Emerson’s “Poetry and Imagination”

Emerson’s “Poetry and Imagination” begins with a general Introduction that spells out the controlling “cosmic” principles of the harmonies of Nature that subtend his consideration of the various headings of the work. This Introduction is a miniature treatise in itself, one reminding the reader of his long-standing metaphysical and aesthetical tenets. The culminating section of this essay, entitled Transcendency, — and he called the second series of these lectures “The Transcendency of Physics” — resumes and caps the metaphysical discussion of this Introductory part.⁷

As he often does, Emerson starts this essay at the bottom of the gradations of human consciousness. He pays tribute to the deliverances of common sense, the “tuitional” faculty that “takes things at their word,” that is, “things as they appear,” predicated on the life of ordinary perception and attendant “belief in matter.” He calls this the cradle, and the go-cart, of the human child, who must learn the causalities of fire and water, and grow up to feed, wash, plant, build. Such are the ends of “tyrannical necessity,” — ends which were previously recognized in “Compensation” and his other famous earlier essays that teach the Heraclitean lesson that we cannot with impunity make the least mistake in engaging the brute resistances and frictions of the material world. In spite of the joys of the poets and the mystics, he writes here, the most imaginative person “never tries to kindle his oven with water, nor carries a torch into a powder-mill, nor seizes his wild charger by the tail.” Emerson’s most remarkable essay on this topic was his essay “Fate” included in *The Conduct of Life*, 1860. (Needless to say, the brute facticity and fatal actuality of the world recurs in Peirce’s Second phenomenological and metaphysical category of brute fact, cf. CP 1.357 and *passim*.)

But true to the essential thrust of his philosophy, — which always, combining Plato and Goethe, features an *ascending metamorphosis*, — Emerson gradually turns the tables on the common sense realism. There are hints, innuendoes, glimmerings, he

⁷ “Poetry and Imagination” is in fact a cornucopia of vintage Emerson. It is built out of several parts, — namely, after a general introductory part (which will occupy us in this paper), subsections on Poetry; Imagination; Veracity; Creation; Melody, Rhyme, Form; Bards and Trouveurs; Morals; and Transcendency. Indebted to waves of metaphysical and aesthetic ideas circulating in the republic of letters after Goethe, Kant, Schopenhauer, Schelling, Swedenborg, and the English Romantics such as Wordsworth, Coleridge, and Carlyle, this combined accumulation of Emersonian themes remains probably unequalled in the philosophical literature of the nineteenth-century on the topic of the poetic imagination. (A direct heir is the Emersonian poet Wallace Stevens’ *The Necessary Angel: Essays on Reality and the Imagination*. Vintage Books, 1942.) “Poetry and Imagination” was also of course a recapitulation of his own views, as articulated over forty years of brilliant essays. But I cannot pursue all these linkages here. Rather, I will simply follow Emerson’s general introduction to “Poetry and Imagination,” while interspersing corresponding references to Peirce.

says, that there are more than the appearances, leading to realization of irreducible dimensions of spirit in nature. Nature herself announces “that nothing stands still but death,” and therefore “that the creation is on wheels, in transit, always passing into something else, streaming into something higher” — a pronouncement that reprised the gist of his “The World-Soul” (1847) and many other poems.

“Matter” then is not what appears; — even “chemistry can blow it all into gas.” Faraday, the most exact of the natural scientists, taught that when we arrive at the supposed elemental particles (the atoms of Democritus and *res extensae* of Descartes, Hobbes, Newton, and Locke), we should not find cubes, or prisms, or atoms, at all, but “spherules of force.” These would be “something more subtle,” finally leading to the discovery that above astronomy and under chemistry there was “will and purpose,” “the universe steeped in thought and everywhere expressing thought.” “The ends of all are moral,” Emerson speculates, “and therefore the beginnings are such.”

(Peirce, in his own words, reprised these tenets of Emerson concerning the implausibility of the atomic hypothesis and the intrinsic teleology of the cosmos. As one instance of this, he postulated “something more subtle” in the terms of Leibnizian “infinitesimals” to account for the synechistic continuity of “mind” and “matter” that is overlooked in the standard mechanistic accounts.)⁸ Emerson worked out his basic metaphysics of what he called the twin laws of Identity and Metamorphosis in many variations in his writings. The essence of this doctrine is that in Nature there is unbroken continuity in the interpenetrative metamorphosis and ascent of its forms, as discovered by both the poets and the scientists in the family resemblances of the laws of mind and nature, which symbolically express the lurking, metaphysically ecstatic, *Natura naturans* of things — for one example, such as he had vividly inscribed as his key essay “The Method of Nature” in: *Essays: Second Series* (1844), to say nothing of many of his poems (Such as “All in All,” “Woodnotes,” “The Sphinx,” to name just a few).

These metaphysical revelations, Emerson says here, upset our politics, economics, and all the other conventions of our commonsensical language and conduct. Startling as these revelations may be, nobody can gainsay that *the activity of the mind runs independently*, exercising its own spontaneous powers of discovery and enjoying the ensuing momentum “of its own order, methods, beliefs, polarities, vortices of self-direction, often very different from the order which common sense uses.” The impulse of the mind is to search resemblance, affinity, identity, in all its objects — “and hence our science, from its rudest to its most refined theories.” (And hence also art.) There is no end to the mind’s circling and ramifying, its outreach and upreach to greater generalization, which capture the correspondences and affinities of the mental and the physical spheres.

⁸ On Peirce’s rejection of psychological and metaphysical atomism, see CP 6.36, 6.173. An infinitesimal is that which is quantitatively greater than zero but smaller than any number. Infinitesimals are not discrete units, but potencies producing both continuity and spontaneity. Immediate consciousness has an infinitesimal interval of time (6.109-111); instants or possible events form a continuum, in which there are no self-identical and distinct parts (1.499). The background is Leibniz, but one can just as well think of centuries of “dharma analysis” in the traditions of Mahayana Buddhism.

Needless to say, this is an essential “anticipation” of Peirce’s category of Thought as Thirdness, which in one context he called the primary category of his philosophy.⁹ Here Emerson also adumbrates Peirce’s realism, as formulated in his anti-nominalistic and anti-psychologistic “logic of inquiry” and architectonic philosophy of science.¹⁰ Peirce was to synthesize these strands of thought in relation to his contention that the only intelligible theory capable of accounting for the variety, stubborn facticity, and open-ended growth patterns of nature and mind is that of an *objective idealism*, connoting a synechistically evolving universe in which “matter is effete mind,” or “mind grown hide-bound with habit.”¹¹ Obliquely, he tapped into Emerson’s idealism of Nature which itself was a smooth blending of strands of Platonic, Neo-Platonic, Idealistic, Swedenborgian, Wordsworthian, Hindu and Sufi thought and poetry.

As indicated above, Peirce’s master-episteme of fallibilism, his logic of abductive hypothesis-making, his architectonic of the research sciences, — with its phenomenological classifications, outlines of the normative sciences, and metaphysical conceptions of chance, necessity, and organic growth, — all proceeded from his principle of synechism. This imported his round rejection of bluff empiricism and the presupposition of reductive materialism in his day — a rejection Peirce, and his whole generation, well knew had been elaborated by Emerson in the generation before him.

For his part, Emerson, whose thought preceded Peirce’s by several decades in the same New England intellectual environment, harkened back to the “electric word pronounced by John Hunter a hundred years ago,” namely, “*arrested and progressive development*” (Emerson’s emphasis). This “electric word” 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.” Hunter’s “arrested development” evidently corresponds to what Peirce thematized as the patterns of nature as “mind hide-bound with habits,” which replicates homeostatic energy patterns, while “progressive development” reappears in Peirce’s meliorative sense of “the growth of mind” in his cosmogonic theory. “Arrested growth” is retrograde evolution accounting for the experience of factivity and causality (in Peirce’s realm of Secondness); “progress evolution” is the upward spiraling Peirce associated with evolutionary love (Thirdness, Agapism).

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, replicative differences, as these are generalized into the laws of the hard sciences; Nature’s *vertical* lines of ascent make flickering appearances within the psychical parameters of the soft sciences, and more clearly in the perspectives of idealistic philosophy. In the latter vein Peirce was to argue

⁹ Peirce regarded Thirdness or Thought as the primal category in his system (1.337); this is tied to his theory of developmental Reason in the universe (1.615); it is Thirdness, not Firstness or Secondness, which produces the intelligibility in phenomena (5.90).

¹⁰ On Peirce’s anti-nominalism and anti-psychologism, see 1.325, 6.150-53, 5.59, 5.121.

¹¹ On Peirce’s panpsychism or objective idealism (matter as effete mind), see 2.228, 6.25, 6.104, 7.364, 7.570, 6.265, 6.268.

that Thought appears in the different gradations of Nature's patterns of habit-formation, such habits not being restricted to the humanly mental.¹²

In his day, 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 symbiogenetic 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."

This pre-Darwinian "ascent of man" is a theme Emerson actually played out in many contexts of his earlier prose writings and poetry. It already appears in the motto of his first work, *Nature* (1836):

A subtle chain of countless rings
The next unto the farthest brings;
The eye reads omens where it goes,
And speaks all languages the rose;
And, striving to be man, the worm
Mounts through all the spires of form.

Peirce and his generation grew up knowing these early Emerson writings by heart.

A separate study would bring out that there are literally hundreds of passages in Emerson's prose and poetry attesting to an evolutionary universe leading up to mankind. In "Fate," for one more example, Emerson wrote:

The book of Nature is the book of Fate. She turns the gigantic pages, — leaf after leaf, — never re-turning one. One leaf she lays down, a floor of granite; then a thousand ages, and a bed of slate; a thousand ages, and a measure of coal; a thousand ages, and a layer of marl and mud: vegetable forms appear; her first misshapen animals, zoophyte, trilobium, fish; then, saurians — rude forms, in which she has only blocked her future statue, concealing under these unwieldy monsters the fine types of her coming king. The face of the planet cools and dries, the races meliorate, and man is born.

Peirce's synechistic universe also connotes such an a meliorative world in which some of the patterns of nature's habit-formations are either arrested ("hide-bound"), while others continue upward in stages of metamorphic progression, — the best examples of which are to be found, according to both Emerson and Peirce, in the stages of human mental civilization. (Emerson articulated the like reflection in "The Progress of Culture," an essay appearing in *Letters and Social Aims*, 1876).

¹² On habits in nature, 5.492; habits are not mechanical (1.390); the law of mind, 6.21, 6.86.

This consideration of course takes us into the very heart of Peirce's metaphysical logic of inquiry. Man's affinity with the ascendant processes of Nature accounts for what Peirce came to call man's capacity for abductive inference in discovering the laws of nature, as witnessed for example in the heuristic *lumen naturale* functioning in the careers of Kepler, Galileo, and Newton.¹³ But mankind's epistemic powers of discovery presuppose norms of rational conduct, which in turn presuppose an ideal, a *summum bonum*, of concrete reasonableness, operative in the open-ended processes of human mental evolution.¹⁴

Here, in Emerson's own terms, "Identity of law, perfect order in physics, perfect parallelism between the laws of Nature and the laws of thought exist." Science and poetry are perfectly congruent in the respect of being energized by this ideal. The examples are ubiquitous. In botany, we have the perception of metamorphosis in seeing the transformation of the same vegetable point or eye into its every part, leaf, petal, stamen, pistil, seed, and fruit. In geology, we see the metamorphosis, say, of a fossil tree which was once living wood into mineral coal. Natural objects, he adds, are as much parts of a symmetrical universe as are the words of a sentence. Each inorganic, vegetable, or animal form "remembers the next inferior and predicts the next higher."

Among others, Goethe, as well as Kant in his *Critique of Judgment*, and again Schopenhauer and Schelling, laid theoretic bases of this conception of ascendant continuity in nature and mind. Peirce was later to call the concept of "continuity" — also witnessed in Leibniz and Hegel — the chief achievement of modern mathematics and natural science.

Now, my own historical point here is that Emerson's writings, — indebted via Frederic Henry Hedge to Schelling among others through the mediation of Coleridge and Carlyle, — had already formulated the essential point of Peirce's synechism. In "Poetry and Imagination" Emerson declared: "There is one animal, one plant, one matter, and one force. The laws of light and of heat translate each other: — so do the laws of sound and of color; and so galvanism, electricity, and magnetism are varied forms of the selfsame energy." But that is not all. As the student of nature ponders this immense unity, he observes that "all things in Nature, the animals, the mountain, the river, the

¹³ On abduction as hypothetical inference, and as *il lumen naturale*, imagination and instinctive guessing in science, see 5.195-205, 5.171-73, 8.209, 1.47, 1.80, 6.10, 2.86, 2.755, 7.38-39, 7.48; 7.381-2. On the affinity of the human mind and nature, "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); and "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).

¹⁴ On Peirce's esthetic ideal and self-control, see 5.402, 1.575, 1.588, 1.615, 8.138n4. "The pragmatist 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 self-control, and this gives the pragmatist a sort of justification for making the rational purport to be general" (5.433).

seasons, wood, iron, stone, vapor, have a mysterious relation to [man's] thought and his life; their growths, decays, quality and use so curiously resembles himself, in parts and in wholes, that he is compelled to speak by means of them.”

In the companion later work, “The Natural History of Intellect” (consisting of sixteen lectures in the Harvard lecture series of 1870-71 he shared with Hedge, Peirce, and others), Emerson wrote that “Nature itself is a vast trope, and all particular natures are tropes,” providing the precedent for Peirce’s various pronouncements on the universe as a “vast representamen,” and “man as a sign.”¹⁵ Peirce conceived of “man’s glassy essence” in terms of an essential social semiosis, relegating the egocentric individual person to ignorance and error. This too was an outgrowth of his cosmogonic philosophy, — his cosmo-semiosis, so to speak — as noted above, in which “matter” must be regarded as “mind hide-bound with habits,” and Thought as mediated and mediating intelligence.¹⁶

Indeed, in his 1870 Harvard lecture course Emerson anticipated these central features of Peirce’s thought in declaring that there is no “dead matter.” “The oldest religion,” Emerson wrote there, 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].

In short, this idealistic affinity of man and nature, at the heart of both Emerson and Peirce, was articulated by both thinkers as foundational for both scientific and poetic intelligence (though Peirce came up shorter than Emerson in thematizing the poetic intelligence). But each thinker went further, in extending the upreach of their cosmo-semiosis to their theo-semiosis, so speak, that is, their philosophy of religion. In this regard, — and in keeping with my paper’s title, — let me now examine certain crucial pronouncements in Peirce’s manuscripts on the religious presuppositions of science.

¹⁵ On Man as a sign, 5.505, 5.283, 5.253, 5.314, 6.270, 7.583: 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).

¹⁶ On Peirce’s social self, see 1.337, 7.571, 5.354, 5.225; a person is a community of cells (1.354); reality involves the decision of the indefinite community (5.311); man’s glassy essence (5.319), logic and social principle (2.654). Peirce does not feature Emerson’s sense of the individual genius. One could argue that he should have a corresponding doctrine to account for the paradigm breakthroughs in science (Kepler, Galileo, Newton, *et al.*), as well as to account for the individual poetic genius in the fine arts (Leonardo, Shakespeare, Mozart, *et al.*). (My suggestion here is that his architectonic or classification of the research sciences could have profitably been extended to an architectonic of both the fine arts and the sciences.)

Peirce on Religion and the Nature of Science

As part of an exponentially larger topic, I will draw attention here to only a few of Peirce's ruminations on Religious Faith and Natural Science. Even these will suffice to show the continuity between Emerson's and Peirce's metaphysical worldviews.

In a manuscript of 1898 on *Religion* Peirce wrote:

"... the supreme commandment of the Buddhisto-Christian religion is, to generalize, to complete the whole system even until continuity results and the distinct individuals weld together [...] the very supreme commandment of sentiment is that man should generalize [...] should become welded into the universal continuum, which is what true reasoning consists in."

"... not merely in man's cognitions, which are but the superficial film of his being, but objectively, in the deepest emotional springs of his life. In fulfilling this command, man prepares himself for transmutation into a new form of life, the joyful Nirvana in which the discontinuities of his will shall all but disappear."¹⁷

In a manuscript of 1908 on Faith Peirce reinscribed his "Buddhisto-Christian religion"—which is to say, Emersonian cosmosemiosis — In the following terms:

"I now return to the expression of my abhorrence of the doctrine that any proposition whatever is infallibly true. Unless truth be recognized as *public*, — as that of which *any* person would come to be convinced if he carried his inquiry, his sincere search for immovable belief, far enough, — then there will be nothing to prevent each one of us from adopting an utterly futile belief of his own which all the rest will disbelieve. Each one will set himself up as a little prophet, that is, a little 'crank,' a half-witted victim of his own narrowness."

"Every true man of science [...] believes in God, — has Faith in God according to my use of the term Faith [...] For to believe in reasoning about phenomena is to believe that they are governed by reason, that is, by God."

"Theology arises from discontent with religious Faith, — which implies a lack of such Faith, and with a desire to substitute for that a scientific anatomy and physiology of God, which, rightly considered, is blasphemous and antireligious. It is also in most striking disaccord with the spirit of the son of Mary."¹⁸

We should also note that his "Answer to Questions concerning My Belief in God," 1905, was written between the two above pronouncements of his religiosity.

And in another manuscript of 1898, entitled *Science Presupposes God*, Peirce wrote:

"It was over the door of Plato's Academy that was put up the notice: No admission for the *agometetes* [ignorant of mathematics]. Were it only from the Academy that he was debarred. He is utterly cut off from all contemplation of the rational. His reason is embryological. Between him and all the perfections which the Cosmos approaches or suggest, a dense fog obstructs all vision."

¹⁷ STUHR, John (ed.) *Classical American Philosophy: Essential Readings and Interpretive Essays*. Oxford, 1987. p. 42-43.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 43-45.

“I can only say that if anybody wishes to have his eyes opened to a cosmos of thought of such wonderful beauty that merely as a poem the delight of it would a thousand times repay the effort of finding it, and which in addition to that appears to be the very Key that unlocks the secret of the physical and psychical universe, if he will come to me prepared, not for brilliant *aperçus* but for thorough work, I can help him to it”¹⁹

Finally, in *The Nature of Science*, a manuscript of 1905, Peirce, in characterizing the *heurospudists*, or men of science who pursue the truth for its own sake, wrote:

“The men of the third group who are comparatively few cannot conceive at all a life of enjoyment and look down upon a life of action. Their purpose is to worship God in the development of ideas and of truth. They are the men of science.”

“The *heurospudists* look upon discovery as making acquaintance with God and as the very purpose for which the human race was created. Indeed as the very purpose of God in creating the world at all.”

“I only mean that the purpose of creation as it must appear to us in our highest approaches to an understanding of it, is to make an answering mind [...] And when I say *God is*, I mean that the conception of a God is the highest flight toward an understanding of the original of the whole psychico-psychical universe that we can make [...] Now the *heurospudist* has an imperative need of finding in nature an object of love. His science cannot subsist without it. For science must be worship in order not to fall before the feet of some idol of human workmanship.” (Axiagastics, Agapism.)²⁰

Now, against this textual background, — which calls to mind certain similar pronouncements of Einstein as well as Spinoza’s *amor Dei intellectualis* — and again, the Emersonian poet Wallace Stevens’s signification of the idea of God as the “supreme fiction” — let me conclude by returning to the seeds of Peirce’s metaphysical thought in Emerson. Emerson had highlighted the “Romantically Sublime” and Idealistic concepts of organic correspondences, generalized as the connaturality or affinity of mind and nature, from his earliest work, *Nature* (1836), written when he was thirty-three years of age, and in many brilliant essays and poems thereafter. The concepts were still front and center in this later writing, “Poetry and Imagination” (prepared for publication by 1872 and published in 1876). There he wrote: “Every correspondence we observe in mind and matter suggests a substance older and deeper than either of these old nobilities.” This was also an allusion to his sense of metaphysical Presence or Reality in the Hindu concept of Brahma, — as per his poem by that name, — with its twin manifestations of *Purusha* (Spirit) and *Prakriti* (Matter), whose combination results in our essentially symbolic and symmetrical universe. To the same point, he declared: “Science was false by being unpoetical. It assumed to explain a reptile or mollusk, and isolated it, — which is hunting for life in graveyards. Reptile or mollusk or man or angel only exists in system, in relation. The metaphysician, the poet, only sees each animal form as an inevitable step in the path of the creating mind.”

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 45-46.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 47-48.

“The real logic,” such as possessed by the American Indian, the hunter, the boy with his pets, Emerson continued, “uses resemblances to ride the streaming metamorphosis of nature to aesthetic or practical fruition.” On another level, “The poet knows the missing link by the joy it gives” — Emerson’s key metaphysical interpretation that adds the missing link of metaphysical Identity to Kant’s articulation of the reflective judgment of aesthetic sensibility (“taste”). Emerson concluded this introductory section to “Poetry and Imagination” with the words: “Science does not know its debt to imagination.” He credits Goethe for having enunciated the same maxim. And as we have seen, Peirce followed the same suit, elaborating a powerful version of cosmosemiosis.²¹

My thesis has been that in many contexts of his mature metaphysical writings (after 1887-88, which begin with his “A Guess at the Riddle” of Emerson’s poem “The Sphinx”), Peirce expressed the same worldview, conspicuously building imagination into his system as the “first” of the phenomenological, normative, and metaphysical categories, while at the same time expanding into a metaphysical system of panpsychical cosmosemiosis. All of his phenomenological, normative, and metaphysical categories, Peirce insisted, are anthromorphic, a stipulation which is itself an essential correlate of his synechistic metaphysics that is closely aligned with Emerson’s.

Brief Conclusion

From the above, we should be able to appreciate that Emerson’s miniature disquisition prefacing “Poetry and Imagination” brings to a head the central thrust of his entire poetical and philosophical output. What follows in “Poetry and Imagination” is his final valorization of *poesis* — an apotheosis of the creative life of the artist that informed the worldviews of such transcendentalist disciples as Walt Whitman, Emily Dickinson, Wallace Stevens, Robert Frost. Among others, Nietzsche, Proust, and Heidegger, similarly valorized the creative life of *the artist*. Peirce, who grew up in Emerson’s backyard, I have suggested, carried on the idealistic thrust of Emerson’s writings in his own basic formulations of the logic and metaphysics of *poetic-scientific* inquiry, and one that roundly repudiates nominalism and psychologism.

As for Peirce, we see that his “Buddhisto-Christian” religion encompassed epistemological, aesthetical, ethical, semiotic, cosmological, and “theological” dimensions in perhaps the grandest, and most seminal, philosophical system since Aristotle (as he himself claimed). Through Frederic Henry Hedge, among others, Emerson was impacted by Goethe, Schiller, Schelling, Coleridge, and Carlyle; and he bequeathed those influences to Peirce.

²¹ On poets and scientists: “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).

Emerson's doctrine of the "Over-Soul" (and its ramifications exhibited in this paper) privileges a Platonic principle of the Good/Beautiful (which is different than Plotinus' elemental principle of the One, even though Plotinus identified the One and the Good). Energized by such a Platonic principle, Emerson's metaphysical naturalism, — as again Peirce's after him, — celebrates the spontaneity, variety, and symbolic character of objective nature, as well as the potentials of aesthetic intuition, scientific discovery, and moral character, in an overarching and open-ended framework of objective idealism. And the evidence is that Peirce followed Emerson in these big-ticket Platonic respects. He played on the theme of Emerson's "The Sphinx" in his "A Guess at the Riddle" and he acknowledged Emerson's influence in his key chapter "The Law of Mind." He anchored his full-fledged objective idealism in his own teleological principle of "cosmic" rationality or concrete reasonableness. Such a sense, he asserted, comes from the heart rather than the head. It is a cosmos characterized by spontaneous metamorphosis, mental growth, and continuity that is not reducible to the uniformity of mechanistic laws. The combined effect of his categories of Firstness, Secondness, and Thirdness drives his theoretical sense of the admirability of harmony or concrete reasonableness (Peirce's axiagastics) in the universe, and thus grounds the inexhaustible generality of the intertwined concepts of fallibilism, synechism, apagism.

In this framework it once again becomes clear why Peirce constantly attacked nominalism and psychologism, as well as the reductive doctrines of empiricism and mechanism. Peirce's "vague" sense of the "Reality" (not the "existence") of God also imports here, and is integral to these conceptual variations. But like Emerson's "Over-Soul," it can't be made into an onto-theological doctrine.²² In that respect, Peirce's cosmosemiosis or buddhisto-christian religiosity joins the ranks of the great speculative mystics, — but that is a topic for another day.

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²² God's "reality" must remain vague (6.161); but people possess "instinctive mind," thus hold ontological affinities to nature and God (6.499); Schiller's *Spieltrieb* or pure play of musement re the idea of God (6.452-465); though we can't apply "existence" to God (6.495); mechanism gives no room for God (6.161); creative activity is an inseparable attribute of God (6.506).

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Address/Endereço

David A. Dilworth
State University of New York at Stony Brook
Philosophy Department
NY 11794 – USA

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