

Cross the Streams! Reengaging Robert Neville and Process Theology on Creation

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“Like poets, metaphysicians are driven seemingly by the very nature of their endeavor to stretch language to the point where it is likely to break, where our very efforts to make finer and fuller sense court the risk of lapsing into nonsense.”¹

In 1984 Dr. Egon Spengler gave the world the seemingly sage advice to never cross the streams. When questioned as to why such crossing can never be done by his fellow Ghostbusters, the good Dr. Spengler simply told them to take his word for it, because the results could be devastating. His colleagues accepted his advice. After all, he is a doctor and maybe stream crossing is his specialty. This situation held stable until the professionals faced a situation in which this existing model for ghost busting no longer worked, the problem of the Stay Puft Marshmallow Man. In stepped Dr. Peter Venkman who, with the group facing the possibility that crossing the streams of their ghost busting proton packs might be their only chance of survival, but also might kill them, fired the first stream. It worked, and they learned something in the process. Now while it may seem strange to frame a theology paper with the movie *Ghostbusters*, I have been told not to cross the streams for a while. I “learned” from Robert Neville that a God who creates the world cannot be impacted by that world because the relationship is asymmetrical. While studying John Cobb’s process theology during my doctoral studies in Claremont, I “learned” that any theory of creation *ex nihilo* as radical as Neville’s provides a God incapable of relating to the world. I “learned” both positions are theological non-starters. The suggestions seemed to make sense, as I

¹ Vincent Colapietro, “Striving to Speak in a Human Voice: A Peircean Contribution to Metaphysical Discourse,” in *Being in America: Sixty Years of the Metaphysical Society*, ed. Brian G. Henning and David Kovacs (Amsterdam; New York: Rodopi, 2014), 285.

was learning from experts. But what to do about the incompatibility of their wisdom? It was then I realized my deepest loyalty was to neither side of the no-stream-crossing campaign, but a philosophical Peter Venkman, Charles S. Peirce.

Charles S. Peirce's Emergent World

Before describing the strengths I accept and weakness I want to overcome in Cobb and Neville, let me sketch the basic features of classical pragmatism I will use to make this shift. I view pragmatism, especially the work of Peirce, as a way of thinking keenly interested in overcoming perceived problems in different approaches while synthesizing their insights. In this paper I am exploring how the differences between Cobb and Neville become rearranged when considered in light of his categories of Firstness (qualitative possibility), Secondness (brute fact), and Thirdness (law and generality). Abduction (imaginative hypotheses) and retrodution (imaginatively repairing hypotheses) will also factor importantly into my argument. Peirce related Thirdness to panpsychism, which led him to a sort of intelligent design argument he called evolutionary love. I reject both these doctrines by driving Peirce deeper into his categories of Secondness and Firstness which challenge easy continuity of experience and open his philosophy to a more indeterminate grounding.

For Peirce, the most general features of the world are his three categories: Firstness, Secondness, and Thirdness. His paper "On a New List of Categories" lays the groundwork for the relation between his categories and human interpretation. The universe evolves toward forms of connection. The universe exhibits self-control as general laws take hold. The categories cannot be reduced to one another, and sign activity cannot take place without reference to the categories. Those three categories relate to possibilities, actualities, and intelligible representation in

experience. They describe the continuous evolution of the universe from Firstness to Thirdness, a process marked by varying degrees of chance, necessity, and mediation. Mere possibility is Firstness without Secondness. Secondness is existence, causation, compulsion. Thirdness is rational general necessity.² Forms, facts, and relations are the universal categories of reality for Peirce.

Firstness is not a static substance behind the world's appearances. The qualities of Firstness are free-floating possibilities with no internal structure of purpose or intelligibility. It is in Thirdness that they become conscious to interpreters, purposive in the world, and intelligible to interpreters as such.³ The relation of Firstness to Thirdness is therefore related to the reality of chance. All is not determined. A scholastic realist, Peirce argues possibilities exist objectively. Chance combined with the reality of possibility entails a future that is open and tied to our conduct.⁴ We find ourselves before an open future and a partially determined past. Both interpreters and the world they interpret have the status of being "not yet" with traces left in the past and present.

Peirce placed more emphasis on the reality of Thirdness, prediction, control, and understanding, than the individual action and reaction of Secondness. This led him to affirm something like a naturalized version of intelligent design, which may not be shocking since later in his life he harbored vague thoughts about the reality of a personal God. Not brute force, but reasonableness, what he even referred to as evolutionary love, is at the heart of growth in the universe. Reasonableness subdues chance and efficient causality with "its sceptre, knowledge, and

² Charles S. Peirce, *The Essential Peirce: Selected Philosophical Writings*. Vol. 2, 1893-1913, ed. Peirce Edition Project (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1998), 267-288. (Hereafter EP 2.267-288).

³ Robert S. Corrington, *An Introduction to C. S. Peirce: Philosopher, Semiotician, and Ecstatic Naturalist* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 1993), 126-127, 133.

⁴ Peirce, *Collected Papers of Charles Sanders Peirce*. Vol. 5 and 6, *Pragmatism and Pragmaticism and Scientific Metaphysics*, ed. Charles Hartshorne and Paul Weiss (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1935), 5: 459-462. (Hereafter CP 5.459-462).

its globe, love.”⁵ The advance of science, the fact that our minds appear tuned to know nature's mysteries, is testament to the fact that something analogous to human thought is present everywhere in the universe.⁶ “The one intelligible theory of the universe is that of objective idealism, that matter is effete mind, inveterate habits becoming physical laws.”⁷ Peirce adopts panpsychism to explain the reality of Thirdness. This conclusion that mind was always real and always developing led a teleological view of the world that led Peirce to affirm some form of theism in which an original mind set the development of mind in the world in motion.⁸ God as an ideal end is tied up with the growth of concrete reasonableness, Thirdness. God is both the source of semiotic activity and the reality bringing interpretive activity in-line with divine purposes, the ontological source of the three categories and cosmological guide of semiotic activity within them.⁹ However, Peirce’s philosophy has the resources to understand the emergence of laws, mind, and intelligence capable of control without invoking intelligent design, but he insufficiently applied those resources.

His acceptance of panpsychism is unfortunate because he has a theory of emergence in his philosophy. He affirms continuity as well as discontinuity when something novel emerges. There is Thirdness *and* Secondness, without needing to read the former into the latter. There are some genuine leaps that create some breaks with what they emerged from, even while obviously connected to what they emerged from. Peirce should have affirmed that reason is sometimes capable of controlling brute physical forces and influencing the direction in which the universe evolves, but without reading that into every aspect of reality. Reasonableness is an achievement,

⁵ Ibid., CP 5.520.

⁶ Ibid., CP 1.316.

⁷ Ibid., EP 1.293.

⁸ Donna M. Orange, *Peirce's Conception of God: A Developmental Study* (Lubbock, TX: Institute for Studies in Pragmaticism, 1984).

⁹ Michael L. Raposa, *Peirce's Philosophy of Religion* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1989), 122.

not a given fact since time immemorial. Despite affirming the reality of chance and the singular facts of Secondness, Peirce flew away from them to Thirdness before adequately considering their implications for his simple view of teleology.

Closely related to Peirce's panpsychism is his notion of evolutionary love. His concern with the reality of Thirdness led him not only to read mind into matter, but to affirm a strong teleology in that mind-matter which inevitably leads to Thirdness. Peirce believed in synechism, or continuity, in the world, but balanced it out with his notion of tychism, of absolute chance. Because there is absolute chance but the world displays reasonableness, there is evolutionary love, what Peirce calls agapism, a providential force leading to increased reason in the world.¹⁰ However, Murray Murphey notes that Peirce does not *need* recourse to divine purpose to explain possibilities, their development, and their continuity. Tychism would have allowed Peirce to say possibilities develop by chance rather than necessity. Spontaneity and connection within the categories themselves could move the universe toward Thirdness. So, Murphey argues, a divine will is not necessary for such progress or the existence of novelty that led to such growth. "The original continuum of possibility is differentiated by acts, which, as acts, are free and arbitrary."¹¹ That is how the universe evolves, real growth through chance without that growth necessarily going in one predetermined direction. So with panpsychism ruled out, evolutionary love is not far behind. The notion that the development of the world is a fragment of the divine mind, God appearing to God fully throughout history, only obtains if a strong developmental teleology can be defended. By rejecting it, as I have done, something more radical is implied. Without it, a God

¹⁰ Peirce, EP 1.362-363.

¹¹ Murray Murphey, "On Peirce's Metaphysics" *Transactions of the Charles S. Peirce Society* 1, no. 1 (1965): 21-22.

relating to Peirce's categories has a future as underdetermined as ours, open to something different than God, new potentials for God or potentials that even transform or transcend God.¹²

Those familiar with Neville's work will already notice a clue as to the differences to come. Rather than focus on icons, indices, and symbols and the interpretation of reality, Neville's theory of broken symbols, I focus on the general features of reality Peirce argues are revealed in interpretive activity. Because the history of John Cobb, among other process theologians, debating Robert Neville on their respective models of God took place almost exclusively in terms of shared commitments to the philosophy of Alfred North Whitehead,¹³ I believe the features of Peirce's philosophy reconfigure the possible conclusions of the debate. Cobb construes God alongside the world, both in the throes of creativity fluctuating between indeterminate and determinate states in a process of mutual creative transformation. Neville argues God is the indeterminate creator asymmetrically related to the determinate world. However, there is a third option if you believe in the truth of pragmatism, as I do. While process philosophy focuses on the coming together of discrete entities to form a great multiplicity, pragmatists like Peirce focus on continuity as entities emerge out of previous realities that are in turn impacted by that emergence. In such a framework there can be a position affirming that the ground of the determinate world both transcends yet nonetheless grows in generality with that world. Peirce's categories describe an emergent reality in which the deepest indeterminacy cannot be kept separate from the determinate orders that

¹² Corrington, *An Introduction to C. S. Peirce*, 187.

¹³ Robert C. Neville, *Creativity and God: A Challenge to Process Theology* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1995); Charles Hartshorne, John B. Cobb, and Lewis S. Ford, "Three Responses to Neville's *Creativity and God*," *Process Studies* 10, no. 3-4 (1980): 93-109; Neville, "Concerning *Creativity and God*: A Response," *Process Studies* 11, no. 1 (1981): 1-10; David Ray Griffin, *Whitehead's Radically Different Postmodern Philosophy: An Argument for Its Contemporary Relevance* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2007); Neville, "A Letter of Grateful and Affectionate Response to David Ray Griffin's *Whitehead's Radically Different Postmodern Philosophy: An Argument for Its Contemporary Relevance*," *Process Studies* 37, no. 1 (2008): 7-38.

emerge from its sheer making - they mutually determinate one another. But first I need to describe why I am invested yet satisfied with neither Cobb nor Neville's position.

Robert Neville's Transcendent God the Creator

To summarize his grand metaphysical scheme before investigating its particulars, Neville argues that the universe of determinate harmonies cannot be understood apart from the affirmation of an indeterminate context beyond the determinate world.¹⁴ Determinacy is presented as the most basic feature of everything that exists. Determinate entities are harmonies of essential and conditional features. Conditional features are how anything relates to anything else, the ways things condition one another. Essential features give each thing its unique identity by which it can relate to and be conditioned by other things without losing that identity and being reduced to those relations.¹⁵ Together, essential and conditional features explain the interrelatedness of all things while giving each a unique identity irreducible to mere relations. However, analyzing determinacy in terms of these features reveals a problem. Conditional relations are only possible because entities are already harmonies of essential features. Since essential and conditional features cannot exist in isolation from one another, but must already be mutually related in each entity, their being must be grounded in something else accounting for that preexisting unity.

Neville argues only an indeterminate ground can sufficiently function as a solution to this problem. If the ground of essential and conditional features is determinate, it will also have conditional and essential features and will relate to other determinate entities rather than grounding their already existing harmonies. Existing alongside them, it would require grounding as well.¹⁶

¹⁴ Neville, *God the Creator; Ultimates. Philosophical Theology, Vol. 1* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2013), 173-191, 211-244.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, *Ultimates*, 193-197.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 184-191.

This is Neville's problem with models of God in which God is a being, whether a transcendent, all-powerful, and all-knowing being or the process God in the throes of creativity with the world, unable to control the world, and only able to know the world after its creatures make their own choices. Neville concludes there must be a purely indeterminate ground contrasted with the world of determinate entities for which it accounts. God is therefore "the creative act that is nothing without acting and which results in the world of determinate harmonies."¹⁷ In short, nothing determinate can be the ontological one for itself and for others. Since the one must transcend determinations, it cannot be determinate. Ruling out supernatural substance theism and process theism in one stroke, God must instead be the indeterminate activity accounting for the integration of essential and conditional features in determinate entities. The determinate world is the outcome of God's creative act, and apart from that world the act cannot be known by individuals.

Neville's theory of creation involves source, act, and product, with the act making crucial distinctions; It breaks the argument for God the creator into an equation with two parts, on my reading. There is God apart from the act, apart from creation, and God with the act, with creation. Being indeterminate rather than a preexisting being, God is literally nothing apart from creating the determinate world. But, there being a determinate world, God is connected to it as its creator. In that act, God's character is given as creator, and the world's character is given as product. "The ontological creative act is a sheer making, with no potentials antecedent to the making. Any potentials would have to be determinate, at least in being something rather than nothing, and on this hypothesis all determinate things are created."¹⁸ God is an indeterminate making without antecedent characteristics or thoughts. Neville's God is a wild one quite unlike a well-defined theistic being.

¹⁷ Ibid., *Religion in Late Modernity* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2002), 21.

¹⁸ Ibid., *Ultimates*, 216-217.

I take Neville's argument as a decisive blow to any argument that God is a personal, a creative extension of Paul Tillich's assertion that God must be the ground of being rather than *a* being. Where I quarrel with Neville is his insistence that he does justice to both the transcendence and presence of God. As I have presented it, Neville restricts most of his thoughts on God to the first half of the equation for creation, rather than considering how God is identifiable in the determinate world as the sort of creator responsible for it. "The creator is *unconditionally* transcendent in the sense that, since it creates the determinations, its own being must be independent of them."¹⁹ On the one hand, he denies God is contingent upon the world, as the world comes entirely from God in the divine creative act. On the other hand, he does claim that divine act is present in the world as creating Godself in the act of creation.²⁰ The sense in which God has more than an indeterminate character as a result of creating the determinate world is just a *sense*, not a reality.

To summarize: There is no God without creation. Talk of God is meaningless without the world. But *there is a world*, which on Neville's account would seem to mean God is more than sheer indeterminacy and is determined by that world in acting as its creator. While I accept Neville's theory of creation as close to a proof as possible that nobody should seriously consider theories in which God is a being who creates out of the divine substance, I feel his work leaves an entire half of his theory unexplored. Shouldn't we engage the world for the unknown, likely fragmentary and ambiguous, ways waiting for God to be revealed in creation as creator, like characteristics of an artist are found in their art? Neville sometimes admits this necessary tension. "Just because God in himself is indeterminate and transcendent, all we know of him is his created manifestations. If God has a character, for example, is loving, or if he works miracles, for example,

¹⁹ Ibid., *God the Creator*, 73.

²⁰ Ibid.

saves someone, this is indeed a contingent miracle, from free grace, not from necessity.”²¹ It therefore seems possible to know God determinately in the world, it is just a matter of what we find. A desire to flesh out this other “side” to God lingers.

John Cobb’s Immanent God of Transformation

Since Whitehead’s process philosophy is the key that allowed Cobb to reopen the door to belief in a personal God, some of the features of that philosophy should be mentioned. Actualities are in process for Whitehead. Anything not understood as in process is an abstraction from that most basic feature of reality.²² This means what we normally call individuals, things that endure, are actually societies of actual occasions.²³ The occasions themselves are a process of becoming concrete known as concrescence. In a concrescence, each occasion enjoys subjective immediacy. Only when the process is complete does it become objective external data for others.²⁴ Subjective immediacy is not consciousness of pain or pleasure, but individuality. The experience subjects enjoy is being actual entities in and for themselves. As Whitehead puts it, “consciousness presupposes experience, and not experience consciousness.”²⁵ Everything has experience, even if only some experiences rise to consciousness. Thus, actual occasions, the basic realities taking the place of substance in his philosophy, do not endure – they arise, become, and reach completion.²⁶ Their experiencing is done, but they can be experienced in the next moment. In this philosophy, relations with the past are primary, out of which a becoming occasion makes itself. These relations take the form of prehensions and feelings. Occasionsprehend/feel previous occasions and become

²¹ Ibid., 119.

²² Alfred North Whitehead, *Process and Reality: An Essay in Cosmology*, ed. David Ray Griffin and Donald W. Sherburne (New York: The Free Press, 1978), 3, 7-8.

²³ Ibid., 72-73.

²⁴ Ibid., 23, 25.

²⁵ Ibid., 53.

²⁶ Ibid., 85, 87.

by unifying them in their own decision.²⁷ Whitehead's occasions begin as open windows to the past, are closed as they form themselves, then open and give what is formed back to the world.

God is introduced to explain how novelty can be prehended. Unlike Neville's argument, creativity is ultimate, not God. There is also an existing but not concrete realm of possibility. God employs the underlying creativity and already existing possibilities and offers them to the world as lures for realization. God is the actual entity transforming indeterminate creativity to determinate possibilities for occasions.²⁸ God is unique, though, compared to other actual entities because all possibilities, eternal objects, are present in God's primordial nature.²⁹ However, those eternal objects are not exemplified and made real apart from the prehensions and subsequent actions of concurring entities. God offers the possibilities as lures to occasions, but the occasions decide what to do with them.

Within this philosophical framework, Cobb's theological concern is the God of love incarnate in Christ, a love offered to the world to alter its future. For such future hope to be real, for the future to be different, there must be possibilities for the present, means by which occasions making themselves in the present can transcend the given by choosing a different possibility for the future. The reality of unrealized possibilities is crucial for Cobb, and for process thought in general. It leads to God as the necessary place, or container, for these possibilities, so they can be of such a status so as to be capable of interacting with concrete events.³⁰ If an occasion is only presented with the objective past, then the present conforms to the past exclusively. Conversely, if something in the present moment is given, but not by the past, then the options for realization in

²⁷ Ibid., 18-20.

²⁸ Ibid., *Religion in the Making* (New York: Fordham University Press, 1996), 88.

²⁹ Ibid., *Process and Reality*, 256-257.

³⁰ Cobb, *Beyond Dialogue: Toward a Mutual Transformation of Christianity and Buddhism* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1982), 135.

the present are not exhausted by the past. There are possibilities not yet realized, yet relevant to the present occasion of experience. For Whitehead, relations to past occasions are “physical feelings/prehensions” while the relation to the unrealized possibilities are “conceptual feelings/prehensions.”³¹ The physical feelings are causal, determined by the past. Conceptual feelings, as they are integrated with the physical, are alternative ways of responding. But if each occasion merely chooses whatever it wishes among the possibilities given, chance and chaos would likely reign, but there are plenty examples of complex order in our world. Thus, Cobb affirms, with Whitehead, the primordial nature of God, the primordial envisagement of possibilities apart from their connection with particular occasions.³² God orders the possibilities so the world can also experience order.³³

For sake of clarity and less use of jargon, allow me to close this section with a metaphor. God is necessary for Whitehead and Cobb as a sort of warehouse to contain all possibilities. Equally necessary is the world full of shoppers to come in and choose from among the available goods. The layout of the warehouse is tailored for each shopper. The most valuable possibilities are up front near the entrance and highlighted with a nice display, God’s initial aim. Regardless, each shopper is free to choose anything in the warehouse and make a subjective choice. Upon choosing they leave and take their chosen possibility into the world where it is available for others. Immediately upon their departure from the warehouse, everything is restocked and reordered for the next shopper to go through the same process, the arrangement of goods now tailored for them. I feel a great insight in this framework because I believe a God that creates a world has given

³¹ Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, 23, 32-34.

³² *Ibid.*, 34, 343-344.

³³ Cobb, “Alfred North Whitehead,” in *Founders of Constructive Postmodern Philosophy: Peirce, James, Bergson, Whitehead, and Hartshorne*, ed. David Ray Griffin, John B. Cobb, Marcus Ford, Pete A. Y. Gunter, and Peter Ochs (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1993), 190.

something to that world which matters, and what we do with it matters to God. What I cannot accept in the framework is God as an actual entity containing possibilities. If this was the only philosophical framework available, I would worship creativity, not the process God, because my ultimate concern will be turned to nothing less than ultimate reality. Luckily, process philosophy is not the only available framework.

The Undeniability of Peircean Habits

Before I explain how I believe Neville's theory of God the creator can be pragmatically reconfigured in relation to the world to embrace the insight I accept from process theology, allow me to explain how I reached this place in which a mediating project is so important. Peirce did not believe the radical doubt of Descartes was possible to instill, and anyone who claims otherwise is fooling themselves. Rather, inquiry into any subject matter begins when already existing habits that have worked become problematic and unreliable, and need to be amended or abandoned for alternatives through inquiry. We can be sure of working habits and the beliefs that led to them, but not absolutely.³⁴ The possibility of error and the need to rethink things is always looming, and should be embraced in the name of progressing toward the truth.³⁵ But outside of a genuine external source of doubt that is not artificially introduced, things continue as normal.³⁶ I knew all this from Neville teaching me Peirce in my Masters program at Boston University. Nonetheless, the original prospectus for my dissertation happily presented Neville and process theologians pitched in a battle to death, with Neville and his indeterminate God emerging victoriously. One fateful day after finishing my doctoral coursework and submitting this prospectus, which was

³⁴ Peirce, EP 1.115.

³⁵ Ibid., CP 7.108

³⁶ Ibid., EP 1.115.

approved, I was sitting in my doctoral advisor's office, and Philip Clayton and I explained to one another the various influences of Peirce on our seemingly different projects. I entered the program heavily influenced by Neville and the force of his argument for an indeterminate God. Clayton was sympathetic to the project, but viewed it as giving up too easily, as he desires to explore the strongest argument for divine transcendence *and* immanence possible. He also argues theology must be fallible and in dialogue with science and the diversity of religions, but focuses on the license Peirce's experimental approach gives theologians to craft novel and possibly wild hypotheses. They must be subjected to strict testing, but instead of placing theologies influenced by Peirce in a zero sum game, we both came to the conclusion that there is more value in pragmatically challenging different positions to help each creatively develop than there is in defending one in its current form against a supposed opponent. Something that flowed from this conversation was the realization that I was not fully committed to Neville's own philosophy, and I was already certain I could not fully accept Whitehead's philosophy because it leans too heavily on ideas similar to those I must reject in Peirce. Rather, I was committed to my own understanding of classical American pragmatism. Having seen it at work in Clayton during our conversation, I couldn't help but locate it in Cobb's theology I was reading for my dissertation battle; except identifying that mutual influence turned Cobb into a creative dialogue partner rather than foe to be vanquished. To Dr. Spengler's insistence that we not cross the streams, I respond with Peirce: "Do not block the way of inquiry."³⁷ With that bit of autobiography out of the way, allow me to explain what I mean in greater detail.

As I understand pragmatism, there is pluralism at a basic epistemic level of how knowledge is gained, and how that necessarily happens in many different ways. Pluralism also has to do with

³⁷ Ibid., CP 1.135.

the goal of inquiry. To be true to the goal of always doing better, always moving toward what is true rather than what we wish, many different positions from which feedback can be obtained should always be present. Truth, real absolute truth, paradoxically requires different perspectives on it always be present so as a community of inquiry we can all move closer toward the truth. As a pragmatist, I wouldn't want to eliminate opportunities for growth toward truth by prematurely eliminating/ignoring someone with so many shared sensibilities from which I can learn.

The importance of pluralism in searching for mediating positions, even ones that seem odd at first glance, could not be more at home with some of the current understandings of pragmatism within the Boston Theological Society. Robert Smid reaches a similar conclusion regarding pragmatism and comparative philosophy. "Finally, pragmatist methods of inquiry are steeped in a thoroughgoing commitment to pluralism. In effect, this means not only that everything is a potential subject of inquiry but also that the results of inquiry should be allowed to stand, even if it is not entirely clear how or whether they fit with the results of other inquiries. This is important because, while the world may or not be pluralistic in the end, an approach to inquiry that starts with pluralism encompasses the largest array of possibilities—including nonpluralistic ones—has the greatest likelihood of arriving at the most productive results."³⁸ It is not that relativistic pluralism is the situation as it is fated to remain, but that to be realists we must figure out which positions are worth abandoning together, as Cobb and Neville have done with supernatural substance theism (to be explained shortly), rather than pitching opposing camps against one another, as Cobb and Neville have done with each other.

In this context, I believe mediating between Cobb and Neville can exemplify this pragmatic point, making pluralism a model for theological progress. If I'm Neville, I don't want Cobb's

³⁸ Robert W. Smid, "Pragmatism, Pluralism, and the Role of Inquiry in Comparative Philosophy," in *American Journal of Theology & Philosophy* 33, no. 2 (2012): 155.

position to be eliminated because it helps me grow, and vice versa. What I want is for the position I am in conversation with to grow with me, and the lack of such growth would be evidence it lacks the supposed fruit identified in it. Thus, Peirce's pragmatism becomes Peter Venkman, a means of moving beyond binary debates between schools of thought whose incompatibility has been a widely accepted "fact." If you know yourself, you will better know what to expect in others – not perfect agreement, but fallible inquirers. If I accept your difference and you accept mine, that acknowledgment becomes the basis for each of us learning more, doing better, and getting the specks out of both our eyes, so to speak. This means negotiating the faults and merits of different yet excellent schools of thought could not be more in line with the heart of American pragmatism. Given I accept Peirce's point on habits, I view the differences between Cobb and Neville, and perhaps process and ground of being theologians more generally, as resulting from their different working habits, social facts that are not to be questioned. However, when faced with positive reasons to doubt, it becomes evident that beliefs are not infallible and new explanations must be searched for until doubt again ceases. Fallibilism means better alternatives should always be entertained and accepted when needed to replace a previously accepted but now problematic belief. There is much that still works in the different Peircean habits of Neville and Cobb, but I want to rethink their relation in light of my personal problems with their work.

John Cobb began his career working out of a rather traditional Christian context. He was born of Methodist missionaries and through the early years of his life held traditional theistic beliefs. God was a supernatural being to which one could pray and on which one could depend. Cobb expected to enter higher education, learn to defeat modern criticisms of that God, and leave ready to defend the faith. However, as Gary Dorrien tells it, things did not work out that way. "His idea was to strengthen his faith by facing the fire of modern criticism. Cobb believed that God

created the world, Jesus was God's divine Son and Savior of the world, nothing is more important intellectually than religious truth, and God can be known personally in prayer. Six months later he had no Christian beliefs at all."³⁹ The theism with which he was working had become problematic, in Peirce's sense. Cobb needed to find resources to salvage it, or give up his Christian identity.

Cobb had no alternative but to try and work his way out of this situation. A sweeping alternative philosophical and theological architectonic like the one Neville creates was not an option for him, as evidenced by his early work. Cobb denies unhistorical reason. He has long since abandoned claims to finality present in his earlier work, that anyone could provide *the* Christian or *the* Buddhist structure of existence, but still maintains that there are truly different structures of existence out of which religious visions of reality develop. It is these structures with which theologians must struggle.⁴⁰ All philosophies and theologies develop out of historically conditioned visions of reality. What one affirms still must be defended on its merits as philosophy, but there is something inevitably given about the situation.⁴¹ If God becomes problematic, a vision and structure cannot simply be dropped and new ones created. If they cease to exist, so does God, and, rather than alternatives being open, life just goes on without Christianity.

Neville comes at theology from a very different angle than Cobb. While Cobb begins with a theistic God and repairs that concept as necessary, Neville constructs an entire metaphysical system and only then turns to considerations of the place of God and lived religion within it. Consider his advice in the opening pages of *God the Creator*: "Rather than begin with a proof for the reality of God, the better part of wisdom is to develop the speculative system and at the end

³⁹ Gary Dorrien, *The Making of American Liberal Theology: Crisis, Irony, and Postmodernity 1950-2005* (Louisville; London: Westminster John Knox, 2006), 210.

⁴⁰ Cobb, *The Structure of Christian Existence* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1967), 20-21.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, *A Christian Natural Theology: Based on the Thought of Alfred North Whitehead*. (Louisville; London: Westminster John Knox Press, 2007), 236.

point out that God's reality has been demonstrated along the way."⁴² Unlike Cobb's specific concerns over a personal God, Neville has frequently commented that at a young age his father told him God is not a person, Jesus is; God is more like electricity – and that struck a chord in Neville. Rather than retroductively modifying theism to fit the data, he makes a novel abductive hypothesis for the sort of God responsible for the world.

Beyond the differences that come, in part, from their different Peircean habits, there are many similarities that indicate why these two theologians should move forward together rather than in isolation. Both Neville and Cobb stand with realism as to whether theology involves investigating the world or merely developing the accepted language of a community. As realists, both are also with Peirce, in spirit, who only accepts what he describes as the method of science, rather than tenacity, authority, or the *a priori*, as one that puts us in touch with something external to ourselves and our communities.⁴³ It may seem Cobb makes something like a linguistic turn in starting theology with the structures of a Christian understanding of existence,⁴⁴ while Neville begins with realism, developing an ontology meant to be true and relevant for anyone, not just Christians.⁴⁵ But neither will Cobb restrict theology to self-examination. Cobb is keenly interested in theology expressing the intimate love of God, given the context/Peircean habit with which he begins his work, but that theology must also be consistent with all the knowledge we gain of the world from other disciplines. And the shared methodological concerns go even deeper, as I view them through Peirce.

Out of their different theological habits both Cobb and Neville offer novel abductive hypotheses about God. For both, the fact that the model of God contained in their abduction is

⁴² Neville, *God the Creator*, 11.

⁴³ Peirce, EP 1.115-123.

⁴⁴ Cobb, *The Structure of Christian Existence*, 20-21.

⁴⁵ Neville, *Ultimates*, xvi.

rather unlike the God of classical substance theism is a sign that their work is moving along the correct path, leaving that inferior position behind. While their models of God differ, shared amid the difference is that such a supernatural God has been disproved by the turn to process in metaphysics. Cobb and Neville, despite their strong differences on God, also share core methodological concerns. Neville stands with Whitehead and Cobb as one who views metaphysics as viable when understood fallible, sensitive to context, and actively tested. They all want a theology that gets at big ideas, not one confined to narrow contexts of tradition.⁴⁶ Despite all these similarities, their respective emphasis on the transcendence and presence of God remain drastically different. It is time to look at them, and God's transcendence and immanence, through a different perspective.

Symbols of God in an Emerging World

Neville's work focuses on the transcendence of God, while Cobb's focuses on divine immanence. Neville's theory of an indeterminate divine creator is perhaps one of the most novel and strong models of transcendence that has been offered. Cobb, latching onto and developing Whitehead's insight that God is the source of novelty for the world, focuses on creative transformation in the world. While both affirm the other side of the equation, neither does so as strongly as the other. The primordial nature of God cannot compare to how Neville's indeterminate creator is different than the world. But Neville's God which gives itself the determinate character of creator in creating is immanently nothing compared to the God manifest in every instance of creative transformation. I aim to help them progress with each other by thinking through each other via pragmatism.

⁴⁶ Ibid., *God the Creator*, xvi.

Sandra Rosenthal lends support to my proposal by labeling Neville a process philosopher who shares an epochal theory of time with Whitehead, and Cobb by extension.⁴⁷ As already described, in this view each emerging occasion comes into being out of past data, defines their own relation to it, and in so doing defines its present spatial and temporal scope. Continuity on this account is achieved by the past being prehended in the present, as each occasion harmonizes the many elements of the past into its own decision, which is then offered to the next occasions for prehension. Pragmatic thinkers like Peirce understand things differently. Rather than discrete entities coming together, entities emerge from one another and, in that process, influence one another in both directions. The result is concrete reasonableness, the transition from Firstness to Thirdness, the growth and extension of possibilities. And on Peirce's view there is continuous flow and connection, meaning the past is only relatively definite because what emerges from it can give it new character. Despite being known as a pragmatic theologian, Neville explicitly sides with Whitehead on this issue.⁴⁸ That is why I find it interesting to reexamine Neville's engagement with process theology through the lens of pragmatism.

While the attempt to bring Cobb and Neville together using pragmatism may be new, the desire to develop a philosophical theology fully invested in Peirce's work is not. Michael Raposa coined the term "Theosemiotic" in *Peirce's Philosophy of Religion* in 1989 to designate a way of doing theology shaped by Peirce's philosophy. Since then, some family resemblances have emerged among various thinkers. Nancy Frankenberry notes those who adopt the label have a tendency to tie religious beliefs to "open possibilities or ideals, not facts antecedently given."⁴⁹

⁴⁷ Sandra B. Rosenthal, *Time, Continuity, and Indeterminacy: A Pragmatic Engagement with Contemporary Perspectives* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2000), 9-30.

⁴⁸ Neville, "Responding to My Critics," in *Interpreting Neville*, ed. J. Harley Chapman and Nancy K. Frankenberry (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1999), 296-297.

⁴⁹ Nancy K. Frankenberry, "Pragmatism, Truth, and the Disenchantment of Subjectivity," in *Pragmatism and Religion: Classical Sources and Original Essays*, ed. Stuart Rosenbaum (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2003), 247

While not a pragmatist, Giambattista Vico, in the early 18th century, showed he was attuned to philosophical trends to come. He argued knowledge is demonstrated by the ability to construct something. Computers were not found in the woods then replicated. They are learned about as they are created. His epistemology was not just applied to science and daily life, but just as relevant to theology, according to Robert Miner. Both God and humans make truth, in different ways. “There are truths which the mind does not construct, but there is no *mode of access* to these truths that bypass human making.”⁵⁰ There is Peter Ochs who, in *Peirce, Pragmatism, and the Logic of Scripture*, explores Peirce's account of inquiry and applies it to what he calls “the logic of scripture.” The result is that the meaning of the texts is the continual generation of habit change, an argument with echoes of Cobb's focus on finding Christ in creative transformation. How does one's understanding of God in creation enact and sustain world-changing work? In a short step, more a flash of awareness, pragmatic thinkers move from metaphysics to ethics. I feel it as the endless drive to see if I can identify with God revealed in creation as creator, a process of inquiry that is itself akin to a form of worship. I hope to embody truly divine values in the course of my experiment and help them emerge in history. In short, what is concrete reasonableness in religion when you are convinced God is not a being with antecedent knowledge of and desires for the world? It is fallible inquiry, experimental theology, and crossing the streams to see what happens.

Peirce gives license for developing an argument for God through engaging his philosophy with his concept of musement, which he thought was especially important for theology.⁵¹ Musement is “Pure Play” or a license to let the mind come up with any and every, no matter how

⁵⁰ Robert Miner, *Truth in the Making: Creative Knowledge in Theology and Philosophy* (New York: Routledge, 2004), 108.

⁵¹ Peirce, EP 2.434-450.

implausible, connection between the three categories.⁵² I bring musement up as a sort of apology for any vagueness that follows. I do not yet have a perfectly clear sense of what it means for an indeterminate God to also be manifest in the reasonable aspects of the determinate world, but my mind cannot help but wonder over options and inevitably land on this conclusion, vague as it is.

I find Neville's argument for God's indeterminacy satisfying. Where Neville falls short is in thinking he does justice to the transcendence *and* presence of God. His argument for God the creator provides what may be one of the most transcendent models of God available, and because of that Neville has difficulty affirming God's determinate character. In fact, he does not. Any determinate claim about God is a broken symbol that cannot literally apply to God.⁵³ God's immanence breaks on God's transcendence. While Cobb's process theology does not struggle with this issue, it does face a problem when it comes to God's transcendence, God's primordial nature. Cobb's God, like Whitehead's, contains the possibilities for the world. Cobb believes they cannot be contained in the past, which is settled. He argues the possibilities for the world, its Platonic forms, are eternal objects in God, who is an actual entity alongside the world, not a reality transcending it, to be able to provide these possibilities to actual occasions in the form of initial aims. But Cobb and Whitehead underestimate the potencies of nature. From my pragmatic perspective, the world marked by Peirce's categories contains and develops all its possibilities, not God. This eliminates the need for identifying God with something less than ultimate reality, creativity, opening the door to Neville's indeterminate God.

God can be understood as real, near, and participating in all three of Peirce's categories by binding them together, a theme expressed well in the developmental teleology of Cobb's process theology. But God can also be understood as the creative source for the three categories, a theme

⁵² Ibid., 436.

⁵³ Neville, *The Truth of Broken Symbols* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1996).

captured by Neville. If the theme these debating theological positions ignore, the emerging out of rather than the coming together of, is given more attention, God can be understood as grounding the three universes of Firstness, Thirdness, and Thirdness while also growing *together* in concrete reasonableness. God would both create and emerge from an indeterminate Firstness to Thirdness with the character given by the act of creating those features. In Peirce's emergent philosophy, that deepest indeterminacy cannot be kept separate from the determinate orders that emerge from its creation. They mutually determinate one another.

An indeterminate God without a preexisting identity can be determinately extended by the world. Neville posits an indeterminate creator known through the determinate world that is the result of divine activity, knowing in his case being a matter of religious symbols pointing toward the otherwise indeterminate God. Being determinate, they fail in this task, so their truth is in being broken. But from my pragmatic perspective it seems those creative interpretations maintain the meaning and reality of God in the world by giving symbolic expression to what cannot be known in any other fashion. This means that religious individuals work together with God in a crucial way to constantly redeem the reference of that term in unique ways for a world constantly growing in novelty. Symbols of God are not broken as much as they are growing, shifting, and adapting.

If indeterminacy and the world presuppose or need one another, in the sense that Neville's equation makes them both necessary for understanding either (i.e. without creation, no creator; without act, no awareness of the indeterminate God but only sheer nothingness), then they are on the same level. Indeterminacy is not more primal or ultimate, but always in need of the world to make sense. Rather than referencing everything (the existence of determinate things, the togetherness of our lives, religious symbols) back to the indeterminate God, indeterminacy *and the world* would be implicated in explanations. If we are so close to God as part of the termini of

the creative act, and God creates God's own nature in that act, why can't we created things directly be symbols of God? Why must all true symbols be broken? Accepting the truth of constructed symbols, not broken ones, seems a more natural thing to do. Symbols, as determinate things, are part of God's nature that comes from creating.

In an emergent framework like the one provided by Peirce, indeterminacy can be saved, but not in abstraction from the determinate world. That which emerges from something is different from, connected to, and impacts the understanding of that from which it emerges.⁵⁴ Something like emerging determinacy in God would have to apply to preserve indeterminacy in the creator. It is not possible to talk about one without the other. These are not exclusive options. An already existing set of possibilities is too determinate to function as the deeper ground of what becomes in the world. But in Peirce's philosophy, an indeterminate God deeper than Firstness will be connected to Thirdness due to the continuity of emergence. There is more in what becomes and, by realizing what was previously only a possibility, this "more" contributes to determining that God. This means stronger affirmations of God's transcendence and presence than are made by Cobb and Neville are possible if one accepts Peirce's pragmatism, as I have presented it. God is also determined by the world resulting from the divine act. God the creator is also created.

I agree there is no creator without creating. God needs to be indeterminate to be the creator of determinate things. But an artist without art is not an artist. If God gets conditional features from creating, once there is creation the indeterminate free divine act has chosen to only be indeterminate in some respects. God is indeterminate as needed to ground the determinate world and conditioned by that determinate world in choosing to create it. Both determinations result from the same divine act. If this is not the case, God, being indeterminate, would be unknowable by

⁵⁴ Ibid., EP 2.3.

anything determinate, the end of metaphysics as anything other than standing in awe before God.⁵⁵ Neville does claim the ontological creative act is completely free, not even determined by an a priori nature in God.⁵⁶ Furthermore, what if God's conditional features, the determinate things created, are self-creative? In the pragmatic theme of emerging out of, creators cannot be separated from what happens to their creation.⁵⁷ The high achievements of Thirdness are connected to brute facts of nature's Secondness, which emerge from the possibilities of nature's Firstness,⁵⁸ which are created by God. What emerges from something cannot be completely separated from that from which it emerged, meaning our religious symbols are real developments of the God from which they emerged in creation, without reducing the two to one another. God is transcendent and not the same as the world, but God is also intimately present as we mold our lives after this reality. The world takes God the creator beyond the features self-given to God in the creative act. But such an extension would be allowed by God in creating things with the freedom to evolve just as they have. Besides the contingent free act of divine creation,⁵⁹ there is semiotic freedom for created things to play a role in determining creation through their interpretations. God is determined as creator by an emerging creation, not a static one.

Both God and the world are growing toward something different than their reality in the past. The "goal" of Peirce's universe is to enact Thirdness through novelty and continuity. With Neville, I argue God is the deepest ground of everything, being indeterminately deeper than the cosmic nothingness of Firstness. And to Neville's position I add that God is that toward which everything is developing. The universe at any point measured, our cultivated reactions, for better

⁵⁵ Philip Clayton, *The Problem of God in Modern Thought* (Grand Rapids: W. B. Eerdmans, 2000), 154.

⁵⁶ Neville, *Ultimates*, 276-279.

⁵⁷ Rosenthal, *Time, Continuity, and Indeterminacy*, 139.

⁵⁸ Corrington, *Deep Pantheism: Toward a New Transcendentalism* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2016), 53-54.

⁵⁹ Neville, *Ultimates*, 232-235.

or worse, to the depth of God are God revealed, Thirdness. The two aspects of God can remain distinguishable as emergent and ground, but there cannot be an absolute break between God as indeterminate and determinate.

As a consequence of developing deep potencies from an indeterminate God, a developmental teleology is implied; not one preordained by a divine mind, but natural development of orders in the world. This position is non-teleological in the traditional sense because the development is not built in from the start by God. It is an achievement. There is growth, but it is contingent on our actions. Whatever develops just is what it is. Without a God containing all possibilities and ordering their relevance, there is no predetermined initial aim for all occasions. The push upward and onward is in nature, not preconfigured in God though still coming from God. We can do our best to make sure the world reflects certain values, and those values waiting to be enacted have ontological support. God's indeterminacy is a given condition for the world. God's determinacy is a precious achievement.

Some of Peirce's fractured thoughts on God and the world's development also point to this theme of continuous emergence: "suppose that in the beginning, – infinitely remote, – there was a chaos of unpersonalized feeling, which being without connection or regularity would properly be without existence. This feeling, sporting here and there in pure arbitrariness, would have started the germ of a generalizing tendency. Its other sportings would be evanescent, but this would have a growing virtue. Thus, the tendency to habit would be started; and from this with the other principles of evolution, all the regularities of the universe would be evolved. At any time, however, an element of pure chance survives and will remain until the world becomes an absolutely perfect, rational, and symmetrical system, in which mind is at last crystallised in the infinitely distant

future.”⁶⁰ If, like laws and concrete reasonableness in the world, we are drawn to conform to God, but God is indeterminate, what can that call mean? My way of expressing it is a call to become symbols of God through our actions.

Peirce acknowledges that we can devote ourselves to various ideals but also states that those ideals must eventually point in the same direction. He even claims that there must be an ultimate ideal that functions as the reference point of all thinking and action. “Life can have but one end.”⁶¹ Because Peirce understands the reason in the world to come from the reasonable mind of God, the final development of reason would amount to the final revelation of God. I want to be clear that this is not what I am advocating. Life is too messy. Nature is red in tooth and claw. Space is vast and at least as full of systems colliding and stars exploding as it is reasonable activity. The second law of thermodynamics would seem to preclude such a simple happy ending. However, I do believe in the real possibility of making strides in a direction, in a sort of process theological hope that divine ideals can be made real in the world, albeit without the assurance that comes from them being prefigured in God. I feel the pull of the Absolute without that Absolute being predestined; it is indeterminate and left to us to develop.

So, is God just a constructed projection of human desire, or could God possibly work with or live in human constructions? If so, God’s identity beyond indeterminacy would be contingent, depending on our choices. A God dependent on the novel choices of finite creatures is other or alien in the wild untamed possibility of novelty that, once acted upon, subsequently becomes God’s own nature. Absolute certainty is the opposite of what I am advocating. Infinite uncertainties permeate religious life. God does not have a predetermined coercive purpose for the creatures of the creative act but is open to decisions of subjects who actualize their lives through decisions that

⁶⁰ Peirce, EP 1.297.

⁶¹ Ibid., CP 2.198

are necessary given God's otherwise indeterminate character. At this point in my argument those versed in Whitehead may be thinking of his antitheses. "It is as true to say that God creates the world, as that the world creates God."⁶² I would put it different: It is as true to say that God creates the world, as that the world extends God.

Neville's God the creator is just sheer making responsible for every determinate thing, an argument that makes sense in relation to the singular instances of Firstness and Secondness. However, by being the creator of continuity as well, Thirdness gives God an immanent relation with the world's development. Relations, predictions based on understanding those relations, and the growth of law-like behavior reveal what else there is to God beyond indeterminate making of singulars. It is a matter of being grasped by the reality of God, and then letting that reality mold our lives. Andrew Irvine has attempted to push Neville's God into the world in an attempt that is perhaps closest to mine among these alternatives. I summarize our most similar points as follows. "In this radical conception of creation *ex nihilo*, the creator, the act of creating, and the creatures co-arise from a wholly indeterminate ground as mutually constituting aspects of the divine identity. Should we not also call God as creator of this determinate world a creature of the wholly indeterminate ground?"⁶³ We become the bearers of divine value, in our limited yet real ways, in this world, which I refer to as becoming symbols of God. God, in deciding to be identified as creator in creating, allows that identity to be extended by being complicit in human creating. Again, Irvine: "So, in stressing the reality of divine transcendence I must beware *reifying* that reality, mistaking it for a thing over all other things, that alone deserves to be called God. Rather God is defined by—no, better, God allows the divine life to be defined by—the creation as ultimate

⁶² Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, 348.

⁶³ Andrew B. Irvine, "Toward a Semiotic Theory of Divinization," in *American Journal of Theology & Philosophy* 33, no. 2 (2012): 137n6.

compatibility in the divine creative act.”⁶⁴ Irvine goes on to emphasize, in good Neville-like fashion, that any of our attempts will fail, but they can nonetheless become signs for how others can engage God. I change his emphasis and eliminate the concern over failing to perfectly embody divine value, simply because I do not see how it is possible to do otherwise. Values created by God are real and depend on action for realization, which extends God's character as creator. Symbols are not walls, but windows.

A natural pragmatic position is one that affirms symbols of God in all their materiality, a position that does not eliminate God's indeterminacy in the same way that Thirdness does not eliminate Firstness from Peirce's philosophy.⁶⁵ This is still a revelation of something we did not create, an “ontological shock” in Tillich's sense that the truth of our unconditional grounding breaks in upon us.⁶⁶ Signification is a gift of God's creative act. It is a shock that our symbols reveal God in a way that would leave God hidden without symbolic engagement. In one and the same moment we are grasped by an understanding of God and creatively involved in that understanding. What does this mean in practice? What are such real ultimate values without which the world would be impoverished? The New Testament has provided a handy list of fruits of the spirit: “the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control... If we live by the Spirit, let us also be guided by the Spirit. Let us not become conceited, competing against one another, envying one another.”⁶⁷ Peirce provided his own sense of what concrete symbolic embodiment of the divine, making God real as Thirdness as something driving disparities together, might mean.

⁶⁴ Ibid., 140n.9.

⁶⁵ Peirce, EP 2.165..

⁶⁶ Tillich, *Systematic Theology*. Vol. 1, *Reason and Revelation. Being and God* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1967), 113.

⁶⁷ Galatians 5: 22-23, 25-26 (NRSV).

Peirce had unshakable faith in the reality of continuity, that disparate conflicting individuals would be brought together as one whole in which everyone understands and cooperates with everyone else.⁶⁸ If that is not the Apostle Paul's message of love in a world increasingly marked by polar opposition, I don't know what is. But such values are not fated to be realized, as Peirce thought. I have argued they have real ontological grounding, but wait on us for their working out. This means there is something missing in the world without religious symbols and the actions they motivate, but that the world can also be made worse by terrible symbols and the equally terrible actions they motivate. The responsibility of figuring out one from the other is the call to a religious life, the call to make something real in the world that would be worse off without that contribution. If they work in the world and make churches more accepting of LGBTQ individuals and other religions, then they will have passed the test of the pragmatic maxim through such results, results of our making that place the goodness, beauty, and truth of an otherwise indeterminate ultimate reality. When religion is at its best, we are revelations – we are symbols of God. At its worst, religion damns God, and atheists are quick to do just that. Without a preformed identity, with God's designation as God coming from the act of creation, it is up to use to tease out what this revelation means in our fallible inquiries and model it in our imperfect lives. There is no key for the test existing in the divine mind, because such a thing does not exist. Is God the vengeful, angry, and destructive God who sends plagues on some people while saving others,⁶⁹ or the God demanding we not judge and who seems particularly invested in elevating minorities and the underprivileged?⁷⁰ Well, both the Crusades and the civil rights movement have happened. Churches have both endorsed gay conversion therapy (which is fraudulent) and been at the

⁶⁸ Ibid., CP 1.673.

⁶⁹ Exodus 7:14-12:36 (NRSV).

⁷⁰ Matthew 7, 25 (NRSV).

forefront of the political charge for LGBTQ rights. God the creator gives everything the gift of being, the chance to flourish - creation is the gift of grace - and we have a mixed track record of extending that same gift to one another. Perhaps some will ask what difference it makes whether God is really loving due to such actions or whether that is merely a broken symbol expressing one aspect of living cosmologically within the ontological act of creation, as Neville would agree these progressive actions are needed in the world. To such concerns I can simply say that, for me, it matters ultimately. It conjures images not of Heaven, but the Kingdom of God on Earth. God is the source of our being, something we don't possess in ourselves, as well as the good in the world we did not create but are called toward. Ethical initiatives have ontological grounding to support continuing such work when the world resists such efforts. Concrete reasonableness is not assured, but it is grounded in ultimate reality and dependent on the collected efforts of humanity.

Such "fruits of the spirit" are precisely the sort of inductive testing Peirce conceived as appropriate for evaluating the hypothesis of God's reality. Pragmatists should consider how conduct is brought to conform with that hypothesis. The test for a hypothesis of God's reality "must lie in its value in the self-controlled growth of man's conduct of life."⁷¹ Musement allows people to be drawn to ideas that are nothing but personal preference. The model of God I am defending may be nothing other than a personal instinct. It may be a vague idea I am drawn to, but which is doomed to the dustbin of history. However, I will not know that for sure until I have tested it over time, in dialogue with others, in a sort of experimental religious life. Does it motivate and sustain moral conduct? Do the ideals God created get worked out? Do we make God the creator more loving, or do we further the wild and arbitrary elements in God? Our sanctification is God's manifestation as we become expressions of ultimate ideals in the world. If I stick with it, if my

⁷¹ CP 6.480.

hypothesis is not a failure and I still cannot get the idea out of my mind, that sticking power might itself be evidence of its truth. And failing in the attempt, if that is indeed fated, is also exciting for a pragmatist – failures indicate alternative ways forward since one is now ruled out. And without making the attempt, I would always wonder if that path was really the best way. While I work it out I boldly stand with Venkman and Peirce and claim that inasmuch as God is indeterminate creator, God is also created.

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