

The “Flowing Stream” that Carries Pragmatism: James, Peirce, and Royce

O “Córrego Fluente” que Carrega o Pragmatismo: James, Peirce, e Royce

André De Tienne

Indiana University at Indianapolis – USA
adetienn@iupui.edu

Abstract: All the great classical pragmatists erected their variations of pragmatism upon distinct understandings of the continuity of experience. This paper explores how the conception of the “flowing stream” of experience is analyzed by James, Peirce, and Royce, so as to yield the distinctive flavor of their respective radical empiricism, pragmatism, and constructive idealism.

A first section examines how James’s phenomenological and psychological account of the “stream of thought” brought him to his conception of pure experience and thus to what Peirce called his extreme pragmatism. A second section attempts to show how Peirce’s own account of the “law of mind” served to clarify a key element of his pragmatic maxim, and how he subsequently developed a key conception that was to compete with James’s pure experience, that of the phaneron. A third section turns to Royce’s analysis of the passage from internal to external meaning, or his account of how purposes get fulfilled through the temporal stream of experience in order to reach a goal that is no longer in the stream, but without which there would be no stream at all. Special attention is given to Royce’s account of the “linkage of facts” and the significance he attaches to the relation of “betweenness.” A concluding section describes how the late Royce managed to move beyond his earlier analysis thanks to his study of Peirce’s semiotic theory of interpretation, which provided him with a far better notion of “mediation.” Peirce and Royce were kindred pragmatist spirits, and both managed, in similar ways, to go beyond James.

Keywords: William James. Charles Peirce. Josiah Royce. Pragmatism. Idealism. Empiricism. Stream of thought. Flow. Continuity. Purpose. Teleology. Experience. Fact. Phaneron. Betweenness. Mediation. Linkage. Semiosis. Interpretation. Absolute.

Resumo: *Todos os grandes pragmatistas clássicos erigiram suas variações do pragmatismo sobre entendimentos distintos da continuidade da experiência. Este artigo explora como a concepção de “córrego fluente” da experiência é analisada por James, Peirce e Royce, de modo que fosse desenvolvido o matiz distintivo de seus respectivos empirismo radical, pragmatismo e idealismo construtivo.*

Uma primeira seção trata da abordagem psicológica e fenomenológica de James do “fluxo de pensamento”, que o levou a sua concepção de experiência e, assim, ao que Peirce chamou de pragmatismo extremo de James. Uma segunda seção tenta mostrar como a abordagem peirciana da “lei da mente” serviu para esclarecer um elemento-chave da sua máxima pragmática, e como ele em seguida desenvolveu uma concepção central que competiria com a experiência pura de James, que é a concepção de fâneron. Uma terceira seção aborda a análise de Royce da passagem do significado interno para o externo, ou sua interpretação de como os propósitos são alcançados por meio da corrente temporal da experiência para se chegar a um objetivo que não está mais na corrente, mas sem o qual ela absolutamente não existiria. Atenção especial é dada à abordagem de Royce da “ligação dos fatos” e da importância que ele atribui à relação de “entremediação”. Uma seção final descreve como o Royce maduro vai além de suas análises iniciais graças ao seu estudo da teoria semiótica da interpretação de Peirce, que lhe forneceu uma noção muito melhor de “mediação”. Peirce e Royce eram espíritos pragmatistas afins, e ambos conseguiram, de maneira parecida, ir além de James.

Palavras-chave: William James. Charles Peirce. Josiah Royce. Pragmatismo. Idealismo. Empirismo. Fluxo do pensamento. Fluxo. Continuidade. Finalidade. Teleologia. Experiência. Fato. Fâneron. Entremediação. Mediação. Ligação. Semiose. Interpretação. Absoluto.

Introduction¹

Charles Peirce published many book reviews in the New York weekly *The Nation*. *Nation* editor Wendell Phillips Garrison would rarely hesitate to shorten Peirce’s reviews whenever he found them too ponderous or lengthy, no matter the significance of the book. One of the most significant works Peirce ever reviewed was Josiah Royce’s two-volume masterpiece *The World and the Individual* that contained the two series of his Gifford lectures of 1899 and 1900. Peirce’s review of the first volume (*The Four Historical Conceptions of Being*) appeared on 5 April 1900, indeed severely abbreviated by Garrison. When Peirce read the second volume (*Nature, Man, and the Moral Order*) two years later, he found it so important that he decided to review it also, and his review appeared on the last day of July 1902. But two months earlier, fearing in advance (and with reason) the sharpness of Garrison’s editorial scalpel, Peirce wrote to Royce a preemptive letter to make sure the latter would hear what Peirce intended to say in spite of Garrison’s cuts.² And what Peirce wanted to express first and foremost, besides remarks on subtle philosophical issues, was enormous praise. Peirce was captivated by Royce’s work, and he saw in it matter of great hope for the future of philosophy. The reason was not only Royce’s masterful system-building and dialectic powers, but also his earnest and deep

¹ A shorter version of this article was read at the Ninth International Meeting on Pragmatism that took place in November 2006 at the Pontifícia Universidade Católica de São Paulo. I wish to thank most warmly Prof. Ivo A. Ibri for inviting me to that extraordinary conference. I am grateful to Maria Eunice Gonzalez (UNESP, Marília) for commenting on my paper on that occasion, and to Peter Hare for his protest against a misrepresentation which I hope to have corrected.

² Letter from Peirce to Josiah Royce, 27 May 1902, in RL 385: ISP 43–4.

study of what was then cutting-edge mathematics, including projective geometry and the mathematics of infinity and continuity. Peirce encouraged Royce to pursue his work steadfastly, but urged him emphatically to fulfill the one condition failing which Royce would be unable to “cover the distance” between philosophy and the “peaceable sciences”: “My entreaty is that you will study logic.” He then invited Royce and his family to spend the summer in Milford, so that the two philosophers could work together their way through logic to the advantage, as Peirce put it with uncanny prescience, of “those who in the 21st century may study your future books.” Peirce felt deep sympathy for Royce’s metaphysics and was convinced that with a larger dose of logic and mathematics Royce’s system would endure through the ages. “Under your logic which I cannot approve,” he told Royce, “there is a nearly parallel stream of thought perfectly sound and in fact without doubt this was really what has kept you straight so that [...] the affirmatory clauses of your conclusions are approximately right.”

The question before us is to determine what was the “perfectly sound stream of thought” that Peirce detected in Royce’s great work. Peirce held Royce to be the greatest metaphysician of his age. Remembering that one of the goals of Peirce’s pragmatic maxim was to get rid of all the metaphysical gibberish of past philosophical history, we must assume that he saw in Royce’s metaphysics a clean, gibberish-free body of propositions fully in compliance with the pragmatic maxim. It is clear from Peirce’s letter, and from his two reviews of Royce’s work, that he especially appreciated Royce’s foray into the mathematics of numbers, of infinity, and continuity. Now it is well known that one of the great commonalities among the classical pragmatists is their belief in the continuity of experience. Peirce, James, Royce, Dewey, all stressed again and again the importance of acknowledging the phenomenological reality of continua for a more adequate understanding of humanity, nature, and the universe. Royce, however, always had a difficult relationship with pragmatism — not with the pragmatism of Peirce, of which almost no one knew anything that mattered at the turn of the twentieth century — but with the pragmatism of James, since James was the official and most compelling figure of pragmatism. Royce saw grave problems in James’s radical empiricism, and so did Peirce. But Peirce was the founding father of pragmatism, and thus could avail himself of coining a new word, *pragmaticism*, to remove any ambiguity in the nature of his affiliation to the great movement. Royce could not do so and preferred to insist simply on the necessity of going beyond Jamesian pragmatism by accepting that which James’s radicalism could not but remain blind to, the reality of the “metempirical,” the idealistic dimension without which the realm of experience remains a narrow kingdom of earth. Peirce, too, was an idealist, one who saw in Royce what Royce wasn’t fully ready to see in himself: a fellow pragmaticist.

And yet, of the classical pragmatists, William James is the first to have insisted most clearly and strenuously, in his published writings, on the continuity of experience. James was no mathematician and no logician, but he had a formidable instinct for the phenomenological and the psychological. In 1884 he wrote a paper “On Some Omissions of Introspective Psychology,” key portions of which were reprinted six years later in the celebrated chapter of his *Principles of Psychology* titled “The Stream of Thought.”³

³ “On Some Omissions of Introspective Psychology,” *Mind*, 9 (January 1884): 1–26; reprinted in *EiP* 1983: 142–67. “The Stream of Thought” is chapter 9 in JAMES’s *Principles of Psychology* (PoP 1890, pp. 224–90); reprinted in PoP 1981: 219–78.

James's insights in that text provide much of the ground upon which his pragmatic radical empiricism will later rest. Now, the fact that that very phrase, "stream of thought," appears in the just quoted letter from Peirce to Royce is probably mere accident, but a happy one it is. It will be indeed my contention that the "stream of thought" is characterized by a particular kind of flow, the very nature and apprehension of which greatly influences one's understanding of pragmatism. James's stream announces his conception of the pure experience. Peirce, too, developed, after James, a conception of the flow and a conception of experience that went beyond James's and greatly influenced the continued refinement of the wording of his pragmatic maxim. Royce, however, had less to say about the stream as such, not because he did not embrace it, but because it played only a fragmentary part in his metaphysics — a fragmentary part essential enough nonetheless to retain him within the pragmatist pantheon. I will now proceed to tell the story of their three streams of thought, and to show how two of them converge so that they end up flowing into something that is no longer a mere flowing stream. This paper has four sections, in which I will consider successively James's stream of pure experience, Peirce's law of mind and his conception of the phaneral flow, Royce's purposive linkage of facts and the transient stages of our inquisitive life, and finally the way Peirce and Royce both manage to carry us into a realm beyond the stream thanks to "semiotic mediation," with which we shall conclude.

1. William James: From the Stream of Thought to Pure Experience

William James was not of course the first thinker to talk about the stream of thought or of consciousness, but he was the first one to insist on its irreducible continuity. In 1859, for instance, Alexander Bain had characteristically defined a stream of thought as a series of discrete ideas succeeding one another at various measurable speeds.⁴ James radically rejected that conception and substituted for it the view that within the realm of consciousness there was no "breach, crack, or division,"⁵ — a simple negative definition of continuity. Consciousness, he wrote, "is nothing jointed; it flows. A 'river' or a 'stream' are the metaphors by which it is most naturally described. *In talking of it hereafter, let us call it the stream of thought, of consciousness, or of subjective life.*"⁶ This stream doesn't flow at a regular speed: sometimes it slows down, allowing us to "perch" ourselves and take a good look at certain concretions of experience that thus become "thingy" or substantive; sometimes it quickens, allowing us to "fly," or better, to swim, and become aware of relations, passages, transitions from one concretion to another. Whether we are swimming or finding a place to rest, both experiences, substantive or transitive, are part of the unbroken stream, equally sensed or experienced, and never completely distinguishable as they tend to dissolve continuously into one another, the main difference being teleological: "the main use of the transitive parts is to lead us from one substantive

⁴ See BAIN 1875: 29.

⁵ PoP 1890: 237; PoP 1981: 231.

⁶ PoP 1890: 239; PoP 1981: 233. A solid discussion of James's conception of the stream of thought occurs in MYERS 1986: 74–80.

conclusion to another.⁷ Relations are not mere abstractions; they are themselves felt in the very moment of their passing through. The larger part of experience consists of these transitions and relations, even if attention tends to privilege the "halting-places," such as the conclusions of our inferences. But even the latter are never cleanly separated from the steps that gave them birth, as their discreteness is merely apparent. Attentive observation reveals all sorts of shreds dangling around their vague boundaries, "fringes" as James called them, or traces that are inherited from the transitional continuum they emerged from. For James, such fringes are an essential part of experience, and the cost of neglecting them, as traditional philosophers usually do, is dearly paid in terms of complicated if clever ad hoc theoretical solutions.

If whatever flows in the stream isn't discrete, then sharp dual distinctions are bound to be erroneous. James casts doubt on the value of separating a thought from its object: there is no need to do so since the object is nothing more than what the thought is itself all about both in content and in expression, no matter how complex or seemingly detached it might appear to be. A streaming thought embraces its entire object all at once from the very start, undivided and unanalyzed, "in a single pulse of subjectivity or state of mind."⁸ Whether we are singing a song or cogitating a reasoning, the whole object of the song or the reasoning is already embraced in the utterance of the first note or the first word — just as much as it is already embraced in the moment preceding the utterance, since that moment is filled with the bursting intention to produce it. Indeed, no stream of thought gets flowing if it is not to accomplish the particular purpose from which it springs. The original intention gives birth to and traverses the entire stream through its continuous transitions. Hence, because each note or each word within the stream belongs to and with every other one, whether already uttered or yet to come, each segment already encompasses, from its own point of view, the entire stream "in a unitary undivided way."⁹ No segmentation of the stream therefore can be said to map out whatever parts analysis might discover in its object. There is no one-to-one correspondence between any segments of the stream and the parts of its object. The stream, however, throughout its performance or expression, is a progressive awakening to the content's fullness. It continuously enriches the thought it carries, for the thought and its object both benefit from coursing through the continuous series of echoes that contribute to their unitary manifestation. When a stream comes to an end (a song's last notes, a reasoning's conclusion), the ending feeling that accompanies it is fuller than the initial one since it brings with it fringes inherited from all segments of the transitioning experience. But what it is that it feels was already present, wholly, from the beginning. Distinct notes, distinct words may seem to carry, by virtue of their discreteness, discrete portions of the overall meaning, but James tells us that this is an analytical illusion. All they do is magnify or emphasize in turn different components, at times more substantive, at times more transitive, of the overall meaning while the latter, in and as a totality, is busy transitioning or flowing through their stream. Notes or words, and meaning, "are made of the same 'mind-stuff,' and form an unbroken stream."¹⁰

⁷ EiP 1983: 144; PoP 1890: 243; PoP 1981: 236.

⁸ PoP 1890: 278; PoP 1981: 268.

⁹ PoP 1890: 279; PoP 1981: 269.

¹⁰ PoP 1890: 282; PoP 1981: 271.

This mind-stuff is the primal stuff that James, in 1904, came to call “pure experience” in the first of his posthumously published *Essays in Radical Empiricism*.¹¹ The notion of pure experience is a direct outgrowth of that of the stream of thought. Although less metaphorical and thus perhaps less suggestive, but just as terminologically and metaphysically imprecise, that notion continues to stand for the “immediate flux of life,”¹² and it embodies a radical philosophical postulate that tightly connects experienceability with reality.¹³ James’s radical empiricism is rooted in that postulate, one of whose expressions states that all real relations, whether conjunctive, disjunctive, or otherwise, are directly experienced. Characteristic of James’s take is that when he seeks to identify the barest type of relation that accounts for experience’s flux, he chooses that of *withness*.¹⁴ This *withness* is at the heart of all continuous transitions or changes within a self’s experience; it must be taken at face value, just as it is felt, and not as an abstraction. Pure experience is indeed togetherness at work: everything is dynamically connected, is succession without holes. This is not to say that James thinks there is no discontinuity: the one type of discontinuity he never fails to acknowledge is that between two minds or two egos — between two physiologically differentiated streams, as it were, the content of each is impenetrable to the other in any direct manner. But such a break, or the impossibility of transitioning from one stream to another, irreducible though it is, is itself lived as a part of one’s pure experience, and pure experience is through and through continuous, brutally so, without one’s having to posit any kind of artificial mediating device in order to explain it.

It is important to notice at this juncture that James’s description of pure experience retains the intentional feature of the stream of thought. The transitioning that occurs is teleological in the sense that any portion of it is cognizant of any other to the extent that each is contributing to the fulfillment of a general common intention. Such sharing of intention glues all the components of the experience together, for it provides each one of them with a particular place that identifies the standpoint from which it agrees with or corroborates the effort of earlier components and prepares later ones. The movement tends to be one in which a virtual idea gets progressively actualized through corroborating perceptions each one of which, in occurring in the order it does, contributes to further *realize* or concretize the guiding idea itself. For instance, the claim that one knows a particular poem by heart entails practically, or even pragmatically, that no sooner his willful intention to recite it arises than it will proceed to guide the successful execution of it verse by verse, each verse contributing, in its precisely ordered utterance, to the fulfillment of the intention, each being fully cognizant of every other. Transitioning

¹¹ “Does Consciousness Exist?” *Journal of Philosophy, Psychology, and Scientific Methods* [JPPSM], 1 (1 Sept. 1904): 477–91; reprinted in ERE 1912 and ERE 1976: 3–19.

¹² “The Thing and Its Relations,” *JPPSM*, 2 (19 Jan. 1905): 29–41; reprinted as Appendix A in PU: 347–69, and in ERE 1976: 45–59. ERE 1976: 46.

¹³ See “The Experience of Activity,” Dec. 1904, published in *Psychological Review* in 1905, in PU in 1909, and in ERE 1976: 79–95. ERE 1976: 81.

¹⁴ “A World of Pure Experience,” *JPPSM*, 1 (29 Sept. 1904): 533–43, and 1 (13 Oct. 1904): 561–70; partly recycled to form ch. 4, “The Relation between Knower and Known,” in *The Meaning of Truth* (1909); eclectically reprinted in ERE 1976: 21–44. ERE 1976: 23–24.

through this experience confirms or verifies one's knowledge of the poem by allowing it to pass, as it were, from mere concept to experienced percept. Any pure experience leads therefore to the terminal perceptual fulfillment of a conceptual intention. Now James tells us that this very process of continuous actualization or fulfillment creates a double polarization through which the virtual beginning of the transitioning and its actual perceptual ending correspond to the subject-object duality.

Whenever certain intermediaries are given, such that, as they develop towards their terminus, there is experience from point to point of one direction followed, and finally of one process fulfilled, the result is that *their starting-point thereby becomes a knower and their terminus an object meant or known*. That is all that knowing [...] can be known-as, that is the whole of its nature, put into experiential terms.¹⁵

James therefore contends that it is the experiential stream itself that brings about, in its development, such distinctions as that between knowing subject and known object. These are experiential poles that arise from the stream's flow itself, for it is that flow which allows conceptual intentions to be perceptually fulfilled, so much so that the knowing subject isn't a knower until experience has fulfilled its quest. It is within the process of fulfillment that the function of knowing gets created.

It is interesting to see, especially from a Peircean point of view, that it is exactly at this point that an exquisite turbulence emerges in James's reasoning stream and gives rise to what could be called a "semiosic eddy."¹⁶ Indeed James holds that the intentional dynamic at work within pure experience is such that not every intentional, or meaning-loaded, concept needs fulfillment in order to become effective. The very continuity of experience, or absence of discreteness within it, allows it to *learn itself*. An intention once perceptually fulfilled doesn't need to be fulfilled again; its mere emergence within the stream is accompanied by the fringes of its former concrete realization, and this gives it the power to become *representative*, to function as a substitute for the perceptual fulfillment in all sorts of operations, whether physical or mental.¹⁷ Within the stream of pure experience, there develop therefore concurrent semiosic streams or sub-streams that save us the trouble of always verifying perceptually all of our meanings. Thoughts or ideas allow us to economize immensely on perceptual experience. They are themselves experiences, but conceptual, and as such their function is to represent other experiences whose own function they happen to fulfill far more efficiently. But what does it mean, in a world of pure experience, in a world of constant transitions and terminations, to "fulfill a function"? James is unequivocal on this point: "The only experience that one experience can perform is to lead into another experience; and the only fulfillment we can speak of is the reaching of a certain experienced end."¹⁸ Experience

¹⁵ ERE 1976: 29.

¹⁶ I use the adjective "semiosic" to refer to the sign process Peirce called semiosis, and the adjective "semiotic" to refer to what pertains to the science of semeiotic or semiotics.

¹⁷ LAMBERTH (1999: 47) discusses this representational emergence, but without fully noticing what is at work. His comments about the stream of thought or of experience (1999: 37–38, 87–90) don't share the depth of those of MYERS (1986).

¹⁸ ERE 1976: 32.

is teleological throughout; it is itself a highly chaotic system of plural experiences, of plural paths often leading from a same starting point to a same ending point through innumerable diverse transitions. Some paths or transitional strategies are more efficient than others and in time may substitute for the latter as they get learned, thanks to the advantage they offer both in speed of realization and in power of association. Path-learning is a messy process, though, and many strategies get lost in a delusional or fictional meta-space and fail to “re-enter reality and terminate therein.” Even so, what pragmatically matters of course, for James, is that eventually whatever takes place within pure experience ends up somehow returning to it and enriching it for the sake of future experience. And at that we have become quite successful: our conceptualization of experience is solid enough to allow us to “live on our speculative investments,” so long, however, as “our credit remains good.”¹⁹

The *logic* of the successful conceptualization of pure experience, however, is not something that James was interested in investigating with required analytical rigor, for his main philosophical purpose lay elsewhere, as Hookway (1997) has shown. As a philosopher-psychologist he was capable of wonderful phenomenological insights that he could express with a suggestiveness that was to prove highly serviceable to generations of thinkers. But he was no logician, let alone full-blown semeiotician, and as a result James’s pragmatism could not go much beyond the far reaches of his phenomenological and psychological account of pure experience. This will appear more strikingly as we now turn to Peirce, and afterward to Royce.

2. Charles Peirce: From the Law of Mind to the Phaneral Flow

Writing to James on October 3, 1904, Peirce told him:

What you call ‘pure experience’ is not experience at all and certainly ought to have a name. It is downright bad morals so to misuse words, for it prevents philosophy from becoming a science [...] My ‘phenomenon’ for which I must invent a new word is very near your ‘pure experience’ but not quite since I do not exclude time and also speak of only one ‘phenomenon’.²⁰

¹⁹ ERE 1976: 43.

²⁰ CP 8.301. By October 3, 1904, Peirce could have read “Does Consciousness Exist?” and not more than the first three sections of “A World of Pure Experience” (= ERE 1976: 21–31), since sections 4 to 7 appeared in *JPPSM* only on October 13. As MYERS explains (1986: 308), James’s pluralistic metaphysics required him to make pure experiences in the plural his fundamental concept. In “Does Consciousness Exist?” James stated: “I have now to say that there is no *general* stuff of which experience at large is made. There are as many ‘stuffs’ as there are ‘natures’ in the thing experienced.” Both Peirce and James agreed that pure experience or the phaneron was an unanalyzed, undifferentiated, and immediate flux, and that it had to be distinguished from the world of representation or conceptualization (see MYERS, 1986: 312). But Peirce entertained two views of the phaneron, one with a capital P that viewed it as a continuum one and unique, the other with a lowercase p that viewed it as particularized or granular, thus closer to James’s notion of pure experience.

Peirce's criticism is typical of the man. Peirce is not a psychologist like James, but he, too, is a phenomenologist of sorts, perhaps not as gifted or prolific as James in his descriptions, but still he could be quite an acute observer of the inner workings of the mind. That he would not approve of James's use of the word "experience" is of course not surprising, knowing how often Peirce insisted on limiting its use to expressing the rawness of the confrontation between ego and non-ego that so typifies the category of secondness. Peirce, however, had no difficulty with the kind of primal reality that James was aiming at with his "pure experience." A better technical word was needed for it. Peirce had been using the word "phenomenon," but without any satisfaction given its heavy historical and philosophical baggage. It was about three weeks later that Peirce finally settled upon a new word, indeed much more felicitous, and far more precise although just as Greek: "phaneron," the observation of which became the object of "phaneroscopy."

But we are getting unwisely ahead of the story. Before coming back to the phaneron, we need to backtrack a good deal. As is well known, Peirce studied James's *Principles of Psychology* with great care, taking the time to review the volumes for *The Nation*,²¹ and returning to them on several later occasions. He greatly admired the work for its suggestive power and essential contribution to the field of psychology, but as a philosopher and logician he found it defective in many ways. Exactly one year after the appearance of his *Nation* review, Peirce published in *The Monist* of July 1892 a paper that was to play in his own philosophical development a rôle similar to that of James's "Stream of Thought" in the latter's development. That paper was "The Law of Mind," the third of a series of five metaphysical articles that appeared between 1891 and 1893 in *The Monist*.²² It is noteworthy that "The Law of Mind" was written about fourteen years after the two essays that ushered in Peirce's pragmatistic credo (although not named as such yet), namely "The Fixation of Belief" and "How to Make Our Ideas Clear," and thirteen years before the *Monist* article "What Pragmatism Is" in which Peirce announced the birth of "pragmatism." Although "The Law of Mind" never discusses pragmatism as such, we will see that the core of its argument does clear up an essential element of Peirce's pragmatic maxim.

It is useful to recall that by the early 1890s, Peirce's philosophy has matured considerably, spurred by the development of his logic of relatives, the extension of his theory of categories from thought to nature, the study of probability theory, and the incorporation of a full-blown evolutionism into his metaphysics. Peirce has reached a stage where he can revisit his earlier theory of mind and especially, as far as we are here concerned, the question of the concatenation of ideas, from the vantage point of a combined psychical and physical perspective informed by the latest advances of mathematics.

One of Peirce's main intentions in "The Law of Mind" is very similar to James's: to overcome the nominalistic belief that ideas are discrete. A little phenomenological attention suffices to reveal that the convenient preconception that ideas are discrete entities creates explanatory difficulties that can only be removed by artificial hypotheses

²¹ Review in two parts, published in *The Nation* on 2 and 9 July 1891; reprinted in W8: 231–39.

²² All five papers are reprinted in W8, with "The Law of Mind" at pages 135–57.

invoking occult powers of the soul. But such *ad-hoc* hypotheses are unable to explain satisfactorily either how ideas bridge or flow from one to another, or how they maintain themselves through time. What would prevent a fleeting idea from vanishing altogether? For Peirce, if ideas do hold on in the psychological space-time of consciousness, it is due to their being, not instantaneous or discontinuous flashes, but lasting events.²³ The mathematical notion of infinitesimals blended with that of continuity helps explain this. Ideas should be seen as episodes of immediate consciousness embracing infinitesimal intervals of time. Each of these intervals, by definition, is an immediately perceived sequence of three instants — beginning, middle, end — and each continuously merges into immediately subsequent and overlapping intervals. Each interval is immediately perceived, but the relations of all parts across a sequence can only be mediately perceived or inferred. This mediate perception, because it represents *all* the relations across the sequence, needs to be conceived both as *objectively* “spread out” over the entire sequence, and as *subjectively* embraced in the last interval, or moment, of the sequence. In this way, the entire series gets to be present in the awareness that accompanies the “last” moment, namely the moment that contains an end not already becoming but about to become the middle of the next interval. Past ideas, therefore, do not vanish entirely but remain present because they are never wholly past: past and present belong to the same continuum of infinitesimal moments, and the nature of the continuum is such that a past in utter discontinuity with the present would be a contradiction. Ideas seemingly conceived in the present are continuously inherited from the past. This does not imply that the past is wholly in the present, for ideas tend to lose their intensity over time. To the extent that they are present, however, ideas are so partly “vicariously” or representationally, partly immediately.

Peirce’s infinitesimalist account of the continuum of ideas is, in spirit, pretty close to James’s account of how each segment of the stream of thought testifies to the entire transitive sequence thanks to its “fringes” even as it magnifies this or that particular aspect of it. But Peirce strives to offer a mathematically grounded hypothesis, perhaps a bit risky since he was well aware that infinitesimals had fallen out of fashion, but justified in two ways: first, by appealing to Cantor’s theory of infinite collections and insisting on the distinction between the two principal orders of infinite (the endless and the innumerable); and second, by offering a new conception of the continuum based on the union of two properties: “Kantianity” on the one hand, or the infinite divisibility of the continuum (later rephrased in terms of having parts whose own parts are of the same kind, i.e., whose parts are never definite²⁴), and “Aristotelicity” on the other, or the

²³ As MYERS (1986: 150) has remarked, James saw such an intimate connection between the concepts of consciousness and time in their implied continuities that one would have expected him to provide a description of the experience of time as flowing. But this James never does, leaving us with the “unsubstantiated belief that the continuity of such a flow is a constant property of human awareness” (MYERS 1986: 154), something which Myers doesn’t believe is the case since “time is not a sensation and can have no flow to be intuited” (153).

²⁴ This is an idea that Aristotle also held, since he stated in *Physics* 231a24–26 that a line was not made of indivisible points. Peirce may have overlooked that passage, which I thank Masato Ishida for having pointed out to me.

stipulation that a continuum contains the endpoints of all of its endless series, and thus contains all of its limits. His recourse to the mathematics of infinities provides Peirce with a *pragmatic* justification for his use of infinitesimals: they make a true continuum far more conceivable. The new definition of the continuum, in turn, allows Peirce to avoid all the traditional pitfalls pockmarked by the discreteness of ideas. Intervals of consciousness that mix both the past and the future become then conceivable (“the present is half past and half to come”), and immediate feelings need not be instantaneous: they are spread out.

That neither the flow of time nor the flow of mind are reversible is of course essential to the account. The space-time of consciousness is a unidirectional continuum of states or moments of feelings affecting or transitioning immediately into subsequent states or moments of feelings. Every moment is overlapped by the previous moment, and each overlaps the next; no moment is ever isolated, and thus none escapes past influence. In addition, the time continuum is such that any feeling can be conceived as immediately connected to all those feelings that differ infinitesimally from it in intensity, which explains how feelings may change. And the space continuum is such that parts of mind infinitesimally close to one another are bound to form “communities of feeling,” an essential condition for the coordination both between and within minds.²⁵

With these mathematically inspired hypotheses, Peirce is better equipped to approach the question of how ideas affect one another. Here, too, as in James, we encounter a “semiotic eddy” in the stream of Peirce’s reasoning, but since its spin is far more powerful, we’d better call it a “semiotic whirlpool.” Peirce agreed with James that the continuum of experience wasn’t purely sensational but also representational. But for feelings to become representational, they need first to get generalized. How does that happen? Peirce notes that feelings start up as ungeneralized ideas that can both spread (with decreasing energy the more removed they get from the present) and associate with other feelings. Simply because they are innumerable in any finite interval of time, feelings are bound to *weld together* into *general* ideas. Such general ideas are continua of living feeling within which ideas gradually modify and shape themselves into others. The more recent a past idea is, the more insistent its influence or power of calling up new ideas gets. Ideas not yet born are being *prepared* in the present through acquired *habits*. These habits consist of bonds between ideas, general connections that call for the emergence of incoming ideas. Peirce can thus claim that future ideas are “already affectible and already affected,” since the closer they are to the present, the readier they are to emerge by virtue of that preparation. That insight allows Peirce to open the door to logic and to assert that affecting ideas cause the ideas they affect to be attached as “logical predicates” to them as “subjects.” And so it is that in this semiotic whirlpool each idea is made to *represent* the previous idea to the following idea and is spurred to do so by the flow of representational energy inherited from the past but always at its peak in the present understood as continuous mediation between past and future.

²⁵ James also comes up with a strategy to bridge the gap between different minds with his theory of the “conterminousness of minds”: see ERE 1976: 37–42. Peirce’s semiotic theory, however, assumes far less discontinuity between the minds of different egos than James could admit, and so does Royce’s idealistic philosophy.

Suggestions from the past influence the future through the present in the same way as an object influences an interpretant through a sign.

General ideas imply the death of “discretist” nominalism:²⁶ they are living realities “concreted” by associations of feelings, and they pervade and govern mental phenomena. The law of mind is teleological; it asserts that ideas shall influence and be influenced by one another and determine acts in the future. It is worth noticing that in stating that mind’s law is that “ideas tend to spread continuously and to affect certain others,” and that in doing so such ideas gain generality and weld with other ideas, Peirce has actually managed to clarify one central aspect of the pragmatic maxim he had formulated fourteen years earlier: how conceptions may have effects. The answer is that they do so because they bind and associate with others, that such binding is never innocent but serves to “transform” (i.e., to get forms across where they were not present before), and that such transformations or “affections” are fully explainable through a proper mathematical and pertinently metaphysical and logical understanding of both continuity and generality.

Eleven years after “The Law of Mind,” thus in 1903, around the time of his Harvard lectures on pragmatism, Peirce began developing or enlarging considerably three essential theories: the phenomenological theory of the categories, the semi-phenomenological, semi-semiotic theory of perception, and the logical theory of signs. Lacking the space to show in detail how one can view the combination of all three as a highly elaborate outgrowth of the results Peirce obtained in his 1892 paper, I will limit myself to a few remarks concerning phaneroscopy. As said earlier, Peirce believed his conception of the Phaneron was preferable to James’s pure experience; this was not merely a matter of terminological preference, but far more a radical improvement over James’s idea. Whereas James conceived the “flux of life” as a succession of myriad pure experiences, Peirce put forward the far broader conception of a unique Phaneron understood as the unbroken continuum of the flow of manifestation that undistinguishably accompanies any sort of awareness from the moment it emerges to the moment it disappears. The Phaneron is the sum total of absolutely everything that ever becomes present, in any way whatever, to any particular kind of mind. Full consciousness is not even required: the mere unreflective awareness that is found whenever some type of manifestation occurs is all that is necessary. Within the Phaneron, there is no separation between ego and non-ego but fusion of these unseparated poles. The Phaneron is the original stream, the one that

²⁶ I naturally agree with PIHLSTROM (2004: 34–35) and a host of others (e.g., PERRY 1935: 1: 547, 560–61, 566–67, & 2: 407, HAACK 1977: 392–93, MYERS 1986: 286–91, ROSENTHAL 2000: 94, OPPENHEIM 2005: 148–51) that the view that Peirce’s pragmatism is realist while James’s is nominalist is too crude to be fair. James had severe reservations toward any form of thoroughgoing nominalism. His own mild nominalistic proclivities were mixed with a heavy dose of realism, as he sought to blend logical realism with empiricism. HOOKWAY (1997) explores key similarities and differences between Peirce’s and James’s versions of pragmatism, showing that they had distinct purposes (a logical vs. a philosophical cast): for Peirce, unlike James, “the consequences we refer to when we classify meanings must involve general patterns” (154), and this helps us inquire responsibly and achieve a definite purpose, such as making scientific progress (158). Hookway also shows that, while Peirce held James’s pragmatism to be “technically and theoretically flawed,” yet he thought that “‘in practice’ the two versions were likely to be very close” (146).

never gets interrupted, the one that carries continuously all thoughts, all segments of experience, all sensations, emotions, dreams, illusions, errors, actions, calculations, efforts, intentions, etc. The Phaneron is the permanent background of manifestness, a continuous multi-dimensional flow with no clear beginning nor clear end. Within that *ur*-continuum, however, there are myriads of semiotic whirlpools that keep emerging whose centrifugal force leads to the separation of ego and non-ego, thereby creating the conditions necessary for representational mediation. These whirlpools are phaneral through and through since they are part of the stream and fed by the stream. But they themselves constitute continua of a new kind, whose main import is that they keep reducing the chaotic phaneral stream to some level of unity.

Peirce agrees with James that the Phaneron is intrinsically chaotic, or “quasi-chaotic” as James said of his pure experience. All at once is manifest in the Phaneron, and consequently nothing is clearly apprehended. I have had occasion to show elsewhere how a semiotic continuum emerges from the Phaneron both because the very logic of the Phaneron, by virtue of its being a Possible, is that it shall annul itself and thus bring in continuously vast ranges of semiotic actualization, and because Peirce’s theory of perception provides the explanation necessary to understand how one passes from mere perceptual awareness to perceptual and conceptual consciousness, that is, how one moves from the phaneral continuum to the semiotic continuum without leaving the former.²⁷ I shall not go through the detail of this analysis here. Suffice it to say that Peirce’s study of continuity and his later application of it to both phaneroscopy and semiotics shore up pretty solidly what remained inchoate in James’s phenomenological/psychological account. For instance, Peirce’s clear distinction between the phaneral and the semiotic will allow him to identify far more precisely how the representational emerges from the manifestational, and especially — this is important for James, and also for Royce — how intentions get carried out. The semiotic stream is teleological through and through, and it is one of Peirce’s signal logical and metaphysical contributions to have shown how signs manage to “communicate forms” according to conditional intentions. Such considerations keep bringing us back to pragmatism, or rather pragmaticism, since the method of pragmaticism is to identify what purpose is at work within any thought, and to study what it seeks to bring about and what use it is designed to subserve.²⁸ To further understand this, it is now time that we turned to the great “teleologist” Josiah Royce.

²⁷ I will mention the following three articles: (1) “Phenomenon vs. Sign, Appearance vs. Representation,” in *Semiotics 1999*, eds. Scott Simpkins, C. W. Spinks, and John Deely, New York: Peter Lang Publishing, 2000, pp. 419–31; (2) “Quand l’apparence (se) fait signe: la genèse de la représentation chez Peirce,” in *RS/SI*, 20/1–3 (2000): 95–144; (3) “Is Phaneroscopy as a Pre-Semiotic Science Possible?” in *Semiotiche* (Torino: Ananke), 2 (2004): 15–30. Forthcoming in *Semiotica* is another article entitled “Iconoscopy between Phaneroscopy and Semeiotic.”

²⁸ See R 478: ISP 144 and 159 (c. 1903).

3. Josiah Royce: From the Linkage of Facts to Intermediation

Royce's teleological and constructive idealism is that of a profound empiricist or, better perhaps, experientialist. His entire philosophy, as much as that of James or Peirce, aims to make out what "experience" is all about.²⁹ But Royce wants to show that experience can never be its own end. Well known is his poetic metaphor in the last of his lectures on the philosophy of loyalty: "Human life taken merely as it flows, viewed merely as it passes by in time and is gone, is indeed a lost river of experience that plunges down the mountains of youth and sinks in the deserts of age. Its significance comes solely through its relations to the air and the ocean and the great deeps of universal experience."³⁰ Hence, whenever the metaphor of the stream, the flow, or the flux appears in Royce's writings, it is always in a context where Royce is trying to understand what is the relationship between that stream and the ocean toward which it is flowing, the end-source of its own meaning or *raison d'être*. Royce indeed associates the stream to the temporal world in which we live as finite beings, but what he seeks, always, is to provide an account, at once logical, ethical, and metaphysical, of the relationship between the temporal and the eternal, the finite and the infinite, the many and the one. In discussing Royce's thought in this connection, one must distinguish between the middle Royce, who hasn't paid enough attention to Peirce's semiotic writings (but has paid a great deal of attention to Peirce on other matters, including infinity and continuity), and the late Royce, who has heard and obeyed Peirce's admonition to study logic, and who has subsequently revised his conception of the Absolute by turning it into an infinite community of interpretation, thereby instituting, exactly as one would have expected him to do, a particularly powerful semiotic whirlpool, deserving perhaps to be called a "semiotic maelstrom." The latter will be discussed in the concluding section.

Is there, within the Roycean Nachlass, a particular text that would have played, in the development of his philosophy, a rôle similar to James's "Stream of Thought" or Peirce's "Law of Mind"? Yes and no: there are in fact quite a number of such texts, because the general question of the connection between the one and the many is one that agitated Royce all his life.³¹ Of these texts, however, two are especially relevant:

²⁹ See NAGL 2004, part 1 for a brief but solid discussion of Royce's pragmatism, shown to be close in spirit to that of Peirce, and part 2 for a demonstration of the centrality of Royce's conception of a community of interpretation in his pragmatism. OPPENHEIM (2005) is of course an essential reference in comparative American philosophy.

³⁰ *The Philosophy of Loyalty*, Lecture 8: "Loyalty and Religion" (New York: Macmillan, 1908), pp. 386–87.

³¹ For instance: the essay "The Possibility of Error," chap. 11 in *The Religious Aspect of Philosophy* (1885); parts 2 to 4 of the essay "The Absolute and the Individual" at the end of *The Conception of God* (1898); several lectures in *The World and the Individual*, such as "The Internal and External Meaning of Ideas" and sections 2 to 4 of the supplementary essay on "The One, the Many, and the Infinite" (in vol. 1, 1899), "The Recognition of Facts," "The Linkage of Facts," and "The Temporal and the Eternal" (in vol. 2, 1901); "The Eternal and the Practical" (*Philosophical Review* 13 [1904]: 113–42); lecture 4, "The World and the Will" in *Sources of Religious Insight* (1912); "The Principles of Logic" in *Encyclopaedia of the Philosophical Sciences* (1913); and several lectures in vol. 2 of *The Problem of Christianity*, including "Perception, Conception, and Interpretation," "The Will to Interpret," and "The World of Interpretation" (1913).

"The Internal and External Meaning of Ideas" (1899) and "The Linkage of Facts" (1900). In the first text Royce establishes a teleological definition of reality grounded on the unsundered linkage between what he calls the internal meaning, or purpose, and external meaning, or experiential fulfillment, of an idea.³² The linkage between an idea and its object is one of correspondence, he says, but by correspondence one should understand no more than the fact that whatever connection gets established between idea and object, it is one that the idea itself *wants* to possess. Any idea is an expression of will, an intent seeking realization and fulfillment, and when something that gets realized gets connected to what is taken as its originating idea, that connection will be true if and only if the realized object fully corresponds to the intention manifested in the idea. Truth therefore becomes a matter of "intended agreement." "Every idea," says Royce, "is as much a volitional process as it is an intellectual process."³³ This is as much as to say that every concept wills or intends to exert a practical influence that contributes to some concrete determination or transformation that is itself part of a larger plan. Furthermore, an idea is never caused by its object; on the contrary, an idea, through the attentive interest of the internal meaning it expresses, selects its object, although without predetermining the success of its eventual correspondence or agreement with it, because the object cannot be merely identical to the idea (otherwise it wouldn't need to be intended or tended toward), but is *other* than that idea. "[W]hat the idea always aims to find in its object is *[its] own conscious purpose or will, embodied in some more determinate form* than the idea by itself alone [...] possesses."³⁴ That determinate form is the idea's external meaning, the concrete individual embodiment and fulfillment of the ultimate desire anchored within the idea's internal meaning. Extending this insight to the whole of reality, Royce then formulates his teleological conception of Being in terms of the "complete embodiment, in individual form and in final fulfillment, of the internal meaning of finite ideas."³⁵

Essential also is the Roycean tenet that everything finite owes its finitude to its being a fragment of an infinite and all-inclusive whole whose entire "content is present in the unity of consciousness of one absolute moment."³⁶ There are many signs that this is the case, and among them our relentless pursuit of truth. It is never enough for us to be simply embroiled in our own presumably individual spheres of experience. Whenever we seek to understand what are the facts of the universe we may trust, or to guess how we ought to act in order to further worthy goals, we are aiming at a kind of certainty and insight that no single individual or finite community of individuals can claim to possess. The private sphere of experience is too small and narrow for anyone to make general claims about the nature of experience that others would have to automatically share.

³² This is actually pretty close to James's view: James not only did not see any separation between a thought and its object, but he, too, saw both as two poles, now viewed as potential conceptual intention, now as actualized percept. Royce follows the same pattern, although far more pointedly.

³³ "The Internal and External Meaning of Ideas," WI-1: 311.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, WI-1: 327.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, WI-1: 339.

³⁶ "The Absolute and the Individual," in *The Conception of God* (1898), p. 204.

The pursuit of knowledge, the conduct of inquiry, postulate higher levels of realities for which such notions as the “experience of all humankind” are meaningful and thus graspable as much as an internal meaning as a process of actual fulfillment. Whenever our cognitive efforts succeed in presenting us with a fragmentary thought that has the coloration of truth, they do so only mediately, through some contrast with a possible future experience to be verified, through the indication of new problems, or through suggestions for further inquiry.³⁷ Royce urges us not to deny the reality of this continuous pressure from beyond under whose whipping we never stop laboring. The facts of present experience are never mere detached fragments of truth accredited by arbitrary subjective authorities. Facts are to be seen both logically and metaphysically as “fragments of meaning embodied in an experience of a wider scope.”³⁸ The factuality that we seek is one that makes us recognize those conditions which we *ought* to accept because they really determine the long-term success of our action. The facts we accept must be valid not only for ourselves in the present moment, but also for an indefinite number of other *conceivable* selves. What we find here in Royce, not too implicitly, is an important supplement to Peirce’s pragmatic maxim. Such a statement, Royceanly modified, might read as follows: “Consider what are the courses of action that could conceivably fulfill the intentions that we conceive our idea to express. Then, the conception of these courses of action as they appear to a consciousness inclusive of an indefinite number of points of view is the whole of our conception of the idea.”

The world of our experience is the world of all the “facts” that we have come to recognize, either because they embody the results of the courses of action we have actually taken in order to obey the imperatives expressed by our purposive will, or because they suggest the further possibilities of action most likely to improve and deepen the expression of our will. Facts then are not external constraints demanding our blind assent, nor are they mere data. They are expressions of purposes offered to our acknowledgment even though much of what they are remains foreign, “other” to us, and thus not fully understood. Facts, in Royce’s view, are subordinated to an *ought*, not merely the ought of our transient, temporal will, but the Ought urged upon us by the higher unity of consciousness that includes all points of view.

An important question concerns how we find out what should be the next step in our course of action, what should be the next “fact” that needs our attention: how do we listen to the purpose’s own urge and how do we find out how best to fulfill it? If Royce acknowledges any stream of thought worth its flow, it has indeed to be that one, which seeks to fulfill intentions and establish agreement between ideas and their realization within the world of experience. His somewhat technical chapter on “The Linkage of Facts” provides us with an answer that relies on the generalization of a relation that

³⁷ See Royce’s *Studies of Good and Evil*, essay “Self-Consciousness, Social Consciousness, and Nature” (New York: D. Appleton & Co., 1898), pp. 212–13.

³⁸ “The Recognition of Facts,” WI-2: 25. We must keep in mind that “facts” are elements of what Royce calls the “World of Description,” not of what he calls the “World of Appreciation.” This important Roycean distinction was introduced in Lecture 12, “Physical Law and Freedom; the World of Description and the World of Appreciation,” of his book *The Spirit of Modern Philosophy* (Boston & New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1892).

Royce, out of good instinct, finds particularly fundamental, the relation of *betweenness*. Royce is showing good instinct on two counts: in his turning to mathematics for a precise account of that relation, and, though he doesn't know it yet, in his preparing himself to adopt a dozen years later Peirce's deeper-reaching semiotic account of the relation of mediation. There is no space to review in detail Royce's study of "betweenness," but a few remarks will do. James, we remember, favored the relation of "withness" in his phenomenological account of the stream of thought. Royce's standpoint is more formal, and what matters to him is to unearth not only the particular strategy that a finite mind resorts to in order to organize and bring consistency to its world of temporal experience, but also to show the limits of that organization by contrasting it with the manner in which this same world is apprehended by an infinite or absolute consciousness. Indeed, Royce's own phenomenological account of the stream aims at showing that as far as finite thinking beings are concerned, *pace* James and Peirce, the experiential flow is not truly continuous, but is more akin to a discrete series: "But experience at any moment shows how I am conscious of my own deeds, of my progress, of my acts of attention, and of my approaches to selfhood in any way, in the form of a *discrete series, in which one stage or act of life is followed by the next*."³⁹ This is not to say that Royce doesn't believe in the reality of a true continuum: on the contrary, from his motto that "all differences rest upon an underlying unity"⁴⁰ follows that discrete series rest upon an underlying continuum that constitutes their permanent background and horizon.

To think finitely is to seek a rational organization of our experience, to discriminate and describe its facts, and to formulate and constantly revise accordingly our plan for the expression of one's self (or our internal meaning). In order to do this, we need to link past, present, and future experience, find out how the world is organized so that we may refine our plans and strategies, and so reduce the danger of our failures. We attend to what we have verified to be the case and what we haven't, to what we have achieved and what we haven't, and we make out the differences in a recurrent process of comparison and discrimination. We are looking for the glue that holds things together and we seek to discover its composition. Whether we seek to understand what is the case or what ought to be done, we are trying to discover the laws of the natural and of the social order. These laws can only be discovered through a process of analysis and observation that pays attention to the linkage *between* facts, because it is what we keep finding "between" them that reveals the structure of the describable world. Comparison and discrimination always require that between the facts compared or distinguished we discover a *third* element which holds the key not only to both their likenesses and differences, but also to the *direction* or transformational tendency manifested by what sorts of characters are retained and what sorts of characters get modified. Recurrent examination will bring to light a series of intermediaries or dynamic *links* that contribute both to retain certain forms and to modify others. The key is to find these links in actual experience repeatedly, to establish the genealogy of these links (the links between the links), and to identify the principle of their succession. The recurrent sequence of our

³⁹ "The Linkage of Facts," WI-2: 105.

⁴⁰ Ibid., WI-2: 56. Royce states that every discrete series is a "mere fragment of a continuum" in WI-2: 98.

own distinctions as we follow the trail of these links will reveal the direction of the process of transformation.

The working postulate that guides our descriptive quest is: “Between any two there is a third.”⁴¹ Application of this postulate brings us to discover all sorts of ordered series of facts, as well as series of series, variously interwoven among themselves by their own links, and collections of such series form complex ordered systems that are themselves found within series of systems. One important limitation is that we are often unable to discover the links we are seeking, so that our empirical world tends to appear discrete. Another limitation is that we do not ourselves discover these links in their own functioning order, but according to the vagaries of our own investigation, an investigation which may only be incremental, proceeding step by step, stage by stage, discretely, finitely, and fallibly. Our inquiry makes us look for intermediaries, the links between any two facts, again and again, but as we do so, we ourselves conduct our search step by step, one stage at a time, discretely, in such a way that there is no “between” between our steps, just as there is no “between” between the whole numbers in their well-ordered series.

Royce surmises that “the true series of facts in the world must be a well-ordered series, in which every fact has its next-following fact,”⁴² for the reason that that world is the world as it appears to an absolute insight that does not need to discriminate and find links. As Royce states in *The Conception of God*, “Precisely because we mean the Absolute Whole to be above mere mediation, we in our finite thoughts have to use expressions of mediation which involve, and in fact explicitly state on occasion, their own insufficiency, their inadequacy to their objects.”⁴³ Thus we accomplish our finitude, by discovering and witnessing the linkage of facts. Our empirical life is “a series of results of intermediation,”⁴⁴ a process of growth in which each of our actions is a gambling “third” that brings us closer to the Other that is our fulfillment.

4. Conclusion: From Semiotic Mediation to the Stream’s Mouth

Royce’s use of the seemingly redundant term “intermediation” shows that he was aware that it was not enough for something to be “between” two other things for it to become an actual mediator between them. The mathematical conception of betweenness he had the good instinct of turning to provided him with a rigorous understanding of one aspect of that conception, namely what it entailed as regards, first, the sharing of common invariant properties among elements in a collection or in an ordered series, and second, the transformational tendency or regularity that characterized the series as a whole. But another aspect of betweenness remained unclear, that of its active or dynamic mediation. It is one thing for the number 4 to sit between 3 and 5 within the whole number series, and another for a peacemaker to sit between two warring parties. These are two very

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, WI-2: 89.

⁴² *Ibid.*, WI-2: 107.

⁴³ “The Absolute and the Individual,” *The Conception of God* (1898), p. 205.

⁴⁴ “The Place of the Self in Being,” WI-2: 312.

different types of mediation, one utterly passive, since the mediational energy is inherited from the law presiding over the series and not originated by the number 4 itself, the other utterly active, since the peacemaker, even if mandated by a higher order, needs to be creative. It is the latter type of mediation that Royce had always been striving toward, but it was only after Peirce urged him to study logic that Royce began to shift toward a more satisfactory description of what actually takes place when two disparate things get linked.

In the manuscript version of Peirce’s review of the second volume of *The World and the Individual*, Peirce criticized Royce’s distinction between internal and external meaning of an idea by representing that such a dichotomy suffered from a lack of analysis of the very meaning of meaning.⁴⁵ Peirce proceeded to show that there were three types of signs, of which one, the icon, was connected to its object via a resemblance, which resemblance constituted the internal meaning of that sign; the second kind was the index, whose actual physical connection to its object constituted the external meaning of the sign. And then there was a third kind, the symbol, whose meaning was neither internal nor external but interpretive since it depended on the sort of impact it would have on another sign, the interpretant. This criticism of Peirce was not included in the *Nation* review, and so we do not know whether Royce could have become aware of it through a letter or a personal conversation with Peirce. In any case, eleven years later, in 1913, Royce published his great classic, *The Problem of Christianity*, in the second part of which four lectures (11 to 14) endeavored to expound and expand on Peirce’s semiotic theory of interpretation. Royce had spent some time re-reading closely several of Peirce’s earliest published papers, including his “Upon a New List of Categories” of 1867 and his anti-Cartesian articles of 1868. The result of that study was that Royce completely revised the notion of betweenness or mediation in terms of semiotic interpretation, and that this led him also to revise his metaphysical doctrine of the Absolute in such grand fashion that we may indeed feel, while perusing the *Problem of Christianity*, that Royce got caught, to his and our own delight, in a “semiotic maelstrom.”⁴⁶

We remember that James’s stream of thought, at least in one of its typical embodiments, was an account of the passage from conception to perception, or, as Royce liked to translate it more Jamesianly, from bank-note to cash or from credit-value to cash-value. The problem was that such antitheses involve dualities, and that in order to bring their two terms into synthesis the usual strategy is to bring in a third active element (such as an act of attention or a particular deed) that turns out not to be on a right par with either, so that the passage from one term to the other doesn’t get satisfactorily resolved by way of a genuine triadic synthesis. In examining this problem, Royce realized that, besides the perceptual and the conceptual cognitive processes, there was a third one that was not reducible to either, the process of interpretation — the process of exchanging one currency into another, to prolong the monetary metaphor.⁴⁷

⁴⁵ See CP 8.119.

⁴⁶ In NAGL’s words: Royce’s “sign-theoretical turn” (2004: 54–55).

⁴⁷ See section 8 of “Perception, Conception, and Interpretation,” PC 2001: 282–83.

Royce sees several advantages in Peirce's conception of interpretation.⁴⁸ The first advantage is that it consists in an irreducibly triadic relation that brings its three terms into a determinate order: a Sign brings its Object to the attention of an Interpretant, an interpreter translates a text for the benefit of a foreign listener, a teacher explains Peirce's semiotic theory to students, etc. Or a single person, deliberating upon a recent course of action and wondering how to proceed next, seeks to interpret her own past self to her own future self. This triadic pattern may be extended to the world's history — within the present, we are interpreting events of the past in the hope of influencing the future course — or to the time-order itself — the present is the interpretation of the past to the future. A second advantage is that this triadic relation is intrinsically social, even within the confines of a single mind: that to which the interpretation is addressed is always another, be it a future self or an altogether different mind. In essence, interpretation is best conceived as a constructive conversation. A third advantage is that the process is potentially infinite: every interpretation calls for a further interpretation of itself, which means among other things that it seeks, to use a favorite hymnal phrase of Royce's, a "city out of sight."⁴⁹ Interpretation forms therefore a teleological stream with myriads of affluents and effluents, all flowing toward a reality both beyond and inmost. As Oppenheim put it well, "interpretation aims at humanly expressible truths which, while in touch with the temporally transient, win an ever-constant element from the eternal."⁵⁰

One particular benefit of such a triadic account of interpretation is that it sheds considerable light upon the logical process of comparison, which Royce had struggled to explain in "The Linkage of Facts." Whenever we compare any two things, we need to find something in between that will serve to make out likenesses and differences. But this something in between is no longer to be accounted for in the insufficiently dynamic terms of a mathematical conception of betweenness, but rather in the terms of Peirce's logic of interpretants. We are still looking for a *third*, but that third needs to be a truly mediating idea or image through which one can literally see how each object under comparison is a transformation from or into the other. This mediating image is thus a sign that represents what constitutes the likenesses and differences between the compared objects by displaying through different strategies (iconic, indexical, symbolical) the nature of the underlying continuity. The process of interpretation, messy as it may be when it seeks to arbitrate conflicts and bring enemies to sign a mutual agreement at the negotiation table, strives to discover or design the one new "third idea" most likely to interpret successfully each side to the other, by showing how each can be understood in terms of the other on the ground of an underlying commonality that only now, through the *creative* third idea, can be represented to all parties.⁵¹

With this revised conception of semiotic mediation, Royce holds a new metaphysical key that allows him to redefine his earlier conception of the Absolute, bringing it even closer to the finite world of experience. Indeed, as long as Royce held

⁴⁸ See NAGL 2004: 55–56 for a complementary discussion.

⁴⁹ "Perception, Conception, and Interpretation," PC 2001: 286–91. This phrase is found in several old hymns, such as in the third stanza of Charles Wesley's "Leader of Faithful Souls" (18th century).

⁵⁰ OPPENHEIM 2005: 168.

⁵¹ MAHOWALD (1972: 128–32) offers brief insights on the role of the mediator.

up to his earlier conception of linkage or betweenness, he was not able to provide a fully satisfactory account of the linkage between the Absolute and the finite world. For the Absolute, as the ultimate insight capable of holding together the infinite variety of finite experiences through time into one single and eternal unity of consciousness, was a type of consciousness above all mediation and therefore exclusive, within itself, of any sort of betweenness. But now that mediation has been redefined in terms of interpretation, Royce develops a metaphysics that removes that last alienation from the Absolute, who therefore, while retaining most attributes already conferred upon it by a long tradition, is no longer an unfathomable "*ab-solus*," a Lone God separate and remote. For interpretation is a will that seeks ever greater rationality, ever deeper truth, ever fuller guidance in the interest of thriving individuals, communities, and societies. The logical process of interpretation remains indeed formally identical at every level of consciousness, from the most to the least individual. It creates expanding communities and communities of communities, "communities of interpretation," as Royce calls them. Indeed the very triadic relation that defines interpretation is one that brings distinct selves or aspects of selves together and turns them into a community.⁵² Such communities preserve the distinct individualities of their members while creating among them genuine links, links that consist of shared purposes and interests that define the community as a whole and require themselves to be interpreted within ever higher communities. The bond of any community is the spirit that inspires all common purposive relations within it, and as such is the interpreter or mediator of that community. Ultimately, therefore, we may metaphysically imagine the community of all communities, the Community of Interpretation that is animated by the Interpreter that interprets all to all. Royce states: "In the Will to Interpret, the divine and the human seem to be in closest touch with each other."⁵³ If they are in closest touch, it is because they partake of the same logic, a logic that becomes an integral part of the definition of the real world. Royce holds the real world to be the true interpretation of the contrast between our will and the fulfillment of our will, between internal and external meanings, at all levels of experience. For an interpretation to be both real and true, the community that actualizes it must be real, and the goal that it seeks must be reached.⁵⁴ This is done through an infinite series of individual interpretations, every single one of which plays a determinate and significant part within the real order of time. Whenever we create the "third idea" that illuminates the path ahead and indicates how to get closer to the goal, we in that moment are catching an empirical glimpse of the very insight that pertains to the ultimate Interpreter.

⁵² OPPENHEIM (2005: 169–70) shows that a full appreciation of the interpretive process must take into account not only its dialogic and logical dimensions, but also its instinctive, affective, volitional, artistic, religious, and mystical dimensions. He adds that it takes a genuinely loyal person to engage successfully in that process, and that in this way, which requires as much a commitment to a local community as an opening to the call of the universal community, "the late Royce's development of his theory and art of loyal interpretation went well beyond that toward which Peirce, James, and Dewey pointed." In this regard, see also NAGL (2004: 64–65) regarding what he views as "Royce's post-Peircean 'humanist' turn," and MAHOWALD (1972: 124–28) regarding the community of interpretation.

⁵³ "The Will to Interpret," PC 2001: 319.

⁵⁴ "The World of Interpretation," PC 2001: 338–40.

What would Peirce have thought of the latest version of Royce's idealistic account? The *Problem of Christianity* appeared one year before Peirce's death, and he probably did not read it. But in the same 1902 letter to Royce quoted at the beginning of this article, Peirce showed signs that he would have agreed with the gist of Royce's argument:

Your statement of the relation of the individual to God is sublime and fit to satisfy the soul in life and in the hour of death. It must stand for age after age. My feeling is that the individual just fills his little place in the revelation of the universal [and,] except for the sake of what fragment of universal meaning he bears[,] is no account [...] Individuals are cells.⁵⁵

Peirce's pragmatism was never that of an individualist. He may not have reached the heights of Royce's metaphysical speculations since he was more preoccupied with logic, but certainly we sense the profound community of spirit that bound these two thinkers from the very moment when, in 1900, Peirce corrected his own pragmatism and declared that there was indeed an ultimate practical purpose, an ultimate tendency that governed all representational yearnings, something to the development of which all conceivable practical effects contributed to. Peirce called it "concrete reasonableness," a self-sufficient goal that brings everything together into one organic whole for the only sake of the unification itself.⁵⁶ Whether we call it the Community of Interpretation or Concrete Reasonableness, it is clear enough that Peirce and Royce ended up cultivating a kindred teleological and semiotic pragmatism. Idealists both, they shared the belief that the streams of experience flew in order to enrich the ocean beyond, a turbulent ocean no doubt, but one that is inclusive of every drop that once was an individual, and one whose waters keep raining back into the streams to replenish them and energize their flow.

⁵⁵ Letter from Peirce to Josiah Royce, 27 May 1902, in RL 385: ISP 43.

⁵⁶ See Peirce's review of *Clark University, 1889–1899: Decennial Celebration in Science*, n.s., vol. 11, no. 277 (20 April 1900): 321, and his definition of pragmatism in the second volume of Baldwin's *Dictionary of Philosophy and Psychology*.

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