

**To what Sort of Metaphysical Realism does Peirce  
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Reflections on James Bradley's Account of Firstness**

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James Bradley has recently written a wonderfully provocative article on Charles Saunders Peirce, addressing the question of (speculative) metaphysics in regards to the Triad or trinity as it is understood through Peirce's theory of signs (Semiology).<sup>1</sup> Bradley argues for a reading of Peirce's metaphysics that is neither nominalist, transcendentalist (in Kant's sense), or idealist (in Fichte's sense); he rather gives us a reading of Peirce's theory of signs that is a speculative metaphysics incorporating certain elements of each, but in the main is beholden to none. Further, Bradley argues for a Peirce that commits to a speculative metaphysics of realism—surely in keeping with some version of Peirce's own statements. But whereas that realism seems to be perpetually in question for Peirce scholars, for Bradley this is clearly a *metaphysical* realism in which antecedents or Firsts exist *an sich*, or in themselves, without mediation and prior to signification. Bradley argues that inappropriate readings of Peirce contribute to the notion that his trinitarianism is a “naturalist cosmology of communication” or even “a useful interpretive tool.”<sup>2</sup> But, Bradley claims, these readings are “dodges;” “[T]hey simply avoid carrying out the kind of metaphysical analysis

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<sup>1</sup> This paper seeks to engage Bradley's thinking on Peirce. Bradley's reading of Peirce has him squarely in what I will call the “metaphysical realist” camp, along with Carl Hausman. This is in fact one of several rival camps to which Peirce is said to belong. Other camps include “objective idealist” (Peter Skagestad), “epistemological/empirical realist” (Susan Haack; Cheryl Misak), “immanent realist” (Lesley Friedman); “process realist” (Sandra Rosenthal); “naturalized yet transcendental idealist” *malgré lui* (Sami Philström) and “transcendental idealist” (Karl-Otto Apel). My position on Peirce lies somewhere between metaphysical realism and immanent realism, *à la* Friedman. But I do believe Bradley's work has pushed us further in the direction of making these distinctions clearer, and this, I hope, is what will come about through in this paper. I will refer to Charles S. Peirce, *Collected Papers* (abbreviated hereafter as CP), vols. 1–6, eds. Charles Hartshorne and Paul Weiss (LaSalle, IL: Open Court, 1931-1935); vols. 7-8, ed. A.W. Burks (LaSalle, Open Court, 1958), and Charles S. Peirce, *The Essential Peirce*, vols. 1-2 (abbreviated as EP) eds. Nathan Houser and Christian Kloessel (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1992; 1998).

<sup>2</sup> James Bradley, “Beyond Hermeneutics: Peirce's Semiology as a Trinitarian Metaphysics of Communication,” *Analecta Hermeneutica* 1, 1 (2009): 72.

that the theory of infinity, which underpins the semiology, requires.”<sup>3</sup> A related concern of his is the de-limiting of Peirce’s Trinitarian semiology such that it is merely “the interpretive structure of the human sciences,” which, in Bradley’s estimation, commits a “lapse back into hermeneutics.”<sup>4</sup> These are strong charges, both against Peirce scholars and against the traditions common to the *Geisteswissenschaften*. These charges obviously bear closer examination.

In what follows, I will attempt an examination of the first charge: the charge that non-metaphysical accounts of Peirce avoid the difficult issue of coming to grips with his theory of Absolute Chance and infinity, which underpin his Semiology. This will require at a minimum, an examination of Peirce’s specific statements on Absolute Chance and infinity and its place in his trinity or Triad. My thesis will be that Peirce’s account of Firstness is not an antecedent realism. Antecedent realism claims a real undetermined or possible yet nevertheless real in that all the features characteristic of the signed or signified real are there prior to signification. That is to say, it is not signified, but is nevertheless real in all the ways a signified real is real; not as a *regulative ideal* of the real, but as real *an sich*. I will claim Firstness is always already to signify and Firsts are always already signified. The sense of realism I contrast to the *antecedent* variant is a *consequent* realism. A consequent realism takes the real as the ontological consequence of signification and not as an antecedent possible, indeterminate something, or unembodied quality. Whereas it is acceptable to define infinity as “potential” and as “absolute indeterminacy,”<sup>5</sup> it is unacceptable to consider it as *antecedently real*, or real *prior* to signification, in any other sense than as a regulative ideal; infinity has its possibility and actuality bound up in its signification<sup>6</sup> or, (to put it in objective idealist terms) it has its being in its becoming. This, I will argue, serves to defeat any claim that Peirce’s metaphysics is an antecedent metaphysical realism.<sup>7</sup> Not only this, it meshes better with Peirce’s notion of Fallibilism, because even the accounts of Absolute Chance and infinity that manifest in Firstness are susceptible of change.<sup>8</sup>

In part one, I discuss Bradley’s understanding of Peirce’s Triad—Firstness, Secondness, and Thirdness—with the aim of situating Peirce’s statements on Absolute Chance and infinity therein. Then I will turn to where, in Bradley, I find a commitment to metaphysical realism. Finally, I will discuss the problem for reading Peirce put forth by Bradley—the problem of getting the metaphysics underpinning Peirce’s semiology correct. I will (very briefly) discuss recent attempts at naturalizing Peirce’s semiology—particularly with

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., 63.

<sup>6</sup> CP 5, 51.

<sup>7</sup> Though it leaves the possibility open that it is *some sort of* metaphysical realism. I do not speculate what sort of metaphysical realism this is, beyond the insistence that it is not of the antecedent (as opposed to consequent) variety.

<sup>8</sup> As is Peirce’s conception of the “dynamical object” that is Secondness. Carl Hausman, *Charles S Peirce’s Evolutionary Philosophy* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1993), neglects the point that this, too, is a regulative ideal. See 152-156.

respect to his account of Firstness. In part two, I turn to Peirce directly. I first discuss his Triad, and the relation of the three categories to one another. Then I turn to the question of realism: what sort of realism can Peirce offer? In regards to Firstness I demonstrate that Peirce can only offer a *consequent realism*. Firsts, such as Absolute Chance (considered phenomenologically), are potentials;<sup>9</sup> they are possibles in terms of their further development, and not determinate beings, actuals, or existents (Seconds); and by themselves, they lack mediation or becoming (Thirds), which is necessary for them to self-determine or be a subject as in the subject of a proposition.

In part three I discuss Absolute Chance and infinity. Infinity as First cannot be concluded to exist (Second) or self-determine (Third) without appealing to the Triad. It remains potential and as such, cannot be considered an *antecedently* real, or real *an sich* (without signification) in any other sense than as a regulative ideal. Signification, I will argue, is what renders Absolute Chance and infinity themselves susceptible of *fallibility*; there is in any determinate account of Absolute Chance and infinity the possibility of further mediation by way of determination (Third). Of course, infinity, as with all Firsts, *is* really real. But it is not *antecedently* real as an antecedent metaphysical realist account would have us believe. It is not real in any determinate sense *an sich*; *it is determinate only through signification*. It is only *determinately* real *as part of the Triad*. It is only real in any meaningful sense (e.g. as abstracted sets of number) in Firstness, Secondness, *and* Thirdness. Beyond its reality as signified, we can speak profitably of its being real only as a regulative ideal that we must believe. And, as I will show, we therefore have in Absolute Chance and infinity a case of *Firstness of Thirdness*. In part four I broach the question, to what sort of realism does Peirce commit himself. It is my claim that this is a consequent realism—a realism of the consequence of signing Firsts as First. This invokes the entire Triad, rather than simply Firstness. As I will show, the proper understanding of Firsts is as a signed First, with Firsts in any other sense (and I am thinking of the sense of First said to lie beyond the signed First) as a regulative ideal of a First but with no claim to being a First *an sich* or in itself.

### **Bradley and his Interlocutors**

Bradley construes Peirce as a “speculative metaphysician;” one who provides us with a “theory of actualization in the empirical world;” “a theory of the *activity* of actualization.”<sup>10</sup> In this, Peirce comes to resemble the Hegel of the

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<sup>9</sup> For Peirce, infinity is a clear case of Thirdness. Yet, infinitesimals (such as differentials or transfinite sets of ordinal numbers) are often treated as Firsts. This is because mathematics is first among disciplines (prior even to phenomenology) in Peirce’s late characterization of his system. There is also the phenomenological feeling of infinity that Peirce talks of in certain places (EP 262). This is a felt sense signified as First. I will discuss this later in the paper. But for now, my suggestion is that these are the Firsts of Thirds.

<sup>10</sup> James Bradley, “The Triune Event: Event Ontology, the Principle of Reason, and Love,” Unpublished Manuscript, 2007, 1-2; Bradley, “Beyond Hermeneutics,” 58. Elsewhere, Bradley says, “My fifth thesis is that Peirce’s is an ostensive trinitarianism, a natural theology of the Trinity,

*Phenomenology*: his is an objective idealism in which neither rationalism nor (subjective) idealism is encountered.<sup>11</sup> In terms of metaphysical method, Peirce's intent is empiricist: it is oriented to "the postulatory procedures of mathematics and the experimentalism of natural science."<sup>12</sup> Peirce's account of reality is tied to his notion of hypothesis: that is to say, the "reality is that which has a nature of its own, in the sense that it is so independently of our minds or independently of whether or not we think it to be so," is a hypothesis that is almost certain to be true."<sup>13</sup> Peirce has a corresponding hypothesis of universals, which are also real in the sense above.<sup>14</sup>

Peirce's trinity, which is the focus of this presentation, is described by Bradley as a transformation of a medieval account of persons and the German idealist account of the absolute subject "into a radically immanent logic of events."<sup>15</sup> This seems to commit whatever account of Peirce's trinity Bradley offers to a logic that is non-transcendental (not a *transcendental* logic, à la Kant). In keeping with Bradley's characterization of Peirce as a speculative, objective idealist, we might conclude that Peirce's logic of events is roughly the position of Hegel's logic (Firstness, Secondness, and Thirdness roughly corresponding to each of Hegel's logical Categories of Being, Essence, Notion), at least in regards to its relationship to events. But we would be wrong if we thought that Peirce's trinity is a close approximation of Hegel's logic; for the principles of actualization (Secondness) that Bradley describes bear little resemblance to Hegel's logic of events. Indeed, for Bradley Firstness and Secondness bear most striking resemblance to *universal, metaphysical reals*, as I will discuss.

To begin with, Bradley stresses Peirce's account of Firstness as "pure ecstatic or ablative activity," "abductive," a "movement from."<sup>16</sup> Firstness is "unconditioned" and "limitless."<sup>17</sup> It is "absolutely indeterminate in its own nature."<sup>18</sup> "Its character as a free ecstatic activity means that in the nature of the case it is a non-determining power."<sup>19</sup> Firstness is a theory of origins; a syncategorematic infinite.<sup>20</sup> "It is a primordial infinite that is real in that it is

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that attempts to make manifest the necessarily creative and radically immanent triune principle of actualization across the fields of logic, mathematics, phenomenology, semiotics and speculative cosmology." Bradley, "The Triune Event," 10.

<sup>11</sup> Bradley, "Beyond Hermeneutics," 56.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 57.

<sup>13</sup> Bradley, "Beyond Hermeneutics," 59; Bradley, "The Triune Event," 3.

<sup>14</sup> Bradley, "Beyond Hermeneutics," 59.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 62. See also Bradley, "Philosophy and Trinity," 169. Bradley attributes this "immanent logic of events" to F.W.J. Schelling.

<sup>16</sup> Bradley quoting Peirce, CP 6, 168, in "Beyond Hermeneutics," 63.

<sup>17</sup> Bradley, "Beyond Hermeneutics," 63.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 63.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.* Bradley claims that the concept of origin derives from Marius Victorinus and the Franciscan voluntarists, together with Schelling's theory of *Abgrund*. However, he does not pause to defend these locations.

<sup>20</sup> Elsewhere, Bradley says, "This concept of origin is elaborated by Peirce in terms of a particular kind of mathematical infinite. His is not the potential infinite of Aristotle and the intuitionists, where however many parts it is divided into, it is possible for there to be more [we can also think of

inexhaustible activity, and “it is a potential syncategorematic infinite, for its absolute indeterminacy means ‘it contains no definite parts.’”<sup>21</sup> It is an infinite not of the One, not of Allness, nor of a multiplicity. It is a mathematical concept of pure chance.<sup>22</sup> It is irreducible, but this is not to be construed as a property of unity; for the First can only be considered in its own nature, not in terms of predicates that attach to it only as a result of its relationship in the Triad. This is a self-realizing movement.<sup>23</sup> Thus, it can only be characterized as “unconditioned freedom.”<sup>24</sup> It is necessarily never the same.

By contrast, Secondness is a second activity; a principle of actualization. It is the principle of essentiality and spontaneously self-differentiating activity.<sup>25</sup> Secondness, too, is irreducible; it “is the activity of determination: it constitutes differences or individuals . . . and it does so by communicating to them the irreducible spontaneity that is the positive basis of all determinacy or actuality.”<sup>26</sup> It is the positive basis of the logical laws of non-contradiction, negation and the excluded middle. It is reaction; resistance.<sup>27</sup> It is both for itself and for its differentiations; it is self-realizing and “determines itself as a law or rule and communicates that power to its differentiations as their medium.”<sup>28</sup> “It is the potentiality of order.”<sup>29</sup>

Thirdness is the power of mediation. While Thirdness is doubtless the power of determinacy, “all structures carry free indeterminacy within their nature. So all structures possess an inexhaustible indeterminacy, which is always

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Kant’s understanding of potentially infinite divisibility, which is discussed in the second Antinomy of Reason.] Nor is it the real categorematic infinite of set theory, involving an infinite multiplicity of sets in which the parts or components are really there and their number is greater than any given. Rather, Peirce’s Firstness is in my view a particular kind of ‘syncategorematic infinite.’ That is, it is a potential syncategorematic infinite, for its absolute indeterminacy means that ‘it contains no definite parts’ (CP 6, 168); it is a continuum of potential parts only (CP 6, 185).” Bradley, “The Triune Event,” 11. Syncategorematic terms are terms that cannot serve as either subject or predicate of a proposition by themselves, but nevertheless, can be used with other terms to form a proposition. For example, the term, “all” cannot by itself form either subject or predicate (we must use it in reference to something other); however, when used in the context of other terms (“All men are mortal”), a proposition can be formulated. This was a later discovery or development of Aristotle’s contribution to logical theory—roughly in the time of the scholastics, which Peirce, frequently invoking Duns Scotus, heavily drew upon. Of course, if Firstness is a syncategorematic infinite, it is by definition, indeterminate. And this is precisely my point: *only* in signification is determination possible. Bradley presumably concurs.

<sup>21</sup> Bradley, “Philosophy and Trinity,” 63, citing CP 6, 168.

<sup>22</sup> CP 6, 201 in Bradley, “Beyond Trinity,” 64.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 64.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 64.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 64. Bradley, “Philosophy and Trinity,” 172. Bradley treats Secondness as generated out of Firstness in a telling passage. But this seems to put Peirce’s admonition that Secondness is irreducible in some peril. Unfortunately, Bradley does not give us an account of how Secondness can be both irreducible and generated from Firstness.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 64.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 65.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 65.

more than any of their individual instances.”<sup>30</sup> There are, therefore, no really complete or completable wholes.<sup>31</sup> This is a *mathesis universalis* for Bradley; a theory of universals. Forms are not fixed entities, pace Aristotle; “forms are potentials that are subject to evolution, to development and decay.”<sup>32</sup> Forms, as unities, “are essentially incomplete and open to further determination.”<sup>33</sup>

It will do to summarize Bradley’s account of Firstness, Secondness, and Thirdness; an account which he draws on in discussing Peirce’s semiological metaphysics.

#### *Firstness*

is indeterminate in itself or its own nature  
has no self-recognition, yet it is a self-realizing moment  
is irreducible  
is a theory of origins  
is infinite  
is real and inexhaustive activity  
is a mathematical concept of pure chance (probability)

#### *Secondness*

is a principle of actualization (object)  
is law or principle  
is the activity of determination  
is reaction/resistance  
is self-realizing  
is irreducible  
is potentiality of order

#### *Thirdness*

is the power of mediation  
is inexhaustible indeterminacy (unities)  
has wholes and forms that are potentials  
its forms are subject to evolution and decay  
is irreducible  
is a theory of universals

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<sup>30</sup> Ibid., 65.

<sup>31</sup> CP 5, 532, in Bradley, “Philosophy and Trinity,” 65.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., 65.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., 65. Elsewhere, Bradley says: “Like differences, all structures [Firstness, Secondness, and Thirdness] are determinations of free indeterminacy, which is inexhaustible. In consequence, all structures carry free indeterminacy within their nature. So all structures possess an inexhaustible indeterminacy. What this means is that all specific laws or rules are essentially and intrinsically vague: they are infinitely or inexhaustibly determinable determinations.” Bradley, “The Triune Event,” 12.

Semiology is analysis of order or Thirdness.<sup>34</sup> Within Semiology, each of the three elements of the Triad has in itself threefolds. Thus, there are three types of Firstness; three types of Secondness; and three types of Thirdness.<sup>35</sup> Thirdness is a threefold of sign, object, and interpretant. In Thirdness, sign acts as a First. This is because “it is the potentiality for interpretation.”<sup>36</sup> For Bradley, this must mean that signs behave the way unsigned Firsts behave—that is, according to the list above.<sup>37</sup> Beyond this, there is a general principle of the Trinitarian metaphysics—any identifiable entity is analysable as a threefold.<sup>38</sup>

I certainly believe that Bradley’s characterization of the elements of Peirce’s Triad is straightforward. However, there is room for interpretative disagreement, as Bradley himself recognizes in placing his account squarely against the account of naturalists that deny *both* the transcendental *and* metaphysically realist substrate of (particularly) Firstness. Bradley’s account of Firstness highlights the characteristic of infinity, irreducibility, pre-predication, and self-realization, along with its (unsigned) reality. The fact that nothing beyond itself can be predicated of it makes it look suspiciously like a Platonic Form; and this would be the case were it not for its fundamental indeterminacy. Other accounts have challenged this reading of Firstness and Secondness. Bradley doesn’t name names, but no doubt he has leading accounts of Peirce, such as Cheryl Misak’s and Susan Haack’s in mind when he laments the preponderance of naturalized readings of Peirce’s semiotics.<sup>39</sup>

Misak is best known for her attempt to de-transcendentalize Peirce—to disentangle Peirce from the transcendental commitments Karl-Otto Apel has suggested he maintains.<sup>40</sup> In her attempt to disentangle Peirce, Misak naturalizes Peirce’s arguments. The best way to approach the truth, according to Misak, is through methodological principles—principles of Thirdness—and not transcendental ones, wherein necessities are demonstrated through possibilities. Experience, in other words, is the basis of argumentation.<sup>41</sup> Haack considers

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<sup>34</sup> Bradley, “Philosophy and Trinity,” 66.

<sup>35</sup> CP 2, 228, 274 in *ibid.*, 66.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.* Of course, we do not (yet) have knowledge of Firsts in themselves, or unsigned Firsts; thus, we can only put forth a regulative ideal that the unsigned First is equivalent in terms of its behavior to the signed First.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 68.

<sup>39</sup> Peirce resisted extreme naturalism and chided both William James and John Dewey for incorporating overly naturalistic accounts of truth and reality into their respective philosophies. This is particularly borne out in CP 8, 239-243 where Peirce criticises Dewey attempts to describe logic in terms of a genetic accounting of thought.

<sup>40</sup> Karl-Otto Apel, *From Pragmatism to Pragmaticism* (Mawah, NJ: Humanities Press, 1995), 186-187.

<sup>41</sup> Cheryl Misak, *Peirce on Truth and Reality* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 134-135. Of realism, Misak says, “The bruteness of experience cannot be ignored and we take this experience to be an index of the existence of things. But we must not make the nominalist’s mistake and leap from this indication of reality to the assertion that reality consists of external objects which are utterly independent of inquirers and which cause inquirers to form beliefs about them” (134). If Misak is correct, Hausman espouses a nominalist position with respect to the “dynamical object” as Secondness, when he claims that it is a “semeiotic-independent” or “mind-

Peirce's realism to be predicated upon the abductive hypothesis—that the best method to get at the truth of Firsts and Seconds is abduction and not transcendentalism, and that this is characteristic of a Peircean scholastic realism.<sup>42</sup> Both turn to science and scientific method (Thirdness) as the best path to truth and reality. The abductive, experimental accounting of Peirce's reals stands opposed to any notion of Firstness as an infinite, self-realizing theory of self-predicating origins. To detach Firstness from Thirdness is to render Firstness unapproachable by the scientific, experimental method, and the possibility of Firstness' fallibility in the face of contrary evidence seems jeopardized.<sup>43</sup>

Is the Trinity a naturalist cosmology of communication, or a metaphysics that the theory of infinity, which underpins the semiology, requires<sup>44</sup>? I claim it is the latter that leads to the former. Is Peirce's trinitarianism downplayed through naturalization? I claim no, because Peirce's Triad is undoubtedly real. And each of the three categories therein is undoubtedly real, and irreducibly so, as Bradley maintains. But they are not real *an sich* in any way that is meaningful beyond the obvious meaningfulness of saying they are *an sich*; that is, they are not real as real considered in an intellectual intuition—a Cartesian real, as Peirce himself declaims in his earliest writings.<sup>45</sup> They are real *in conjunction with another* (real for us, or signed); they are real as 'in themselves' entities in the Triad in no other sense than as a regulative ideal of reality. Put another way, Firsts are not real for us *prior to, or antecedent to*, their investiture in the process of signification or the Triad in any other way than as a regulative ideal; they are real *as a consequence of this*. With this in mind, let us turn to some of Peirce's statements on Firstness and Thirdness for some clarification on the matter.

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independent condition." Hausman, *Charles S. Peirce's Evolutionary Philosophy*, 156. This despite his use of a quote where Peirce discusses the prescinding of objects of Secondness into the Sign and the Dynamical Object, the latter "which by some means contrives to determine the Sign to its Representation [Thirdness]." CP 4, 536. Fortunately, his considered opinion is somewhat different; he ultimately claims that "Peirce is led to suppose a dynamical object that "must" be a condition functioning so that constraints lead and sometimes compel investigators to acknowledge and adopt certain interpretations in preference to others. This does not commit him to a view of preexistent real objects *in themselves*." Hausman, *Charles S. Peirce's Evolutionary Philosophy*, 157. I submit Bradley holds the same opinion in his accounting of Firstness. See Bradley, "Philosophy and Trinity," 172.

<sup>42</sup> Susan Haack, "'Extreme Scholastic Realism: Its Relevance to Philosophy of Science Today," *Transactions of the Charles S. Peirce Society* 28, 1: (1992): 19-50. For his part, Apel thinks the wholesale turn to abduction poses real problems for Peirce. For it seems to thwart what Apel considers Peirce's "transcendental pragmatism," which, while amenable to the fallibility characteristic of all knowledge, must also be thought to provide for transcendental reals. See Karl-Otto Apel, *From Pragmatism to Pragmaticism*, 186-187.

<sup>43</sup> And it just might fly in the face of Bradley's own pronouncement that any identifiable entity is identifiable only through the Triad.

<sup>44</sup> Bradley, "Philosophy and Trinity," 69.

<sup>45</sup> CP 5, 268.



## Peirce on Chance, Firstness and Thirdness

Here, I will draw primarily from Peirce's series of papers in the *Monist* (1891-1893) and his lectures on pragmatism delivered at Harvard University (1903). I will also discuss his earlier formulation of chance in "Design and Chance" (1884) and his connection of change to Firstness in "A Guess at the Riddle" (1885). In "Design and Chance," Peirce nests his theory of chance in the context of an evolutionary account of science and cosmology. Chance is characterized as "the one essential agency upon which the whole process [of evolution] depends."<sup>46</sup> Chance is considered to be either ordinary or absolute. Ordinary chance involves causality and is relative (probability).<sup>47</sup> Absolute Chance, by contrast, is a hypothesis that "everything is subject to change and subject to chance,"<sup>48</sup> and will "sometime bring about a chance in every condition."<sup>49</sup> Chance "must act to move things in the long run from a state of homogeneity to a state of heterogeneity."<sup>50</sup> Chance "is indeterminacy, is freedom."<sup>51</sup>

In "A Guess at the Riddle" Peirce characterizes Firstness as "that whose being is simply in itself," not referring to anything nor lying behind anything,"<sup>52</sup> whereas the third "is that which is what it is owing to things between which it mediates and which it brings into relation to each other."<sup>53</sup> Firstness considered in itself is "present and immediate,"<sup>54</sup> "initiative, original, spontaneous, and free."<sup>55</sup> Yet it is also "something vivid and conscious."<sup>56</sup> It "precedes all synthesis and all differentiation. It has no unity and no parts."<sup>57</sup> Elsewhere, Peirce calls it the "immediate consciousness." He also characterizes Firstness as "[T]he starting point of the universe, God the creator," "the Absolute First."<sup>58</sup> In terms

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<sup>46</sup> EP, 219.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid.

<sup>49</sup> EP, 220.

<sup>50</sup> Peirce was doubtless familiar with Clausius' characterization of the second law of thermodynamics, which postulates the total increase in entropy (heat transfer from warmer to cooler). Heterogeneity in this instance may well refer analogously to what Peirce understood as the transfer of heat in a closed system. Heat dissipates in a closed system and energy ultimately diminishes until it ceases when absolute heat loss occurs. Peirce may have been reacting to this by positing what is in essence a universe of energy that expands and heterogenerates at least as much as it diminishes and homogenizes. Peirce claims that ultimately, "There must therefore be a point at which the two tendencies [extropy and entropy] are balanced and that is no doubt the actual condition of the whole universe at the present time" (EP 221).

<sup>51</sup> EP, 222.

<sup>52</sup> EP, 248.

<sup>53</sup> EP, 248.

<sup>54</sup> EP, 248.

<sup>55</sup> EP, 248.

<sup>56</sup> EP, 248.

<sup>57</sup> EP, 248.

<sup>58</sup> EP, 251. Compare this with Peirce's account of God's unlikelihood of being conscious in "A Neglected Argument for the Reality of God" (CP 6, 483).

of metaphysics, Firstness is thought to be “indeterminate,” a “virtual variety,” that “come[s] out of the womb of homogeneity” by a “principle of spontaneity.”<sup>59</sup> Peirce does not say so here, but his “immediacy,” “pure spontaneity,” and “lawless originality” infers chance.<sup>60</sup>

Thirdness, by contrast, is a category that “bridges over the chasm between the absolute first and last, and brings them into a relationship.”<sup>61</sup> Thirdness is “the representation mediating between these two [Firstness and Secondness].”<sup>62</sup> Yet, Thirdness is not absolute, as Firstness is, “for the third is of its own nature relative, and this is what we are always thinking, even when we aim at the first or second.”<sup>63</sup> Indeed, there are three degrees of Thirdness. Two degrees of Thirdness are said to be “degenerate:” they [do] not exist as such, but . . . [are] only conceived.”<sup>64</sup> The first is “where there is in the fact itself no Thirdness or mediation, but where there is true duality [Secondness]; the second is where there is not even true Secondness in the fact itself.”<sup>65</sup>

I will try to make this clearer. To talk of thirds in the first degree is to say that a mixture of ingredients is brought together by containing each. (Peirce gives us the example of a pin fastening two things together.) We can make sense of this degenerate form of Thirdness through appeal to “an intelligible law” or general principle (such as causality).<sup>66</sup> To talk of thirds in the first degree is thus to bring Firsts that exist in opposition or “duality” to relate to one another (Seconds) under a law (Third). It is, as I will maintain, to bring about the manifestation of Firstness of Thirdness. To talk of thirds in the second degree is to say that the mixture (Seconds) of opposite ingredients (Firsts) produces something wholly arbitrary or spurious. Peirce gives us the example of a Centaur—a mythical half-man, half-horse.<sup>67</sup> This is a representation with no basis in reality conceived as Firstness or Secondness. Thus, Thirdness in its first degenerate form is a true Secondness that lacks Thirdness (mediation) *in the fact itself*, though the fact itself is rendered intelligible through the application of an “intelligible law.”<sup>68</sup> The facts remain independent of each other and the law brings them together. The law is not present *in* the facts; rather the law is present *in* conjoining them. What connects the facts and makes them real to each other is the law. However, Thirdness in its second degenerate form admits of no law that can bring them

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<sup>59</sup> EP, 257.

<sup>60</sup> EP, 257.

<sup>61</sup> EP, 249.

<sup>62</sup> EP, 250.

<sup>63</sup> EP, 251.

<sup>64</sup> EP, 253.

<sup>65</sup> EP, 254. Peirce also discusses this at length in his 1905 Monist series papers. See esp. CP 1, 537-538.

<sup>66</sup> EP, 255.

<sup>67</sup> EP, 255.

<sup>68</sup> EP, 255.

together; thus, the facts remain independent of each other, and any connection can only be spurious.<sup>69</sup>

Together, these two early essays provide the context for the subsequent discussion of Firstness, Secondness, and Thirdness in regards to Peirce's middle (1890's) and late (1903) Theory of Signs. In his middle period essays published in the *Monist* (1891-1893), Peirce (re) emphasizes Firstness, Secondness and Thirdness are categories, or conceptions.<sup>70</sup> In considering "the origin of things," the first is the "idea" of that which does not lead to anything, but is "in itself,"<sup>71</sup> whereas the process that mediates between first and second is third.<sup>72</sup> Further, Peirce claims that Firsts ("chance-spontaneity") are "hypotheses" that can be traced out in detail, with mathematical precision.<sup>73</sup> (Here is one place where Peirce clearly identifies Firsts with chance and spontaneity.)

In his late writings, Peirce's notions of Firstness, Secondness, and Thirdness, while categories or signs, are given phenomenological treatment. In Peirce's hierarchy of the disciplines (circa 1903), phenomenology is preceded only by mathematics.<sup>74</sup> In phenomenology (what Peirce calls "Phanerescopy"), Firstness, which connotes qualities, is considered as feeling; and the approach of consciousness to Firsts is called, "aesthetic consciousness."<sup>75</sup> Firsts, considered phenomenologically, also follow the pattern of threeness: there is a monadic, dyadic, and triadic stance of consciousness towards what is felt.<sup>76</sup> Monads are immediate; they are phenomenologically irreducible, or *an sich*. They admit of no predication, not even of themselves (they have no subject). They are reminiscent of Hegel's Immediate Being—Being prior to (any) determination. Only considered phenomenologically as Seconds (dyads) do objects emerge in relations of predication (as subject-object relations) and only then can we say something of them. Finally, Thirds (Triads), considered phenomenologically, are mediated entities. They are feelings as taken up in thought.

It is important for Peirce that the categories of Firstness, Secondness, and Thirdness in the discipline of phenomenology are thought of as *categories*—ways of approaching the real. We approach Firsts in no other way than through Secondness and Thirdness; that is to say, we approach Firsts not as Firsts in

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<sup>69</sup> Peirce chides Hegel throughout this section for not recognizing that Seconds are reals. Seconds, being objects, are irreducible to Firsts. However, on Peirce's estimation, Hegel takes Seconds for Thirds, with the result that mind invents world.

<sup>70</sup> CP 6, 33.

<sup>71</sup> CP 6, 33.

<sup>72</sup> CP 6, 33.

<sup>73</sup> CP 6, 45.

<sup>74</sup> CP 5, 121. Peirce's hierarchy of the disciplines consists in mathematics, followed by phenomenology, the (three) normative sciences, and finally, metaphysics.

<sup>75</sup> CP 5, 113. See Apel, *From Pragmatism to Pragmaticism*, 95. This was not Peirce's first mention of the link between phenomenology and Firstness. In 1885, Peirce thought we could approach mathematics phenomenologically, as aesthetic consciousness (EP 262): infinity, which for Peirce is a mathematical Third, is first felt (Firstness), then related (Secondness) and finally, thought (Thirdness).

<sup>76</sup> Monads are a late articulation of Peirce's firsts of monads, applied to propositions; even monads have a triadic structure. See CP 5, 173.

themselves or *an sich*; we *sign* Firsts as *an sich*. Though the sign of First denotes the real entity or quality beyond the sign, we have no insight into this entity or quality without the sign: the entity or quality in question is *indeterminate* or *merely possible* without the sign. We approach Firsts only through our (mediating) activity. The understanding of Firsts through Thirds is Firstness of Thirdness<sup>77</sup>—which Apel has characterized as “qualitatively unified” and “intuitively perceivable.”<sup>78</sup> Firstness of Thirdness is the proper relationship of Firsts considered as Firsts in signs. Firsts of Thirds are signed first as Firsts, then as Thirds, meaning they are not sublated in Hegel’s sense; they do not serve only as “moments” in a greater shape of spirit.<sup>79</sup>

Only mathematics is said to precede phenomenology: Yet the ‘discoveries’ of mathematics are mediated ones; in this sense, they are products of experimentation that takes place in Thirdness. They are also reals in themselves, though signed (and mediated). Though they are reals, they are reals *taken* as real *because* they are supported through methods of science (abduction, deduction, induction). All reals are first immediate reals *in* Firstness<sup>80</sup>; yet, they are also reals on the basis of their relations to other reals (Secondness) and their inquired-into status or thought (Thirdness). Reals are never *merely* reals *an sich* (Firstness) *for us*; for us they are signified. They are only reals *an sich* or in themselves. However, to consider them as merely *an sich* or in themselves renders them meaningless, as they are unsignified, and are thus unable to relate to other reals (Secondness) or submit to the scientific-mathematical investigation (including deduction) that isolates the practical consequences of having a belief in them (Thirdness). Furthermore, Peirce maintains throughout his writings that Firstness, regardless of its immediacy, is susceptible of fallibilism—the Absolute Chance (itself a Law of Firstness) that what we take to be Firsts could be otherwise.<sup>81</sup>

It will do well to keep in mind Peirce’s insistence on approaching Firstness in thought (Firstness of Thirdness) if what we want to do is carve out disciplines (such as mathematics, phenomenology, and the normative sciences). For we never approach Firsts other than in relation (Secondness) and thought (Thirdness) and this explication of First as first takes place only through the method of “prescinding.”<sup>82</sup> To prescind is to abstract; to abstract from the point of view of Thirdness (thought, or logic) that which is in itself, yet by itself unrelatable. (It bears resemblance to the method of *Apophansis*, wherein a

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<sup>77</sup> CP 5, 150.

<sup>78</sup> Apel, *From Pragmatism to Pragmaticism*, 94.

<sup>79</sup> Apel, *From Pragmatism to Pragmaticism*, 108.

<sup>80</sup> CP 5, 399. Consider Peirce’s example of the hardness of a diamond. Hardness is felt; it is not cognized. To say ‘this diamond is hard,’ is to make a judgment that contains both subject and predicate. Hardness, however, has no subject. It has not been related (yet) in Secondness and not judged (yet) in Thirdness. It is First. But without the context of Second and Third, it is meaningless other than as an ideal of a (potential) subject that is hard.

<sup>81</sup> CP 2, 654.

<sup>82</sup> CP 1, 420.

bracketing of something from something is conducted.)<sup>83</sup> Pure Firstness, through the method of prescinding, is “the condition of qualitative determination” alone.<sup>84</sup> Firstness is felt; experienced.<sup>85</sup> Yet it is not thought or cognized unless and until it is related (Secondness) and mediated (Thirdness). But until it is related and mediated, it is indeterminate. Only through signification (including of course, the signification of Firstness) does it become determinable.

### **Ineffables, Platonism, and Antecedent Realism**

This brings me to the question of infinity—a *mathematical* real that is also real as a quality for aesthetic consciousness<sup>86</sup> and is singled out by Bradley as an especial example of true Firstness. By 1894, Peirce considered mathematical reals as basic to Firstness. Mathematics would be, from that point forward, considered a foundational branch of philosophy.<sup>87</sup> Peirce assigns mathematics to Firstness. Indeed, numbers seem to be the *only* entities that exist *an sich*, irreducible, yet not qualities that require an approach through Secondness (relation) and Thirdness (thought). This suggests to us that Peirce is some sort of number Platonist. As with all things of Firstness, numbers are approachable only through signs. The sign is our approach to the number, which takes the number as real in and through its signification. Numbers, beyond signification, are regulative ideals.<sup>88</sup> Yet, if this is the case, it makes little sense to say that Peirce is a number Platonist because the number, while in itself unapproachable, is real to us only through signification and real in itself only as a regulative ideal. (We can’t approach the number in any other way than through the Triad.) Furthermore, classes of numbers (ordinals and cardinals) cannot be judged as classes except through Thirdness (logic; method). Thus, while we may say that they are *an sich* prior to signification (Firstness), as classes, they require the logic of deduction or abstraction to make this claim tenable. And this is the domain of Thirdness.

Let us look more closely at two of Peirce’s ineffables—ineffables that Bradley draws on. These are Absolute Chance and infinity. I will discuss infinity first. Peirce’s ‘theory’ of infinity deals almost exclusively with infinitesimal

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<sup>83</sup> In the Aristotelian sense of being able to say of something what it is not, rather than what it is. See Aristotle, *De Interpretatione* 17, 31, 5. in Aristotle, *The Complete Works of Aristotle*, vol. 1, ed. Jonathan Barnes (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995).

<sup>84</sup> Hausman, *Charles S. Peirce’s Evolutionary Philosophy*, 125.

<sup>85</sup> Hausman, *Charles S. Peirce’s Evolutionary Philosophy*, 126.

<sup>86</sup> EP, 262.

<sup>87</sup> Hausman, *Charles S. Peirce’s Evolutionary Philosophy*, 112; Murray Murphey, *The Development of Peirce’s Philosophy* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1961), 245. Peirce was familiar with Georg Cantor and his establishment of ordinal (well-ordered) numbers. He consciously drew on the understanding of a well-ordered set in framing his subsequent triadic relations. The derivation of ordinal numbers, however, is a process Peirce termed, “hypostatic abstraction,” and belonged to Thirdness. See also Apel, *From Pragmatism to Pragmaticism*, 124.

<sup>88</sup> In this respect, Peirce is more Kantian than Platonist. For regulative ideals are for Peirce ideals we must take to be true (believe) even though we have insubstantial evidence (knowledge) of them.

numbers. Peirce accepted Leibniz's theory of differentials.<sup>89</sup> He used this to argue, almost from the beginning of his writings, that thought itself was continuous. Continuity—which would become a hallmark of Absolute Thirdness—was the counterpart to Absolute Chance, or the Law of Absolute Firstness. But Absolute Thirdness—Continuity—cannot (as of yet) be empirically tested, only deduced (abstracted). It currently remains unapproachable through empirical methods (abduction; induction) and, presumably, mathematical techniques of probability. Absolute Chance, by contrast, *is* pure probability. In itself it is unapproachable, but through induction from particular instances a general law can be formed of Absolute Chance. Thus, while we can consider Absolute Chance *an sich* (as Firstness) in its particular instances (such as in game theory or statistical probability), it is an empirical endeavour and thus partakes of Thirdness. It becomes a clear case of Firstness of Thirdness. It is a hypothesis that Absolute Chance is operative in the universe; a hypothesis that is tested in particular instances, using the mathematical techniques of probability and induction. The larger point is that any supposed Platonism of Peirce's must be immediately qualified by the insistence that we do not determine qualities or entities of Firstness as *an sich* except in and through our signification of them (as Firsts). While we count them as *an sich* (as Firsts) we always already relate to them in terms of Secondness (relation) and Thirdness (thought). We are back to the claim of Bradley's; the claim that it is only through the Triad as a whole that we approach entities or qualities of existence.

This brings me to the question of what sort of realism Peirce is providing. At first, it might seem as if Peirce is providing us with an *antecedent realism*; a sort of realism in which qualities or entities exist not only *an sich*, but *prior to and independent of* any signification. And Peirce *does* seem to account for Firsts in this sense in many places.<sup>90</sup> However, there is also the question of fallibility. For Peirce, all accounts of entities and qualities are liable to be wrong should enough investigation into them persuade the (scientific) community of their falseness. From his earliest forays into pragmatism through to his development of pragmatism, Peirce held to this belief. What this would mean for antecedent realism is an account of the real that is also subject to change. That

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<sup>89</sup> Of course, the development of limit theory, which would replace the infinitesimal calculus, was first proposed by Cauchy in the 1820's. Peirce held doggedly to the earlier development of infinitesimals, partly it would seem, because his father Benjamin Peirce was a wholehearted supporter of them. See Murphey, *The Development of Peirce's Philosophy*, 120.

<sup>90</sup> Hausman contends that Peirce was a metaphysical realist because he takes Firsts as not only significations, but significations *of* something beyond significance. More importantly, brute facts for Hausman are instances of Seconds, and Seconds are irreducible. To have a brute fact is to come up against something; to struggle with it. Second not only implies but invokes the reality of the other. Secondness contains "the mind-independent residue of compulsion or resistance that constrains thought." Hausman, *Charles S. Peirce's Evolutionary Philosophy*, 146. My response to Seconds is equivalent to my response to Firsts; we are still in the business of signifying, even if what is signified suggests "mind-independent residue," as Hausman calls it. To say something pre-exists *an sich* or in itself prior to interpretation is a manifestly Platonist claim, and one Peirce never admits. Hausman himself recognizes this and denies that Peirce meant his metaphysical realism to imply pre-existent things-in-themselves.

is to say, an account of the real that is *antecedent* must be an account of the real in which we *take* the qualities and/or entities of Firstness (Absolute Chance, infinitesimals) as real, while at the same time allowing for their change. (Indeed, it seems built into the notion of Absolute Chance that we *must* do so.). However, this seems contradictory; it seems we cannot simultaneously believe in antecedently reals as reals *an sich* prior to signification *and* hold out for the possibility of their changing. Put another way, we cannot hold to an account of Firsts as *antecedently* real *and* consider these as fallible.<sup>91</sup> It seems we can only consider them real *an sich* in an *ex post facto* sense—that is, after suitable signification and perhaps even scientific investigation. Their realism is tethered to the methods of philosophy.

Now, it might be countered that Peirce is saying that certain entities (say, ordinal numbers) are immutable and thus *not* subject to the fallibility criteria, and he is thus advocating for a sort of number Platonism (or even a ‘quality’ Platonism, given Peirce’s insistence that Firsts are felt (aesthetic consciousness)).<sup>92</sup> But this cannot be right; for on the argument of Absolute Chance (itself a First) no entity can *be* immutably real, only *taken as* immutably real with the proviso that it may change. (It could also *be* immutably real and yet *become* something else; in which case it wasn’t.) Thus, this avenue is not open. Alternatively, one might claim, to say something is antecedently real is to say that it is real and subject to (possible) change, yet required to be understood as immutable *if* we are to sign (that is, there has to be something foundational or bedrock in the sense of a *regulative ideal* in order for signing to even occur). But to say that, it seems to me, stretches antecedent realism beyond belief. And there is another good reason to not claim for the antecedently real. This concerns the notions of potentiality and actuality that Bradley uses in his discussion of Firstness and Secondness.<sup>93</sup> Firsts are potential; only through relation or dynamism (Secondness) and thought (Thirdness) do Firsts ‘move’ to actuality or *energeia*. This accords well with the *an sich* characterization of Firsts; Firsts, considered *an sich* or as indeterminate, are possibles; potentials.<sup>94</sup> Seconds, by contrast, are actuals; Thirds are the mediation of Firsts and Seconds through law (e.g. causation/causality).<sup>95</sup> Antecedent realism, it seems to me, could credit only

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<sup>91</sup> Or, not without the invocation of a regulative ideal; but this is just what I am suggesting.

<sup>92</sup> Hausman makes this claim, and backs it up with passages in which Peirce compares his system of ideas favourably to Platonic forms (Hausman, *Charles S. Peirce’s Evolutionary Philosophy*, 152-153). Hausman quotes Peirce’s 1897 declaration, “Idea is here to be understood in a sort of Platonic sense” (CP 2, 228). Peirce *does* claim his generals (Thirdness) are close to Plato’s ideas, but he cannot be right; for Plato’s forms are pre-existent in the sense that they do not come into being through our interpretation, investigation, or discovery, of them, whereas generals are for Peirce regulative ideals that we *take* as true once formulated. They remain to be fully demonstrated in the long run of community assent. In the meantime, they have their *modus operandi* in the practical consequences they net for us. See Misak, *Peirce on Truth and Reality*, 135.

<sup>93</sup> Bradley, “Philosophy and Trinity,” 63; CP 6, 168.

<sup>94</sup> CP 1, 422, 437.

<sup>95</sup> It also augurs against considering Firsts as Platonic Forms. Platonic Forms, of course, are not potentials (or possibles) waiting to be instantiated in the phenomenal world; they exist in and for themselves beyond the phenomenal world. And they are self-predicating Forms (whereas Peirce’s

actuals with possessing any reality beyond their ‘possible’ status (that is, beyond their status as regulative ideals). Yet prior to their signification, we cannot take them as anything other than a regulative ideal of something that lies beneath, behind, or beyond, the sign.

### Consequent Realism

Thus far I have suggested only a negative argument for a different form of realism. It is time for a positive argument. Here, I very briefly discuss one possibility; what I will call *consequent realism*.<sup>96</sup> This is a realism that admits of Fallibilism—the actualization of Absolute Chance (and infinity) in the (phenomenal) universe, through empirical instances. It is a realism that insists on the real as actual in the signification (as the First, the Second and Third), while denying reality to the possible in any other than a regulative sense. In this understanding, a First is not merely an *an sich* real. To be sure, we consider it real through its signification as First. But (as in the cases of Absolute Chance and infinity) its reality is supported through method (*Apophansis*, or prescinding), which involves and invokes Secondness and Thirdness. What makes realism consequent rather than antecedent is the reliance of Firsts on Seconds and (especially) Thirds. In other words, to say of something that it is real is already to experience that real as relation, reaction, and negation (Secondness) and submit that real to mediation or thought (Thirdness). Any other characterization of the real is merely *an sich*—indeterminate or possible—a real that is *taken* to be real but of which we can say nothing beyond the conditional claim that it *would* realize itself *if* actualized in thought (as Second and Third).

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Firsts are not—they *must* wait until Secondness or reaction). While it is true Plato’s Forms participate *in* the phenomenal world, they do not rely *on* the phenomenal world for their predication or indeed, their Being.

<sup>96</sup> Lesley Friedman, *Peirce’s Transcendental and Immanent Realism*,” *Transactions of the Charles S. Peirce Society* 31, 2 (1995): 377. Friedman develops this notion out of a discussion of embodied and unembodied qualities. While embodied qualities are seemingly self-evident (hardness in the case of ‘this diamond is hard’), unembodied qualities are not. Peirce considers unembodied qualities as *possibles*; “The qualities themselves (*an sich*) are mere eternal possibilities.” CP 6, 200, in Friedman, “C.S. Peirce’s Transcendental and Immanent Realism,” 377-378. This is particularly borne out in the instance of Secondness. A body with hardness requires another body of another degree of hardness to resist and (therefore) actualize the first body. But we say the hardness of the first body remains regardless of the hardness of the second. The first body retains its hardness just in case the second body *should* impact with it. In this case, hardness as an unembodied quality is premised on possibility, rather than actuality, of its resistance *vis à vis* another hard body (Secondness). CP 1, 437, in Friedman, “C.S. Peirce’s Transcendental and Immanent Realism,” 378. Unembodied qualities are possibles, not actuals. Of course, Peirce believes that possibles, while not existents (they are not Seconds) “are pretty nearly identical” with embodied qualities (Firstness). MS, 478, 1903, 31-32, 38 in Friedman, “C.S. Peirce’s Transcendental and Immanent Realism,” 375. But they are only regulatively so, since we have *no embodied account of them* (existence) as qualities of Firstness *until they are signed*. And of course, we could get them wrong (Fallibilism). For yet another take, see Sami Philström, “Peircean Scholastic Realism and Transcendental Arguments,” *Transactions of the Charles S. Peirce Society*, 34, 2 (1998).



Of course, consequent realism does not deny the *an sich* reality of entities or qualities: far from it. It requires that *something* be signed (Firstness) qualitatively (as felt, or as aesthetic consciousness, or as a possible to be actualized). But it does not maintain that we can say of this something what it is *beyond* signification, for Firsts have no subject as they are mere unembodied qualities, and therefore, we cannot predicate of them *until related (Secondness) and mediated (Thirdness)*. To do otherwise is particularly problematic for our two examples; Absolute Chance and infinity. For Absolute Chance must be thought of as a law (of probability) for us to comprehend its effect on the universe. And infinity can only be characterized mathematically (as for example in infinitesimal calculus, or the idea of transfinite sets of ordinal numbers, or the idea of continuous space (without gaps))—all characterizations of Thirdness. We can only approach these phenomenological or qualitative instances as cases of Firstness of Thirdness—of qualities or entities that are signed through their coming-to-be-understood in the acts of prescinding, abstracting, and deducing. And while we can say that we approach the entities of mathematics (as Absolute Chance or pure probability) in aesthetic consciousness (as First), we are *signing them* as Firsts, which exist in relation (as Seconds) and mediation (as Thirds). This felt sense is of an indeterminate or possible; an indeterminate or possible that becomes ultimately determinate or actual only through Secondness and, ultimately, Thirdness. It is (once again) a case of Firstness of Thirdness.

Before we get too comfortable with this characterization of realism, let us distance ourselves from an earlier reading of Peirce's logic that also drew on the issue of consequence vs. antecedence. This was a supposed ontological distinction—an affair of Thirdness to be sure—that was drawn by John Boler. The context was Peirce's refutation of nominalism; Boler saw the turn to a realism of consequents as the linchpin on which scholastic realism turns.<sup>97</sup> Now Sandra Rosenthal has shown quite rightly that this can only concern Peirce's *logical* account, not his *ontological* account, of realism.<sup>98</sup> Rosenthal quotes from Peirce: "Scotus and the later scholastics usually dealt not with the syllogism but with an inferential form called a consequence. The consequence has only one expressed premise called an antecedent; and its conclusion is called the consequent; and the proposition which asserts that in case the antecedent be true, the consequent is true, is called the consequence."<sup>99</sup> In other words, if Boler's distinction is used to claim that Peirce's realism is *ontologically* consequent, it begs the question. Whereas my claim *is* ontological, not (merely) logical: the consequent of consequent realism is not (merely) a logical relation between itself and its antecedent. In the case of firsts beyond their signing, antecedents are regulative ideals and in themselves are indeterminate.

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<sup>97</sup> John Boler, *Charles Peirce and Scholastic Realism* (Seattle, WA: University of Washington Press, 1963), 111.

<sup>98</sup> Sandra Rosenthal, *Charles Peirce's Pragmatic Pluralism* (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 1994), 65.

<sup>99</sup> CP 4, 45 in *ibid.*, 111.

## Conclusion

My point has not been to castigate Bradley's understanding of Peirce's Triad. Rather, it has been to clarify the relationship between Firsts and Thirds that Bradley leaves open in his characterization of Peirce's semiological system as a metaphysical realism. My examples in this regard have been Absolute Chance and infinity. If Peirce's semiological metaphysics is to make sense, it must be shown how the categories function together. The conclusion that, in terms of signs, we approach Firsts as Firsts of Thirds is to qualify whatever Platonism we might think Peirce evidences in his discourses on Firstness. It is to distance Peirce's semiological metaphysics from any insistence on there being *an sich* or in itself reals that we somehow grasp directly through reason, logic, mathematics, or scientific experimentation. It is to insist that, whatever this real is, it is always already 'taken up' in signification; first as quality or entity (the category of Firstness), then as relation (Secondness) and finally, as mediation or thought (Thirdness) if we are to count it as embodied and therefore actual (beyond mere possibility). This is a metaphysics of *consequent realism*; a realism that does not begin to determine the real *until* the real is signed. This metaphysics contrasts with antecedent realism, which claims a real undetermined yet nevertheless real in that all the features characteristic of the signed or categorized real are there prior to signage—a real of the possible. For Peirce, I have argued, antecedent realism can amount to no more than a regulative ideal, wherein we must take reals as real prior to signification, but of course cannot determine them as such. This is the case, for example, with unembodied qualities—qualities that must be embodied to be actualized. The real prior to signage must both be embodied *and* wait for the final consent of community for its truth. And even then, it is subject to Absolute Chance. If Peirce is a metaphysical realist, then he is a metaphysical realist of the *consequent* sort—the consequence of signification--rather than the *antecedent* sort. I leave it to the reader to decide whether this is in fact metaphysical realism.